

Walking a Fine Line: Britain, the Commonwealth, and European Integration, 1945-1955

A thesis presented to  
the faculty of  
the College of Arts and Sciences of Ohio University

In partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree  
Master of Arts

Cameron A. Dunbar

December 2017

©2017 Cameron A. Dunbar. All Rights Reserved.

This thesis titled  
Walking a Fine Line: Britain, the Commonwealth, and European Integration, 1945-1955

by  
CAMERON A. DUNBAR

has been approved for  
the Department of History  
and the College of Arts and Sciences by

Peter John Brobst  
Associate Professor of History

Robert Frank  
Dean, College of Arts and Sciences

## ABSTRACT

DUNBAR, CAMERON A., M.A., December 2017, History

Walking a Fine Line: Britain, the Commonwealth, and European Integration, 1945-1955

Director of Thesis: Peter John Brobst

Alongside the decline of its empire, the integration of Western Europe was the greatest foreign policy question facing the United Kingdom in the wake of the Second World War. The preeminent Western European power in 1945, Britain stayed aloof instead of taking the leadership of the emerging European communities in the first 10 years after the war. By thoroughly examining the pivotal post-war decade, this thesis will argue that staying outside of these earliest post-war European communities severely damaged the United Kingdom both politically and economically. In particular, it will argue that Britain's deep attachment to the Commonwealth of Nations – and specifically the relationship with the 'old dominions' of Australia, Canada and New Zealand – played the vital role in binding the hands of British leaders who were straddling the fine line between the old Commonwealth connections and the attempted new closer relations with Western Europe. It is only by examining and understanding British reasoning and reserve in regards to the European project in these years of 1945-1955, when Britons earned the moniker of 'reluctant Europeans,' that we can appreciate why Britain has had such a difficult time dealing with the issue of European integration ever since.

## DEDICATION

*To my mother, Gayle.*

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my advisor — Dr. John Brobst — for his guidance and support during the process of formulating and writing this thesis. I would also like to thank Dr. Paul Milazzo and Dr. Steven Miner for agreeing to serve on my thesis committee and for providing sound comments and advice. In addition, I would like to acknowledge Dr. Ingo Trauschweizer and Dr. Ziad Abu-Rish, both of whom helped me grow as a student and as a writer in my courses taken with them. Thank you as well to the Contemporary History Institute for providing me with generous financial support, without which I would not have been able to study at Ohio University and complete this thesis. Last, but certainly not least, I would like to thank my family for lending their encouragement over the past two years.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Abstract .....	3
Dedication .....	4
Acknowledgments.....	5
Introduction.....	7
Chapter 1: Squaring the Three Circles.....	35
Chapter 2: Labour’s Missed Chance.....	64
Chapter 3: The ‘Main Religion’ of the Tory Party .....	87
Chapter 4: Out of the Common Market .....	106
Conclusion .....	142
References.....	149
Appendix A: Winston Churchill’s ‘The Tragedy of Europe’ Speech.....	156
Appendix B: The Schuman Declaration .....	163
Appendix C: Communique Issued at the Conclusion of the Messina Conference .....	168

## INTRODUCTION

*No man is an island entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent...If a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less.*<sup>1</sup>

--- John Donne, 1623

*If western civilisation is to survive, we must look forward to an organisation, economic, cultural and perhaps even political, comprising all the countries of western Europe.*<sup>2</sup>

--- Harold Macmillan, 1939

The United Kingdom's decision to apply for membership into the European Economic Community, officially announced by Prime Minister Harold Macmillan to Parliament in a speech in the House of Commons on July 31, 1961, marked a major departure in the history of the United Kingdom's economic and political foreign policy in regards to the European continent.<sup>3</sup> It not only flew in the face of centuries of the 'Sceptered Isle's' resistance to what its statesmen saw as risky commitments on the European continent, with the exception of acting as a balance of power to the European state system. It also contradicted more than a decade of British aloofness from, and in some cases downright sabotage of the, idea of European integration and a supranational European Community, as well as marking a major turning point in the history of Britain's relationship with its imperial and Commonwealth connections. Much as the North

---

<sup>1</sup> John Donne, "No Man is an Island." Quoted in Brendan Simms, *Britain's Europe: A Thousand Years of Conflict and Cooperation*, (London: Allen Lane, 2016), 37.

<sup>2</sup> Harold Macmillan, *Tides of Fortune: 1945-1955* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), 152.

<sup>3</sup> On the first page of the sixth volume of his memoirs, Macmillan claimed of Britain's bid to enter the EEC, "This decision can be regarded as a turning point in our history." Harold Macmillan, *At The End of the Day, 1961-1963* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), 1.

Atlantic Treaty Organization had bound Britain to a European military commitment, the EEC would potentially bind Britain to the continent in political and economic terms as never before.

As Labour Party leader – and Macmillan nemesis – Hugh Gaitskell memorably put it in a hard-hitting party conference speech in September of 1962, the United Kingdom joining into any kind of formal union with its European neighbors meant the “end of a thousand years of history.”<sup>4</sup> Only in the most of serious times, such as at the start of the Second World War, did anyone in Britain ever conceive of there being some sort of European union, as evidenced by the quote above from a young Macmillan in response to a question on war aims in October 1939 or Winston Churchill’s offer for a Franco-British Union in June 1940. Even then, it is doubtful that Macmillan meant for Britain, a proud global power that possessed the most extensive empire the world had ever seen, to become a member of such “organization,” or that Churchill conceived his offer as anything more than a political union between two countries under mortal threat from Nazi Germany. In fact, another future Prime Minister, Anthony Eden, also stated in late 1940 – as Britain stood alone against Germany – that after the war it may be essential to create “some form of European federation” that would “comprise a European defence scheme, a European customs union and a common currency.”<sup>5</sup> In the 1950’s Eden would

---

<sup>4</sup> Hugh Gaitskell, “Party Conference Speech of October 3, 1962.” Quoted in Brian Brivati, *Hugh Gaitskell* (London: Richard Cohen Books, 1996), 414-415. As George Brown, Labour’s Shadow Home Secretary and a pro-European described it, “Emotionally, intellectually, and in the manner of its delivery (Gaitskell’s) speech was most compelling.” Quoted in George Brown, *In My Way: The Political Memoirs of Lord George Brown* (London: The Camelot Press, 1971), 218.

<sup>5</sup> Anthony Eden, *The Reckoning* (London: Cassell, 1965), 74.



lead the way in keeping Britain out of a European defense scheme and a European customs union, but the desperate times of 1940 called for desperate measures.

The first question to ask, then, about Britain's initial attempt to gain entry into the European Economic Community, is why it took so long. Why did Britain, the preeminent European power in the wake of the Second World War, decide to stay outside of the process of European integration in the years afterwards, when it could have played the dominant role in shaping the emerging bodies to its liking? Why, in the face of a mounting pile of evidence to the contrary, did Britain stick for so long with its Commonwealth and Empire as the presumed source of its economic power and political prestige instead of joining in with the Europeans? And what effect did this delay in entering Europe have on Britain's relative economic and geopolitical decline in those years?

The purpose of this thesis is to answer these questions by reviewing the United Kingdom's relationship with the idea of European integration in the decade after the end of the Second World War, up to November 1955, when Britain walked out on the negotiations that would eventually lead to the formation of the European Economic Community.<sup>6</sup> It will examine Britain's reluctance to collaborate with its Western European neighbors on the concept of European integration in the years immediately following the war, focusing particularly on the many missed chances to enter the European Communities at the embryonic level before Britain's slow turn towards Europe started in the late 1950's. Only by examining these initial stages of British foot-dragging

---

<sup>6</sup> The EEC became a reality March 25, 1957, when Germany, France, Belgium, Italy, the Netherlands and Luxembourg signed the Treaty of Rome. It would officially come into being on January 1, 1958.

on the European issue can we understand why Macmillan's government decided in the years directly after the formation of the European Economic Community that the country's economic future no longer resided with the Commonwealth and Empire but in Europe, and why Britain found it so difficult to gain membership in the EEC during the 1960's and 1970's, when it took the country three tries before it finally gained entry in 1973.

By thoroughly examining the pivotal post-war decade, this thesis will argue that staying outside of these initial post-war European communities severely damaged the United Kingdom both politically and economically. Even in the closing stages of the war, the continentals had shown a desire for Britain to lead the way post-hostilities, with Belgium's Paul Henri-Spaak telling Churchill that Britain should spearhead increased political and economic unity in Western Europe once Germany was vanquished.<sup>7</sup> If Britain had taken the lead on the formation of proposed European institutions in the late 1940's, or joined the bodies that did come into being in the early 1950's, it could have ensured itself the leadership of Europe going forwards instead of handing that mantle to France and Germany. Instead, a lack of strategic foresight saw Britain adopt a 'national strategy' to forge an independent (and ultimately failed) path to growth.<sup>8</sup> What emerged from Britain's nonparticipation in these years was a kind of spiraling effect: By staying out of the Communities that started to emerge in the early and mid-1950's, Britain also insured that it also would not be an active contributor in the next phases of European

---

<sup>7</sup> John W. Young, *Britain and European Unity, 1945-1992* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993), 6.

<sup>8</sup> James E. Cronin, *Global Rules: America, Britain, And A Disordered World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 13-14.

integration. The compound interest created in 1945-1955 eventually had to be paid off by the governments of the 1960's and 1970's, and it is still arguably on Britain's contemporary European balance sheet. It is imperative to examine and understand these early years, when Britons earned the moniker of 'reluctant Europeans,' to appreciate why Britain has had such a difficult time sorting out the issue of European integration ever since.

This thesis will contend that Britain's turn away from Europe in the years following 1945 was the result of its deep historic economic, political, military and sentimental ties to its empire and to the British Commonwealth of Nations, an intergovernmental organization of nations that shared the common tie of being former members of the British Empire.<sup>9</sup> The origins of the Commonwealth dated back to 1926 Imperial Conference, when Britain and its dominions agreed they were "equal in status, in no way subordinate one to another in any aspect of their domestic or external affairs, though united by common allegiance to the Crown, and freely associated as members of the British Commonwealth of Nations."<sup>10</sup> In the wake of the Second World War, with Britain's position as a world power imperiled, British policymakers saw leadership of the Commonwealth as essential for retaining its great power status.<sup>11</sup> It was a deep

---

<sup>9</sup> Australia, Canada, New Zealand, South Africa, and the United Kingdom officially formed the Commonwealth on December 11, 1931. India and Pakistan joined upon receiving independence in 1947, with Sri Lanka joining in 1948. These eight countries would remain the only members until Ghana and Malaya joined in 1957.

<sup>10</sup> H. Duncan Hall, "The Genesis of the Balfour Declaration of 1926," *Journal of Commonwealth Studies* Vol.1, no. 3 (1962): 169.

<sup>11</sup> A paper by Britain's Commonwealth Relations Office in the mid 1950's assessing the probable development of the Commonwealth in the next 10 to 15 years put it this way: "While the Commonwealth does so remain, the United Kingdom as its oldest member, occupies a world position far more important than she could claim solely in her own

attachment to the Commonwealth – and in particular, the relationship with the ‘old dominions’ of Australia, Canada and New Zealand that accounted for over 80 percent of total British exports to the Commonwealth in the late 1950’s<sup>12</sup> – that guaranteed any attempt by Britain to join the emerging European communities would be extremely problematic.<sup>13</sup> Only the recognition in the late 1950’s that the Commonwealth had become a source of illusions rather than of economic or political power opened the door for the United Kingdom to finally apply for European Economic Community membership in 1961.<sup>14</sup> As Macmillan would put it at the height of the EEC negotiations in September 1962, “It is no good pretending. Some people naturally feel that we can go back to the old world before the war. A lot of people do look backwards, but the real test you must bring to this question is ‘Are we going to look forward?’”<sup>15</sup>

But in spite of this recognition by the late 1950’s that the Commonwealth was damaged goods, the United Kingdom’s historic connection to that organization would still be the major barrier to Britain’s first attempt to seek entry into the EEC, binding the hands of British leaders who were straddling the fine line between the old

---

right.” Quoted in Benjamin Grob-Fitzgibbon, *Continental Drift: Britain and Europe from the End of Empire to the Rise of Euroscepticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 209-210.

<sup>12</sup> David Gowland and Arthur Turner, *Reluctant Europeans: Britain and European Integration, 1945-1998* (New York: Longman, 2000), 93.

<sup>13</sup> Stuart Ward, “Anglo-Commonwealth Relations and EEC Membership: the Problem of the Old Dominions” in *Britain’s Failure to Enter the European Community, 1961-63*, edited by George Wilkes (Portland, OR: Frank Cass, 1997), 93.

<sup>14</sup> For a study of the years after 1955, see George Wilkes, “The Commonwealth in British European Policy, Politics and Sentiment, 1956-63”, in *Britain, the Commonwealth and Europe: The Commonwealth and Britain’s Applications to Join the European Communities*, edited by Alex May (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 53-81.

<sup>15</sup> Harold MacMillan, “The Common Market: Europe, Britain, and the Commonwealth,” delivered on television from London, England, September 20, 1962.

Commonwealth connections and the attempted new closer relations with Western Europe. Indeed, the Commonwealth was mentioned an astounding 297 times in all during the Commons debate that followed Macmillan's opening speech on July 31, 1961.<sup>16</sup> Such was the pull of this mish-mash of countries on the imperial heartstrings of Britain's political classes even well after the Commonwealth was accepted as being of diminishing importance. It is this contradiction – that Britain made the decision to apply for entrance into the EEC due to the lessening importance of the Commonwealth as both an economic and political bloc, and yet still insisted that the special position enjoyed by Commonwealth countries in the British market (and political sphere) could never be sacrificed in favor of the European nations they were intending to partner with – that was also at the heart of Britain's European story during the Premierships of Clement Attlee (1945-1951), Churchill (1951-1955) and Eden (1955-1957). It will be at the heart of this work as well.

In analyzing Britain's European tale from 1945-1955, this thesis will primarily focus on the British side of the equation, scrutinizing the process of decision-making within the government by looking at Cabinet conclusions and memoranda. However, it will also explore how the United Kingdom dealt with the response from the Commonwealth nations to the European unity movement. Fearing the consequences of British integration into the developing European institutions, the Commonwealth countries fought their corner fiercely to keep their preferential economic and political

---

<sup>16</sup> Hansard, House of Commons debate of July 31, 1961 in "House of Commons Parliamentary Debates: Sitings of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century", *Hansard Online*, <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/sittings/C20>.

links with the mother country intact.<sup>17</sup> For instance, the existence of the Commonwealth, wherein countries had tariff autonomy, prevented any easy acceptance by Britain of the principle of any kind of European common market such as that established by the EEC.<sup>18</sup> But it wasn't just hard economics – British race patriotism, or the “idea that all British peoples, despite their particular regional problems and perspectives, ultimately comprised a single indissoluble community through the ties of blood, language, history and culture” also still held a strong grip on the minds of both Britons and the populations of the dominions.<sup>19</sup>

This was a uniquely British conundrum not shared by the six signatory countries (Germany, France, Belgium, Italy, the Netherlands and Luxembourg) that founded the EEC and its predecessor, the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), which had come into effect in 1952. Consequently, the restraining effect of the Commonwealth on Britain's proposed entry into Europe from 1945-1955 had two key components: Britain's belief that it needed to preserve the interests of the Commonwealth in any deal it made with the continentals, and the Commonwealth's equally strong belief that it needed to keep Britain from turning to Europe to preserve the special economic and political

---

<sup>17</sup> As New Zealand Prime Minister Keith Holyoake told Macmillan, he was “deeply concerned lest the achievement of European unity should result in restriction in market outlets for our products.” Quoted in Grob-Fitzgibbon, *Continental Drift*, 269. Canadian Prime Minister John Diefenbaker would become such a problem for Macmillan in regards to Europe that he wrote in his diary that Diefenbaker “is ill-informed and seems to be lacking in any power of precise ratiocination.” Harold Macmillan, diary entry of November 3, 1958 in *The Macmillan Diaries, Volume II: Prime Minister and After, 1957-66*, edited by Peter Catterall (London: Macmillan, 2011), 168.

<sup>18</sup> Alan S. Milward, *The European Rescue of the Nation-State* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 219.

<sup>19</sup> Stuart Ward, *Australia and the British Embrace: The Demise of the Imperial Ideal* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2001), 2.

advantages it enjoyed due to the Commonwealth connection. Both of these factors need to be examined to grasp the whole picture.

At the start of this assessment of the years 1945-1955, it is important to dive deeper into the underlying political, economic, military and sentimental reasons for why the Commonwealth played such a major role in keeping Britain out of these early moves towards European unity. All four of these elements – economic, political, sentimental and military – played a key part in the Commonwealth’s restraining effect. Too often studies of Britain’s detachment from the early processes of European integration attempt to cherry-pick just one of these factors as *the* reason, especially one of the first two. By highlighting political reasons or economic motives for British policy individually, these studies disregard the complexity of decision-making and the interchange connecting these elements. This thesis endeavors to say that all four played a major role, and this can only be understood by looking at them in combination. While the bulk of this thesis will make the argument that the British unwisely stayed outside of the process of European integration during these momentous years, an investigation of Britain’s Commonwealth ties shows that it is somewhat unfair to wholly criticize, with the benefit of hindsight, British officials and the leaders from both major parties of the 1940’s and 1950’s for sticking with the Commonwealth and not jumping wholeheartedly into the European project. To get at this point, and to understand why so many British decision-makers thought that they had to decide between the Commonwealth and emerging European institutions like the ECSC and the EEC, one must comprehend why the British statesmen of the 1940’s and 1950’s held such a deep attachment to the British Commonwealth, and

in particular to the old settler dominions of Canada, Australia and New Zealand.<sup>20</sup> Simply put, there were plenty of motives for why political leaders and Whitehall officials believed in the first decade after the Second World War that it was the Commonwealth, and not Europe, that continued to hold the key to the United Kingdom's future. As a result, the commercial and political links with the Commonwealth were the most difficult problem that Britain faced when it did at last decide to try for membership into the European communities.<sup>21</sup>

Economically, membership in the early European institutions certainly would have jeopardized relations with the Commonwealth, the world's largest trading bloc that still took about half of British exports at the time, more than double the share then going to Western Europe.<sup>22</sup> Of course, this proved to be shortsighted, as during the 1950's the position of the Commonwealth and Western Europe relative to trade with Britain reversed. By the close of the decade, it had "become apparent that Britain's future international economic policy could no longer be based on the Commonwealth," and by the end of the decade Britain's trade with Western Europe had increased so rapidly that it felt it had no other choice than to apply for membership into the EEC.<sup>23</sup> Most

---

<sup>20</sup> The Commonwealth nations certainly realized the strong restraining effect they could play in the negotiations. In a May 1961 memorandum looking at the implications of possible British entry into the EEC, the Australian trade minister John McEwen wrote Australia could "assume that the United Kingdom will go as far as she possibly can to avoid unqualified acceptance of the Treaty of Rome" in order to protect Commonwealth interests. Andrea Benvenuti, *Anglo-Australian Relations and the 'Turn to Europe', 1961-1972* (Rochester: The Boydell Press, 2008), 29.

<sup>21</sup> Alan. S. Milward, *The Rise and Fall of a National Strategy: The UK and The European Community, Volume 1* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 352.

<sup>22</sup> Simms, *Britain's Europe*, 176.

<sup>23</sup> P.J. Cain and A.G. Hopkins, *British Imperialism, 1688-2000*, 2nd edition (New York: Longman, 2002), 632-637.



significantly, in 1961, for the first time, Britain exported more goods to Europe to the Commonwealth, despite not being a member in the EEC's common market.<sup>24</sup>

During this time Britain's relative economic decline in relation to its European neighbors also sped up. The signs started in the first post-war decade, when the national incomes of the six ECSC members had grown on average nearly twice as fast as the United Kingdom. The rate of expansion of the Six's foreign trade also on average almost doubled that of the UK in these years.<sup>25</sup> Between 1950 and 1958, the gross nation product of the United Kingdom rose from \$47 billion to \$65 billion, while that of the Six skyrocketed from \$75 billion to \$163 billion.<sup>26</sup> And between 1955 and 1960, the average growth rate of Britain's economy was 2.5 percent compared to 5.3 percent in EEC. Compared to only Germany, which Britain had just recently vanquished in the war, it was even worse. During the 1950s Britain's share of world exports sank from 25.5 percent to 16.5 percent while that of the Federal Republic of Germany rose from 7.3 percent to 19.3 percent, a development that can only partly be explained by compensatory effects after the Second World War as Germany rebuilt its shattered economy.<sup>27</sup> This was the opportunity cost of starting outside the emergent European institutions. Britain had chosen to be 'out' in the 1950's. But, as would be a recurring theme in the history of Britain's relationship with Europe, choosing to be 'out' by no means disposed of any

---

<sup>24</sup> Young, *Britain and European Unity*, 76.

<sup>25</sup> Milward, *The Rise and Fall of a National Strategy*, 229.

<sup>26</sup> Uwe Kitzinger, *Diplomacy and Persuasion: How Britain Joined the Common Market* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1973), 29.

<sup>27</sup> Wolfram Kaiser, *Using Europe, Abusing the Europeans: Britain and European Integration, 1945-63* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), 110-112.

problems (in this case the Six's economic explosion, which in large part grew at the cost of Britain's economic slowdown) caused by the 'ins.'<sup>28</sup>

Given the diverging economic fortunes of Britain and the Six during the 1950's, joining the ECSC, and its successor the EEC, could have helped reverse Britain's downward economic trend; all in all, it can be argued that the Commonwealth still remained as a link with Britain's imperial past and as a useful international forum, but it could not halt Britain's decline, and that this should have been apparent at the time.<sup>29</sup> On the face of it, it was a failure of imagination and tendency to stay with the old status quo for too long that continued to bind Britain to the Commonwealth throughout the 1950's, and as a result Britain's missed the boat on joining what would soon become an economic powerhouse in the EEC. However, this awareness is in part drawn from hindsight. Undeniably, in the first years after the Second World War the sterling area actually was Britain's lifeline, and the Commonwealth a source of both raw materials and industrial markets that had no discernible end. As Oliver Franks, a powerful Foreign Office official in the 1940's, would say years later, "People did not foresee then that the sterling area would one day break up, that the countries of the Commonwealth wouldn't all want to hold their reserves in sterling." It actually did happen in less than a decade as officials like Franks saw their predictions about the future state of British economic

---

<sup>28</sup> Hugo Young, *This Blessed Plot: Britain and Europe From Churchill to Blair* (New York: The Overlook Press, 1999), 89-90.

<sup>29</sup> Giles Radice, *Offshore: Britain and the European Idea* (New York: I.B. Tauris & Company, 1992), 23.

power proved incorrect. But, as Franks pointed out, “none of this was foreseen at the time.”<sup>30</sup>

It was not foreseen in part because, trade-wise, Britain’s ties with the Commonwealth nations ran deep and in the 1950’s the Commonwealth still seemed to give Britain outsized economic scope and power in the world.<sup>31</sup> In large part this was due to the Commonwealth trading system based on the Imperial preference arrangements established under the Ottawa agreements of 1932. These were a series of bilateral deals between individual Commonwealth countries and the United Kingdom, helping to reinforce the principle of Commonwealth preference in the British market.<sup>32</sup> The idea that the empire was a robust economic bloc was still strong in 1950, and for good reason. The preference system meant that in 1949-50, the Commonwealth accounted for 46 percent of British imports and 53 percent of its exports (compared with 13 and 11 percent, respectively, accounted for by the six European countries that would shortly form the score of the European integrationist policy).<sup>33</sup> At the beginning of the 1950s, with the exception of Malaya, Britain and the Commonwealth countries were each other’s most important bilateral trading partners. This extended beyond just the old dominions as much of the Commonwealth and Empire provided assured markets for British industry. For instance, in 1950 more than 50 percent of the imports into Australia, New Zealand

---

<sup>30</sup> Michael Charlton, *The Price of Victory* (London: BBC Publications, 1983), 70; Young, *This Blessed Plot*, 39.

<sup>31</sup> Kitzinger, *Diplomacy and Persuasion*, 28.

<sup>32</sup> Ward, “Anglo-Commonwealth Relations and EEC membership”, 93.

<sup>33</sup> Alex May, “The Commonwealth and Britain’s Turn to Europe, 1945-73”, *Round Table* Vol. 102, no. 1 (2013): 31; Sir William Nicoll, “Britain and the Commonwealth in the 1960s”, in *Britain, the Commonwealth and Europe: The Commonwealth and Britain’s Applications to Join the European Communities*, edited by Alex May (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 32.

and British West Africa came from Britain, while it was over 40 percent for South Africa and 25 percent from India and Pakistan. Conversely, 73 percent of New Zealand's exports went into Britain; this number was 66 percent for British West Africa and 39 percent for Australia.<sup>34</sup> This meant that for these countries, and in particular a small country like New Zealand with an undiversified agricultural economy, any exclusion from the British market due to a European customs union was a "grave danger" that could be a "death sentence" and had to be resisted at all costs.<sup>35</sup> It was a feeling reciprocated by the British, with Conservative grandee Leo Amery stating in 1954 that preferences are "the lifeline of the Commonwealth which we must preserve."<sup>36</sup>

On top of the hard import/export numbers, the type of products Britain was able to import from the Commonwealth nations made the connection even more important. In the early 1950's many Whitehall economists came to the conclusion that primary products were likely to remain scarcer than they had been in prewar times. The shortages caused by the Korean War only added to this assumption. This theory that the earth's resources were finite and diminishing led to a seller's market and lent weight to the view that the Commonwealth placed Britain in a strong position to resume a leading role in the international economy.<sup>37</sup> This implied that that the UK's primary interest should be in keeping close ties with the Commonwealth and Empire nations, which held ample

---

<sup>34</sup> Nicoll, "Britain and the Commonwealth in the 1960s", 33.

<sup>35</sup> Gordon R. Lewthwaite, "Commonwealth and Common Market: The Dilemma of the New Zealand Dairy Industry", *Geographical Review*, Vol. 61, no. 1 (1971): 85; P.G. Elkan, *New Zealand's Butter and Cheese in the European Economic Community*, Research paper No. 2 of the New Zealand Institute of Economic Research (Wellington: Whitcombe and Tombs Limited, 1962).

<sup>36</sup> Nora Beloff, *The General Says No: Britain's Exclusion From Europe* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1963), 72.

<sup>37</sup> Gowland and Turner, *Reluctant Europeans*, 91.

resources of primary commodities, such as rubber from Malaya, iron ore from Australia, wheat from Canada and butter from New Zealand.

Commonwealth preference meant cheap imports, which in cost of living terms gave Britain a huge international competitive advantage. This was especially true in the all-important area of food. For example, Australia and Canada supplied 61 percent of the country's wheat imports in 1955, while Australia and New Zealand provided 60 percent of its total meat imports.<sup>38</sup> As Douglas Jay, who would serve as both Economic Secretary to the Treasury and Financial Secretary to the Treasury in the Attlee government, put it when attacking proposed British EEC membership, "The higher food import prices together with the abandonment of subsidies on our home-produced food, would force up living costs and prices of all of our exports, with loss of exports throughout the world."<sup>39</sup> It was a unique trading relationship that was important to both sides well into the decade of the 1950's: Of the total value of Commonwealth foodstuff exports to the UK and to the six EEC countries over the years 1956-60, 82 percent were to the UK. These foodstuffs made up about 35 percent of the value of total British imports from the Commonwealth and they came almost entirely from the three dominions.<sup>40</sup>

While to the Six the dominions were only a loose bundle of marginal countries, exporters of small amounts of butter, grain, meat and so on, for Britain they were crucial trading partners. As a result, British officials came to the conclusion that any new links

---

<sup>38</sup> Gowland and Turner, *Reluctant Europeans*, 95.

<sup>39</sup> Douglas Jay, *After the Common Market: A Better Alternative for Britain* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), 62.

<sup>40</sup> Milward, *The Rise and Fall of a National Strategy*, 311.

with Europe must not weaken the old links with the Commonwealth.<sup>41</sup> It was a conviction that British leaders retained even after the decision to seek entry into the EEC had been made, as seen from a memo Macmillan sent to his chief negotiator Ted Heath on September 14, 1961, just as the negotiations were about to begin, saying that retention of Commonwealth preferences was “very important.”<sup>42</sup> This unwillingness on the part of Britain give up the preference arrangements with the Commonwealth, while at the same time trying to negotiate entry into the EEC’s Common Market, would produce one of the most intractable problems of the negotiations and went a long way towards France deciding to use its veto to deny British membership in January 1963.

In addition to these extensive trading connections the Commonwealth also helped ease Britain’s most prominent financial problem of the post-war period. This was the ‘sterling-dollar gap’ as Britain faced the increasing difficulty of earning enough dollars by exports to the United States, by far the greatest economic superpower in the world, to pay for dollar imports from the U.S. It was Britain’s leadership of the sterling area (the nations of the Commonwealth minus Canada but including Scandinavia) that allowed Britain to weather this problem, both because of the resource-rich exports from the Commonwealth countries and because, as banker to the sterling area, Britain maintained a major advantage in adjusting the external policies of other member states to Britain’s economic and currency needs.<sup>43</sup> The sterling area, as a crucial part of the Commonwealth complex, instilled in British political leaders a preoccupation with the Commonwealth’s

---

<sup>41</sup> Nicoll, “Britain and the Commonwealth in the 1960s”, 31-32.

<sup>42</sup> Gowland and Turner, *Reluctant Europeans*, 94.

<sup>43</sup> John Darwin, *Britain and Decolonization* (London: Macmillan, 1988), 236.

importance “which distracted their attention from the process of European integration and made them largely indifferent if not dismissive towards the new schemes.”<sup>44</sup>

In all, the trading relationship between Britain and the Commonwealth provided the United Kingdom with markets and with sources of supply for raw materials outside the dollar area at prices which the UK was often in a position to dictate.<sup>45</sup> And considering that the war had turned Britain from being the world’s largest creditor to being the world’s largest debtor, Britain’s place as the leader of the sterling area cannot be understated, either. What the famed British economist John Maynard Keynes called a “financial Dunkirk” could be best saved through closer relations with the Commonwealth, or so it seemed.<sup>46</sup> As we will see, this was the economic reality that British leaders such as Ernest Bevin and Churchill faced as they debated the merits of staying the course with the Commonwealth or embracing European integration in the late 1940’s and early 1950’s.

Beyond economics, the leadership of the Commonwealth was initially seen as the main source of British political status and independence in the world and the most important basis for Britain’s claim to a world power role during the early postwar period.<sup>47</sup> It was widely thought in British political circles that the United Kingdom’s claim not just to have global interests but to be a global power, close to if not quite on par with the United States and Soviet Union, was based on its links with both the self-

---

<sup>44</sup> Gowland and Turner, *Reluctant Europeans*, 95.

<sup>45</sup> Edmund Dell, *The Schuman Plan and the British Abdication of Leadership in Europe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 34.

<sup>46</sup> Alan Bullock, *Ernest Bevin: Foreign Secretary* (London: Heinemann, 1983), 121.

<sup>47</sup> Elisabeth Barker, *Britain in a Divided Europe, 1945-1970* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971), 53-54; Kaiser, *Using Europe, Abusing the Europeans*, 12.

governing and not yet self-governing countries of the Commonwealth.<sup>48</sup> It was an “important foreign policy status symbol which helped to compensate for Britain’s relative economic decline to justify a special role alongside the two superpowers.”<sup>49</sup> Indeed, the first 10 years of the post-war world were a time of renewed vigor in the British imperial project, despite capitulations of power in India, Burma, Ceylon and Palestine in 1947-48. In this decade Britain was exerting itself as a power more energetically than at any time outside the world wars, certainly far more than in its theoretical Victorian heyday.<sup>50</sup> But the object now was not that Britain should sustain the empire, but that the empire and the newly constituted Commonwealth should sustain Britain. In some quarters, it was also felt that Britain had both a political and a moral duty to provide economic and technical aid to ‘backward’ Commonwealth countries in what would soon become known as the “third world.”<sup>51</sup> This was especially the case for Clement Attlee’s Labour government, which saw the multi-racial Commonwealth as a potential world-wide bridge between the rich and poor, as well as between the black, brown and white.<sup>52</sup>

It is true that the Second World War (and most notably the fall of Singapore) had revealed conflicts of interest and priority between Britain and other members of its empire.<sup>53</sup> But the war had also demonstrated the importance of the Commonwealth to Britain, with the memory still strong that after the fall of France in 1940 it had been the Commonwealth nations, and not the Europeans, who had stood with Great Britain in the

---

<sup>48</sup> Dell, *The Schuman Plan and the British Abdication of Leadership in Europe*, 64.

<sup>49</sup> Kaiser, *Using Europe, Abusing the Europeans*, 37.

<sup>50</sup> David Reynolds, *Britannia Overruled: British Policy and World Power in the Twentieth Century*, 2nd edit. (New York: Longman, 2000), 186.

<sup>51</sup> Barker, *Britain in a Divided Europe*, 97.

<sup>52</sup> Kitzinger, *Diplomacy and Persuasion*, 23.

<sup>53</sup> May, “The Commonwealth and Britain's Turn to Europe, 1945-73”, 30.



face of the Nazi menace. Millions of empire men and women served on all fronts in the course of the war, and little New Zealand's battlefield casualties were the highest among all belligerents as a proportion of the population, with the exception of the Soviet Union.<sup>54</sup> Britain had also purchased massive amounts of much-needed food from New Zealand and Australia during the war in order to maintain rations.<sup>55</sup> The loyalty shown by the old dominions in the two world wars was particularly valued by Churchill's Conservative Party, with the common wartime effort a point of pride for both Britons and the populations of Canada, Australia and New Zealand. Casting aside the Commonwealth countries, who had sacrificed so much for Britain, in favor of tightening bonds with the Europeans, one of whom just years before had been the mortal enemy, was not an easy or obvious decision to make.

And while in the first years after the war Britain was forced to shed some of its imperial possessions, it had retained sufficient colonies in Africa, the Caribbean, south-east Asia and the Pacific to project power worldwide. With a colonial empire spread so broadly around the globe, Britain possessed an extensive chain of military, air and naval bases nearly as extensive.<sup>56</sup> It also could rely on a host of bilateral agreements and exchanges that tied the old dominions into military, intelligence and security cooperation with the mother country.<sup>57</sup> In the years after the war, Britain's defense expenditure rose

---

<sup>54</sup> Simms, *Britain's Europe*, 165.

<sup>55</sup> Paul Robertson and John Singleton, "Britain, Butter, and European Integration, 1957-1964", *The Economic History Review* Vol. 50, no. 2 (1997): 328.

<sup>56</sup> Barker, *Britain in a Divided Europe*, 97.

<sup>57</sup> May, "The Commonwealth and Britain's Turn to Europe", 30-31.

to much greater heights than it had ever been in peacetime in modern history.<sup>58</sup> This was not a nation that saw itself as in terminal decline.

In addition to these economic, political and military factors, many in Britain also held strong sentimental and familial attachments with the old dominions, which after all were formed out of British settler colonies. Anthony Eden described the Commonwealth ties as “sacred” and demonstrably indicated where British loyalties and interests largely laid in the 1950s when he said: “What you’ve got to remember is that, if you looked at the postbag of any English village and examined the letters coming in from abroad to the while population, ninety per cent of them would come from way beyond Europe ... Ten per cent only would come from Europe.”<sup>59</sup> Relationships with the Commonwealth retained a much tighter psychological grip on the minds of Conservative Party – and for that matter the Labour Party – politicians than the awkward realities of a trading bloc of expanding economies across the English Channel.<sup>60</sup> Compared to what the Commonwealth could offer Britain in the sphere of political prestige, worldwide power and sentimental ties, Europe just couldn’t match up. And despite developing into sovereign states, the dominions of the 1950s still thought of themselves as a British nation and retained extremely close ties with the ‘mother country.’<sup>61</sup>

These political as well as economic and sentimental ties channeled the thinking of British politicians and officials along a particular route which, hemmed in by tradition and loyalty in regards to the Commonwealth, “precluded more than an occasional glance

---

<sup>58</sup> David Edgerton, *Warfare State: Britain, 1920-1970* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 23.

<sup>59</sup> Gowland and Turner, *Reluctant Europeans*, 84.

<sup>60</sup> Young, *This Blessed Plot*, 106.

<sup>61</sup> Benvenuti, *Anglo-Australian Relations and the ‘Turn to Europe’*, 1.

at broader horizons.”<sup>62</sup> As Alec Douglas-Home, Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations from 1955 through 1960 and Macmillan’s successor as Prime Minister, would later write, “The British public was still too near to the glory of Empire to accept the role for Britain of just another country in Europe.”<sup>63</sup> This ‘great power syndrome’, which “prevented a more substantial re-evaluation of British economic and political interests and *long-term* aims in Western Europe, was rooted in strong traditions of political mentality to uphold Britain’s great imperial legacy.”<sup>64</sup> For British leaders of the late 1940’s and 1950’s, it proved very difficult to suddenly abandon this inheritance and betray Britain’s imperial past in favor of a European future. This was particularly so in the wake of the Second World War, which only seemed to affirm this legacy.

The concept of the Commonwealth equaling political prestige and economic power for Britain would slowly start to drain away in the face of changing realities throughout the 1950’s. However, the extreme importance of the Commonwealth dimension even as the British decided to seek membership in the EEC is seen in Macmillan’s choice to address it in the beginning of his July 31, 1961 statement to the Commons, when just four paragraphs in he stated:

I believe that it is both our duty and our interest to contribute towards that strength by securing the closest possible unity within Europe. At the same time, if a closer relationship between the United Kingdom and the countries of the European Economic Community were to disrupt the long-standing and historic ties between the United Kingdom and the other nations of the Commonwealth the loss would be greater than the gain. The Commonwealth is a great source of stability and strength both to Western Europe and to the world as a whole, and I am sure that its value is fully appreciated by the member Governments of the

---

<sup>62</sup> Jacqueline Tratt, *The Macmillan Government and Europe: A Study in the Process of Policy Development* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1996), 42.

<sup>63</sup> Nicoll, “Britain and the Commonwealth in the 1960s”, 35.

<sup>64</sup> Kaiser, *Using Europe, Abusing the Europeans*, 56.

European Economic Community. I do not think that Britain's contribution to the Commonwealth will be reduced if Europe unites. On the contrary, I think that its value will be enhanced.<sup>65</sup>

Much like Bevin and Churchill before him, Macmillan proved to be far too optimistic in his hope that Britain's European interests could be reconciled with its Commonwealth commitments. Perhaps, too, he was far too confident that his government could bridge that gap. It was a chore any government would have found difficult as the Commonwealth, with its focal points of British interests, identity and emotional appeal, commanded the attention of British policymakers and the British public in ways that Europe could not.<sup>66</sup> The sentiment of retaining close political and economic connections with the old settler dominions still held a prominent place in the heads and hearts of the British people, even as it became increasingly obvious that Commonwealth no longer held the key to Britain's prosperity.

Consequently, the Commonwealth became the most important external factor limiting the nature and extent of British interest in the early process of European integration. No aspect of Britain's European policy eluded inspection without reference to what was seen as the higher priority accorded to British ties, obligations and interests within the Commonwealth. British policymakers habitually invoked the Commonwealth as an essential part of a seemingly unalterable argument against closer British connections with Europe, and safeguarding the Commonwealth relationship was to remain high on the list of priorities of every British government during this period.<sup>67</sup>

---

<sup>65</sup> Hansard, House of Commons debate, July 31, 1961.

<sup>66</sup> Gowland and Turner, *Reluctant Europeans*, 83.

<sup>67</sup> Tratt, *The Macmillan Government and Europe*, 51; Gowland and Turner, *Reluctant Europeans*, 83.

When Britain did decide to seek membership in the EEC in 1961, the anomalous political relationship with the Commonwealth turned into a most peculiar problem for British ministers, who found themselves constrained by the needs of people outside their political constituency. This meant that for much of 1961-1963, the British government was largely acting not always in the best interests of its own people.<sup>68</sup> By trying to appease everyone – the Europeans, the Commonwealth, its own backbenchers, British public opinion – the British government ended up pleasing no one. The United Kingdom would ultimately be denied membership in the EEC because it failed to resolve its old Commonwealth commitments with the new commitments it would need to undertake in the European community, at once gaining nothing from entry into the emerging European institutions while at the same time exasperating its old Commonwealth allies.

Too often the restraining role of the Commonwealth – a restraint both real, but also exaggerated by the perceptions of British leaders at the time – has been given only a small role, marginalized or sidelined altogether in studies of Britain's relationship with the idea of European integration in the first post-war decade. Largely, this is because the Commonwealth restraint quickly melted away as the organization became less important politically and economically to both Britain and the Commonwealth nations in the 1960's and after, when Britain made its final retreat from empire and accepted a role in Europe. It is no coincidence that when Britain did at last succeed in entering the EEC in 1973 at the third time of trying, it did so largely because it had at last shed itself of the

---

<sup>68</sup> Tratt, *The Macmillan Government and Europe*, 19.

Commonwealth restraint, with the desires of Commonwealth countries playing little role in those negotiations.<sup>69</sup>

Though few studies of these years leave out the Commonwealth's role entirely, many of these narratives only briefly touch upon it instead of systematically probing why the Commonwealth held such a hold on Britain's collective mind throughout the early stages of European development. Some mask the Commonwealth effect by focusing on the role of the United States in relation to Britain's bid to enter Europe. Others concentrate on non-Commonwealth economic factors, such as the different economic realities between Britain's industrial/trading economy and France's less-developed agricultural economy, as the key behind Britain's failed bid. And still others make the mistake of focusing on the oversized personalities at the center of the tale, such as Bevin, Churchill, Eden and Macmillan on the British side and Konrad Adenauer, Paul Henri-Spaak, Georges Bidault and Robert Schuman on the European side, as the underlying reason for why these leaders could not agree to a deal.

While all of these issues played a factor in Britain's indifference towards Europe in the opening years after the Second World War, the perceived necessity of maintaining

---

<sup>69</sup> When Heath's Conservative Party decided to seek membership in 1970, it did so on terms that would have been alien to the British leaders 20 years before. The manifesto setting out Britain's bargaining position flatly rejected the Commonwealth, coolly saying that "The member countries of the Commonwealth are widely scattered in different regions of the world and differ widely in their political ideas and economic development...their political relations with the United Kingdom have greatly changed and are still changing." Quoted in John Darwin, *Unfinished Empire: The Global Expansion of Britain* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2012), 380. For a further insiders account of the 1970-1972 negotiations, written in 1972 by the head of the British negotiating team but only published at the turn of the century, see Sir Con O'Neill, *Britain's Entry into the European Community: Report on the Negotiations of 1970-1972* (London: Whitehall History Publishing, 2000).

economic and political links with the Commonwealth was the major limitation on Britain's desire to ingratiate itself in the early steps towards European integration in the 1940's and 1950's. "Membership of the Communities must not weaken Britain's ability to lead the Commonwealth" was a doctrine that would hamper the British bargaining position throughout this time.<sup>70</sup> By clinging to a Commonwealth link that was soon to weaken considerably, the government of Britain would lose the opportunity to join in and shape the future of Europe.<sup>71</sup> This Commonwealth dynamic cannot be overlooked in any study of British relations with Europe in the 1940's and 1950's, particularly if we are to understand why the 1961-1963 negotiations for Britain to enter the EEC ended with French president Charles De Gaulle's humiliating and abrupt "non" to Macmillan.<sup>72</sup>

Accordingly, the decisive years of 1961-1963 cannot be treated as if in a vacuum, as they sometimes are. Many of the problems faced by Macmillan, his chief negotiator Heath, and the rest of the British government and its negotiating team had their origins in the first 10 years after the end of the war, when the seeds of European integration were at first planted and then sprouted into fully-formed supranational institutions. Only by understanding the chronology, motives and reasons behind Britain's reluctance to come to the European bargaining table in the years before Britain's fateful November 1955 decision to walk out on the European Economic Community negotiations can we appreciate the causes of Britain's difficulty in trying to join the EEC in the years after. As a result, this work will be divided into three chapters to best analyze the United

---

<sup>70</sup> Milward, *The Rise and Fall of a National Strategy*, 311.

<sup>71</sup> Grob-Fitzgibbon, *Continental Drift*, 415.

<sup>72</sup> Stephen Wall, *The Official History of Britain and the European Community, Vol. II: From Rejection to Referendum, 1963-1975* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 20-22.

Kingdom's labored post-Second World War history as it stayed outside of the initial moves of the European community, as well as the restrictive influence on that process created by Britain's historical, political, economic and sentimental attachment to the British Commonwealth.

The first three chapters – “Squaring the Three Circles”, “Labour's Missed Chance” and “The ‘Main Religion’ of the Tory Party” – will cover the first nine years after the Second World War. By examining Britain's initial reluctance to collaborate on the idea of European integration in these years, despite the fact that Britons – most conspicuously Winston Churchill – could rightfully claim to be the godfathers of the European union idea, we can better understand both why the British started its slow turn towards Europe in the second half of the 1950's, and why they found the negotiations to enter the EEC so difficult come 1961. These chapters will analyze: How another of Churchill's concepts, that of the “three circles of power,” would help to keep Britain out of a full commitment to European integration; the Labour government's initial forays into Europe and Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin's fluctuating diplomacy in regards to the early stages of European integration; the Conservative (or ‘Tory’) Party's opportunistic embrace of the European movement while in opposition, and its abrupt about-face once back in power; why the British crucially abdicated leadership in Europe by staying outside two of the earliest and most prominent attempts at European supranational institutions, the European Coal and Steel Community and the European Defense Community; and the Commonwealth's abrasive reaction to early British attempts to tie it into the emerging plans for European integration.



Chapter four, “Out of the Common Market”, will focus on the crucial year of 1955, when Britain made the vital choice to stay outside of the European Economic Community. Starting with Eden’s assumption of the role of Prime Minister in April, it will chart how British attitudes started and remained standoffish regarding the resolution of the Messina Conference of early June 1955, which called for the formation of West European customs union and common market. It will also analyze the responsibility of various Whitehall departments in the decision for the United Kingdom to stay outside the emerging institutions in 1955, the role played by Britain’s chief representative at the negotiations in Brussels from July through November, and just why the British government felt itself unable to become members of the group that two years later would form the EEC.

Britain’s relationship with the concept of European integration has been the country’s primary foreign policy conundrum since the end of the Second World War. Every Prime Minister, from Attlee to Theresa May, has been forced to deal with the thorny issue of Europe, and just how involved with the idea of ‘ever closer union’ Britain should be. The question of Europe has almost singlehandedly brought down Premierships (Margaret Thatcher, John Major and David Cameron), caused the most startling realignment in British politics in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (the split of the Labour Party into pro and anti-European camps in 1981) and been the subject of two of the just three referendums held in the history of the United Kingdom (first in 1975, and then 2016). More than any other issue, Europe is the question that divides the British nation, the question that most causes uncertainty among Britain’s allies, and the question

that, try as they might, British leaders have not been able to successfully answer in the last 70 years. In the wake of the 2016 ‘Brexit’ vote, it is a subject more vital to our understanding of the British national story than ever before. Britain’s topsy-turvy ride on the European rollercoaster started in the decade after the end of the Second World War, and hit its first climax when Britain’s representatives walked out of the negotiating room on a late fall day in Brussels in 1955. Only by better comprehending the opening salvos and struggles regarding the United Kingdom and the European Communities in the years 1945-1955 can we grasp the country’s difficulty with the ambitious idea of European integration that up to this day remains the major problem facing British leaders. It is to this earliest portion of Britain’s post-1945 European saga that this work now turns.

## CHAPTER 1: SQUARING THE THREE CIRCLES

*I am convinced, and I do not speak without some knowledge of both Europe and of the United States, that it is possible to reconcile our position as the center of the British Empire with full development of close economic relations with all the friendly countries of Europe. For my own part I will be content with nothing less. I strive for all three great systems – the British Commonwealth of Nations, the European Union and the fraternal association with the United States. I believe ... this island will become the vital link between them all.*<sup>73</sup>

--- Winston Churchill, 1947

*We could not integrate our economy with that of Europe in any manner that would prejudice the full discharge of responsibilities and interests as a leading member of the Commonwealth and sterling area.*<sup>74</sup>

--- Stafford Cripps, 1949

It is no small irony that the history of European integration post-1945 starts with none other than Winston Churchill. It was this eternal arch imperialist – notoriously said to have told Charles De Gaulle on the eve of the Normandy landings that, “If Britain must choose between Europe and the open sea, she must always choose the open sea” – who originally mooted the idea of ever closer European union just months after the end of Europe’s second cataclysmic war of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Considering Churchill’s unmatched political prestige and hold on British and continental minds in the wake of

---

<sup>73</sup> Winston Churchill, “Party Conference Speech of October 4, 1947”. Quoted in Grob-Fitzgibbon, *Continental Drift*, 415.

<sup>74</sup> James Ellison, *Threatening Europe: Britain and the Creation of the European Community, 1955-58* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000), 33.

Britain's triumph in the Second World War, his words went a long way towards beginning the processes of European integration. Indeed, he is still known as a 'father of Europe' today. However, Churchill also exemplified the characteristics of nearly every British politician who would follow him: An absence of steady vision on the European issue, but also a reasoning "for why that unsteadiness did not matter, as the issue of Europe could always be the plaything of fickle British politicians, because there always existed other possibilities for Britain, growing out of imperial history."<sup>75</sup> This is why any examination of Britain's European story after the Second World War must begin with Sir Winston.

Churchill's ever active mind was on with a new, post-war Europe even in the autumn of 1942, when he wrote to his Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden that his "thoughts rest primarily in Europe – the revival of the glory of Europe, the parent continent of the modern nations and of civilization ... Hard as it is to say now, I trust that the European family may act unitedly as one under the Council of Europe." He recognized that Britain would "have to work with the Americans in many ways and in the greatest ways," but that Europe is our prime care."<sup>76</sup> Churchill didn't take long after the end of hostilities to start a dialogue on his new European theme. Speaking to a Joint Meeting of the Belgian Senate and Chamber in Brussels on November 16, 1945, Churchill stated grandly that he could see "no reason" why "there should not arise the United States of Europe, which will unify this Continent in a manner never known since the fall of the Roman Empire." Of course in the same speech Churchill could not resist heralding his own 'British island'

---

<sup>75</sup> Young, *This Blessed Plot*, 6.

<sup>76</sup> Macmillan, *Tides of Fortune*, 153.

that had “repeatedly in the last four hundred years headed victorious coalitions against European tyrants, and for once again holding the proud but awful responsibility of keeping the Flag of Freedom flying.”<sup>77</sup> As ever with Churchill, he couldn’t quite refrain from a dig at the expense of his European partners, especially if he could trumpet his own nation’s horn at the same time.

Leo Amery, another British statesman known much more as an ardent supporter of Empire than a sympathizer with Europe, was thinking along the same lines as his long-time friend Churchill. Just ten days after Churchill’s speech in Brussels, Amery gave a similar one at the University of London in which he argued that while Britain lay outside of Europe because of its “very characteristic culture of (its) own” and its membership in an “equal partnership of nations (the Commonwealth) distributed all over the world,” Britain was nonetheless “a nation of the European family intimately linked with Europe throughout world history” whose security was tied to stability on the continent. Amery would go on to say that after the tragedies of the Second World War, Europe would find peace and economic prosperity only through the “creation of some sort of European union or association as the visible expression and focus of a new European patriotism.” He concluded that it was up to Britain to lead this pursuit, declaring that it was the “duty of the British Empire,” after all born out of the European heritage, to “make our contribution to the saving of the old home of this world’s greatest civilization, to the

---

<sup>77</sup> Winston Churchill, “The Future of Europe”, addressed to a Joint Meeting of the Belgian Senate and Chamber, Brussels, on November 16, 1945. Quoted in Grob-Fitzgibbon, *Continental Drift*, 35.

rebirth of Europe as one of the world's great world units.<sup>78</sup> Amery would soon become one of the leading proponents of linking Europe to the Commonwealth, with the United Kingdom, of course, at the center of it all.

In a dramatic statement in the House of Commons on June 5, 1946, Churchill went even further, imploring his colleagues not to punish Germany, who just over a year before, after all, had been the great enemy. Leaving little doubt, Churchill boomed, "Let Germany live. Let Austria and Hungary be freed. Let Italy resume her place in the European system. Let Europe rise in glory, and by her strength and unity ensure the peace of the world."<sup>79</sup> Later that year on September 19 in Zurich, Switzerland, in perhaps his most cited speech on the European project, Churchill declared in his clearest language yet that the only way to "recreate the European family" was to "build a kind of United States of Europe." He argued that, "We must build a kind of United States of Europe...The structure of the United States of Europe, if well and truly built, will be such as to make the material strength of a single state less important...If at first all the States of Europe are not willing or able to join the Union, we must nevertheless proceed to assemble and combine those who will and those who can." It was this ever-closer European unity, and primarily the closer economic cooperation between West Germany and France, Churchill argued, that would keep the red tide of Soviet influence, and perhaps Soviet troops, from spreading into Western Europe as the continent rebuilt in the years after the war. Closer European unity would also help save Europeans from themselves: "If Europe is to be saved from infinite misery, and indeed from final doom," Churchill argued, "there must

---

<sup>78</sup> Leo Amery, "British Links with Europe", addressed to the University of London on November 26, 1945. Quoted in Grob-Fitzgibbon, *Continental Drift*, 35.

<sup>79</sup> Hansard, House of Commons debate, June 5, 1946.

be an act of faith in the European family.”<sup>80</sup> Responding to Churchill’s Zurich speech, his son-in-law and fellow Conservative Party politician Duncan Sandys was equally resolved, writing that Britain’s “sacrifices give us the right, our victory imposes on us the duty and our interests confirm the wisdom of giving a lead to the European nations they are willing to make towards a united Europe.”<sup>81</sup>

Paradoxically, while it was the famous British wartime leader Churchill and other Britons in his circle who helped to invoke and lay the groundwork for this idea of European integration that was to be so integral to the story of the continent in the next half century, it would also be he and his fellow Britons who for the next decade and a half who would be the most resistant to this European idea. As can be attested to by Churchill’s preceding quotes on “the United States of Europe” and decidedly different declarations in the years after, when his words calling for an integration of Europe started to turn into reality, many British statesmen, including Churchill, can only be described as having muddled and fluctuating thinking on the issue of Europe, struggling to reconcile Britain’s proposed new role as part of an integrated Western Europe with its historic role as the leader of its world-wide Empire and the British Commonwealth. However, that was not the mood directly after the war, when the horrifying thought of a third conflagration on the continent drove hasty talk of Europe uniting. Summarizing Churchill’s European vision as it was in 1946, Harold Macmillan wrote that “Britain could in (Churchill’s) view play a full role in Europe without loss or disloyalty to the

---

<sup>80</sup> Winston Churchill, “The Tragedy of Europe”, speech in Zurich, Switzerland, September 19, 1946. See Appendix A for the full text of the speech.

<sup>81</sup> Grob-Fitzgibbon, *Continental Drift*, 44.

traditions of her Empire and Commonwealth.”<sup>82</sup> On December 28, 1946, Churchill indicated as much in a letter to the Archbishop of Canterbury, writing in a ‘Statement of Aims’ that, “If Europe is to survive, it must unite. The aim must be to unite all the peoples of Europe and give expression to their sense of being Europeans while preserving their own traditions and identity.” The United Kingdom’s part to play in this was unambiguous: “Britain has special obligations and spiritual ties which link her with the other nations of the British Commonwealth. Nevertheless, Britain is an integral part of Europe and must be prepared to make her full contribution to European unity.”<sup>83</sup> Though in the heady days of 1945 and 1946 Churchill may have thought there would be no question of deciding between Europe and the Commonwealth, in the years ahead this would prove to be a mammoth miscalculation.

### The Three Circles

In addition to being the father of the European idea, the prolific Churchill was also the progenitor of the “three circles” concept that would come to dominate British strategic and diplomatic thinking for much of the two decades after the end of the Second World War, when Britain attempted to keep up with the rising superpowers — the United States and the Soviet Union — that had joined Britain in the Grand Alliance to defeat the Axis powers. In the aftermath of victory in 1945, Britain began to experience a relative decline in both influence (informal empire) and hard power (formal empire) around the globe. It was in response to these changed post-war realities that Churchill formulated his novel design for Britain’s new place in the world. The three interlocking circles – an

---

<sup>82</sup> Macmillan, *Tides of Fortune*, 156.

<sup>83</sup> Grob-Fitzgibbon, *Continental Drift*, 47-48.



Atlantic alliance linking North America to Europe, Europe itself, and the British Commonwealth – would, according to Churchill, combat this relative decline and allow Britain to retain a position as one of the world’s great powers. “If you think of the three interlocking circles,” said Churchill, “you will see that we are the only country which has a great part in every one of them,” thanks to Britain’s leadership of the Commonwealth, its ‘special relationship’ with the United States, and its association with the institutions of European security and prosperity.<sup>84</sup> Britain’s influence in each circle was reinforced by its role in the other two; that is, as long as circumstances remained the same and favorable to Britain being able to walk the tight balancing act at the center of the circles.

Churchill’s Conservatives, since Benjamin Disraeli the party most closely identified with Britain’s empire, would be the one to embrace the ‘three-circles’ concept most wholeheartedly in the decade after the war. In some cases this meant a clear preference for the Commonwealth at the expense of Europe, and a coalition of around 40 Conservative members of parliament, led by the Marquess of Salisbury, were not so much indifferent to Britain’s relationship with the European community as watchfully hostile to any strengthening of it, lest it weaken relations with the Commonwealth.<sup>85</sup> As Macmillan, whose enthusiasm for Europe in these years seemed “boundless,” put it, “A considerable portion of the Conservative Party were doubtful and even anxious about this new movement. They feared ... that in one way or another, both on the political and on the economic side, Britain’s position as head of the Empire and Commonwealth might be

---

<sup>84</sup> Reynolds, *Britannia Overruled*, 190.

<sup>85</sup> John Turner, *The Tories and Europe* (New York: Manchester University Press, 2000), 42; Milward, *The Rise and Fall of a National Strategy*, 99.

prejudiced.”<sup>86</sup> As Churchill himself would say in 1949, “Britain cannot be thought of as a single state in isolation. She is the founder and centre of a worldwide Empire and Commonwealth. We shall never do anything to weaken the ties of blood, of sentiment, of tradition and common interest which unite us with the other members of the British family of nations.”<sup>87</sup>

However, early on in the process of European integration Churchill, Amery and Sandys took the lead on trying to amalgamate two of the circles, the Commonwealth and Europe, into an integrated whole. Shortly after his Zurich speech, Churchill tasked Sandys with launching an interparty group that could promote his ‘United States of Europe’ initiative both in Britain and on the continent. In reply, Sandy’s first draft included a statement of aims that read, “Our first loyalty in this country is to the British Empire and Commonwealth, but we are convinced that the freedom and welfare of its people are intimately bound up with the freedom and welfare of the peoples of Europe.” The objective, he wrote, was to “unite all Europe from the Atlantic to the Black Sea, neither dependent on, nor opposed to, the Soviet Union or the U.S.A.” It was a lofty goal, but it could be accomplished, because with its “associated Dominions and Dependencies,” this new union of Europe could control resources just as abundant as the two superpowers.<sup>88</sup>

---

<sup>86</sup> Alistair Horne, *Harold Macmillan: Volume I, 1894-1956* (New York: Viking, 1988), 314; Macmillan, *Tides of Fortune*, 159.

<sup>87</sup> Winston Churchill, “Speech at the European Movement Meeting” in London, England, November 28, 1949. Quoted in Ivan T. Berend, *The History of European Integration: A New Perspective* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 38.

<sup>88</sup> Grob-Fitzgibbon, *Continental Drift*, 44-45.

Amery joined in on this theme as well. Writing in the *Sunday Times* on October 27, 1946, Amery asserted that the only prospect for the future peace of the world, and just as importantly British prosperity, lay in the formation of a United Europe rather than British alignment with either the Soviet Union or the United States. He contended that Britain should not “sacrifice at home or the strength and unity of the Empire in order to promote American economic liberalism,” but should instead supply guidance in Europe by using its Commonwealth as an example “more suited to European conditions than the rigid federal system of the United States or of the Soviet Union, with its partial surrender of sovereignty.” “We owe it to ourselves as well as to Europe,” Amery declared, “to give a lead on this issue.”<sup>89</sup>

A year later Sandys also wrote to *The Times* on the same issue, maintaining that any European union would be “nothing but an illusion unless it obtains the effective participation of “Great Britain,” but Britain could not agree to join “any continental system which tended to separate her from her partners in the Commonwealth.” Thus, the British government’s mission should be to “devise arrangements for the integration of western Europe of such a nature as will enable Britain to participate effectively without prejudice to the maintenance and further consolidation of her Imperial connexions [sic].”<sup>90</sup> While this was to prove much easier said than done, Sandys continued to argue for a link between the Commonwealth and Europe throughout the Conservatives’ time in opposition, writing Churchill in September 1949 to encourage him to promote an economic strategy of enlarging “the Empire system to include other Western European

---

<sup>89</sup> Grob-Fitzgibbon, *Continental Drift*, 46-47.

<sup>90</sup> Grob-Fitzgibbon, *Continental Drift*, 101.

nations and their overseas associates and dependencies.” He continued, “Britain and the Sterling Area together with the nations of Europe...are capable of forming an economic unit, which has undeveloped potentialities of men and materials fully equal to those of the United States and certainly much greater than those of the Soviet Union.”<sup>91</sup>

Even as late as April 1951, Macmillan was writing in his diary that he hoped “by detailed study of the question of trade relations (including Tariffs and Preferences) and of monetary policy (including widening and strengthening of the sterling area) to prove our case that Europe and the Commonwealth should be complementary and mutually supporting in a dollar dominated world.”<sup>92</sup> As we will see, the Labour government of the time was trying, and failing, to put exactly this policy of linking the Commonwealth and Europe into practice since 1945.

### The Commonwealth Strikes Back

While still in opposition, the Conservatives would get a taste of just how difficult it would be to bring the Commonwealth nations in under the umbrella of a unified Western Europe. In the run up to the second meeting of the Consultative Assembly of the Council of Europe – an intergovernmental consultative body that had sprung out of Churchill’s Zurich speech – in Strasbourg in November 1951, Churchill attempted to invite representatives from Commonwealth nations to attend so as to exhibit the bonds between Europe and the Commonwealth. To this end, all through that summer Conservative Party members pressed statesmen from the Commonwealth to show up. Churchill started the clarion call, sending a telegram to all Commonwealth Prime

---

<sup>91</sup> Grob-Fitzgibbon, *Continental Drift*, 114.

<sup>92</sup> Harold Macmillan, diary entry of April 7, 1951 in *The Macmillan Diaries, Volume I: The Cabinet Years, 1950-1957*, edited by Peter Catterall (London: Macmillan, 2003), 61.

Ministers on June 24 insisting that it “is of the greatest importance to British leadership in Europe ... to ensure that developments towards European unity should be in fullest harmony with broad Commonwealth interests.” Two days later, Macmillan reiterated the message in another telegram to Commonwealth Prime Ministers, writing, “It has long been our British theme that the interests of the Commonwealth and the movement towards greater unity in Europe are complementary and not competitive.” And on July 11, Amery wrote an article for the *European Review* arguing for “a considerable interlocking or partial integration between Europe and Commonwealth, to the benefit of all concerned, without facing the United Kingdom with the alternative of going in with Europe or staying with the Commonwealth.”<sup>93</sup>

This intensive lobbying effort came to nothing. Louis St. Laurent, the Canadian Prime Minister, wrote to Macmillan that while he concurred that it was “very important that the kind of unity which is achieved in Europe should in no way be inimical to the true interest of our Commonwealth association” he did not believe this was best accomplished “by having representatives of non-European Commonwealth nations brought into the deliberations of European Councils and Assemblies.” Sidney Holland, the New Zealand Prime Minister, similarly responded that he was incapable of sending any representatives to Strasbourg. Robert Menzies, the Australian Prime Minister, also said that all of his parliamentarians would be tremendously busy and not able to leave the country. Macmillan persisted, writing again in September to stress to Menzies “how anxious we are to see Britain play a proper role both as an Imperial and as European power and asking him to send some form of government representative. But Menzies

---

<sup>93</sup> Grob-Fitzgibbon, *Continental Drift*, 148-149.

again snubbed the offer, simply saying that he sent his “very best wishes to you in your coming venture.”<sup>94</sup>

The message was clear: Britain was a European country. The old dominions, flung across the oceans and concerned with the problems in their own back yards, were not. This revealed an independence of mind in the old dominions that had not been present in past years. This must have been of particular shock to Macmillan, who earlier in May had optimistically believed that “the picture of the Commonwealth and Europe, acting in a very close economic and monetary alliance, is getting clearer,” and that “more imaginative minds are beginning to be attracted by the idea of Europe and British Empire and Commonwealth getting together, and so reproducing something like the American wealth and power.”<sup>95</sup>

The Commonwealth’s reluctance to be brought into the European fold was a significant development. While the Conservative Party was eager to see British leadership of both the Commonwealth and Europe brought together into one whole, the leaders in the Commonwealth were shown to be much less attracted by Europe. For Churchill, Macmillan, Amery, Sandys and other pro-European Conservatives, the question of Europe had never been isolated from the question of the Empire and Commonwealth. Their notion of British leadership in Europe was established on the same themes as Britain’s leadership of the Commonwealth. This meant Commonwealth participation in any outlines for European integration. For Commonwealth leaders themselves to recoil so bluntly from playing a part in Europe challenged the very

---

<sup>94</sup> Grob-Fitzgibbon, *Continental Drift*, 149.

<sup>95</sup> Macmillan, diary entry of May 15, 1951 in *The Macmillan Diaries, Volume I*, 74.

fundamentals of Conservative thinking on Britain's position in Europe. For the first time, it looked like there would possibly have to be a choice between two of Churchill's circles. And if that choice did have to be made, there was little question of what circle these fervent imperialists would go with.<sup>96</sup>

### The Labour Government and Europe

It wasn't just the Conservative Party that had difficulty in dealing with the idea of greater British integration with Western Europe in the first years after the end of the Second World War. The socialist Labour Party also had reservations about Britain becoming too deeply engrained in the European circle, especially at the cost the Commonwealth, and ultimately lacked the qualities necessary to keep Britain at the heart of Europe.<sup>97</sup> As the party in government under Prime Minister Clement Attlee from July 1945 through October 1951, Labour would get the first crack dealing with Europe, and would set many of the trends that would cause Britain to stay aloof from the emerging European Communities in the decades ahead. Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin's thinking on the European matter proved to be just as scrambled and contradictory as Churchill's. As the preeminent biography of Bevin states, "For all his achievement, Bevin failed to recognize the permanence of the change in Britain's international position at the end of the war and, in a vain attempt to maintain a world role, set the country off on the wrong course."<sup>98</sup>

Old War Cabinet colleagues, Churchill and Bevin (much like their respective parties overall) had much in common when it came to both the Commonwealth and

---

<sup>96</sup> Grob-Fitzgibbon, *Continental Drift*, 150.

<sup>97</sup> Dell, *The Schuman Plan and the British Abdication of Leadership in Europe*, 229.

<sup>98</sup> Bullock, *Ernest Bevin: Foreign Secretary*, 789.

Empire and the European issue. In effect Bevin implemented, against the background noise of Churchill's constant forays into the inspiring language of "European pseudo-federalism," a confused, if not duplicitous, European policy that revealed the same ambiguity. Bevin was a strong subscriber to Churchill's "three circles" design as a diplomatic philosophy, and possessed a disdain for the utter weakness of the continental countries that was shared by many Britons of the period. Much like Churchill, he saw a great world outside of Europe, in which all Britain's interests could somehow be reconciled under one umbrella. In effect, Bevin wanted the West to unite, but was unsure how this might best be brought about.<sup>99</sup> This uncertainty can be observed in Britain's uneven European policy during Bevin's time in the Foreign Office (1945-1951). It was in these first six years after the war that "the key alliances of Western power were shaped, and the debate about what Europe meant reached its first conclusions. It is with the decisions made and defended in those years that a British attitude which has endured for fifty years was first defined."<sup>100</sup>

As a result, Bevin's foundational role in Britain's European story cannot be downplayed or overlooked. However, while Bevin, as the head of the Foreign Office, drove much of his department's eventual resistance to European integration during Attlee's government, he was hampered by systemic issues in the FO that also cannot be ignored. Until 1949, the Foreign Office possessed no such thing as a planning staff to assist in policymaking. So when Christopher Mayhew, on becoming a junior minister at the Foreign Office in 1946, asked for a document outlining foreign policy, he was told

---

<sup>99</sup> Young, *This Blessed Plot*, 31-33.

<sup>100</sup> Young, *This Blessed Plot*, 26.



”not merely that no such document existed” but “that it was really rather doubtful whether we had a foreign policy in the proper sense at all.” From this blissful seat-of-the-pants ethic came a strong departmental prejudice against making difficult choices, especially in regards to the topic of European integration. For Bevin’s Foreign Office to attempt to preserve Britain’s unique position in all three of Churchill’s intersecting circles was a sensible goal. But to disregard much of the evidence that might soon make this an illusory scheme was inexcusable. Yet, this was exactly the usual tendency of the FO in the years after 1945.<sup>101</sup>

Originally, Bevin was in favor of a “Middle Power” grouping of Western Europe and the Commonwealth countries that could run an independent policy in world affairs. Using language that would make Amery proud, he said this middle power would appeal to “those who find American capitalism little more attractive than Soviet Communism,” as well as to those who “feel a natural dislike of seeing this country in a dependent position.”<sup>102</sup> This belief is best summed up in a memorandum Bevin wrote to his Cabinet colleagues on January 4, 1948, when, echoing the rhetoric of Churchill, he argued that it was “not enough to reinforce the physical barriers which still guard our Western Civilization (from the Soviet threat). We must also organize and consolidate the ethical and spiritual forces inherent in this Western civilization of which we are the chief protagonists.” The only way to do this, he asserted, was “by creating some form of union in Western Europe, whether of a formal or informal character, backed by the Americas

---

<sup>101</sup> Young, *This Blessed Plot*, 33-34.

<sup>102</sup> The National Archives, CAB 129/37, Ernest Bevin, “European Policy”, October 18, 1949; Geoffrey Warner, “The Labour Governments and the Unity of Western Europe, 1945–51”, in *The Foreign Policy of the British Labour Governments, 1945–51*, edited by Ritchie Ovendale (Leicester: University of Leicester Press, 1984), 66.

and the Dominions.” Bevin also told the Cabinet that “We in Britain can no longer stand outside Europe and insist that our problems and position are quite separate from those of our European neighbors,” and concluded: “Material aid will have to come principally from the United States, but the countries of Western Europe which despise the spiritual values of America will look to us for political and moral guidance and for assistance in building up a counter attraction to the baleful tenets of communism within their borders.... We have the material resources in the Colonial Empire, if we develop them, and by giving a spiritual lead now we should be able to carry out our task in a way which will show clearly that we are not subservient to the United States of America or to the Soviet Union.”<sup>103</sup>

At this time Bevin saw no reason why a closer affiliation with Europe need weaken Britain’s relationship with the Commonwealth. In the Labour Cabinet he wasn’t alone in this belief. On July 27, 1947, in a piece in the *Financial Times*, Chancellor of the Exchequer Stafford Cripps wrote that “we (the government) feel that there is no conflict (between cooperation with Western Europe and the British Commonwealth).” He went on to spell out his thinking, explaining that “by developing production of new resources in the Commonwealth in the field of raw materials, we are creating sources from which we and the other European countries can draw, and thus reduce our dependence upon dollar supplies. ... Our purposes in co-operating with (Europe) and cooperating with the Commonwealth are complementary, and thus there can be no conflict between them.”<sup>104</sup>

By working with Europe, Britain would not destabilize the Commonwealth and Empire,

---

<sup>103</sup> The National Archives, CAB 129/23, Ernest Bevin, “The First Aim of British Foreign Policy”, January 4, 1948.

<sup>104</sup> Grob-Fitzgibbon, *Continental Drift*, 101.

but could conversely improve the lives and futures of its colonial peoples. It would turn out to be wishful thinking.

Four days after Bevin submitted his memo on “European Policy, the Cabinet met and agreed on many of Bevin’s views concerning British foreign policy towards Europe, concentrating above all on its consequences for the Empire and Commonwealth. It would be “necessary,” the Cabinet agreed, “to mobilize the resources of Africa in support of any Western European union; and, if some such union could be created, including not only the countries of Western Europe but also their Colonial possessions in Africa and the East, this would form a *bloc* which could stand on an equality with the western hemisphere and Soviet *blocs*.” The Cabinet also agreed that the “Dominion Governments should be fully consulted and kept in touch as the proposals for closer union in Western Europe were developed.”<sup>105</sup>

If there was to be some kind of European union, Britain’s Labour government deemed that it would be an imperial one, utilizing the resources of the colonies and shaped in consultation with the old dominions. In many ways, this mirrored the Conservatives’ preferred policy championed by Sandys and Amery of attempting to bring together the Commonwealth and Europe into an integrated whole. Bevin made this policy public when he issued a call for the formation of a Western Union on January 22, 1948 in the House of Commons. Repeating the arguments he had used in the Cabinet, he explained to parliament that his intention was to guarantee British autonomy from the

---

<sup>105</sup> The National Archives, CAB 128/12, “Foreign Policy in Europe”, Cabinet conclusions, January 8, 1948.

United States, saying that “as soon as we can afford to develop Africa, we can cut loose from the U.S.”<sup>106</sup>

However, Bevin believed this greater European political integration would only help their U.S. ally in the emerging Cold War. In a memo of March 3, 1948, he laid out his thinking, saying that the Soviets were “a threat to western civilization” who could only be stopped by the unification of Western Europe. As a result, he declared that the British government should “pursue on as broad a basis as possible in co-operation with our French allies, the conclusions of a treaty or treaties with the Benelux countries” and should “proceed at once” with “the whole problem of the co-ordination of efforts for the cultural, social, economic and financial revival and development of the West and for the defence of Western civilization.” This could only be achieved with the help of “the Commonwealth and the Americas.”<sup>107</sup> Two weeks later, Britain did sign a mutual defence pact with France and the three Benelux nations (Belgium, Luxembourg, the Netherlands), a military agreement that raised hopes for further political integration in the future.

In addition to the proposed political Western Union, Bevin had also begun to explore the possibilities for expanded European economic cooperation into an actual customs union in the midst of a dramatic downturn in Britain’s economic fortunes in 1947.<sup>108</sup> Along with America’s Marshall Plan aid, lowering barriers and equalizing tariffs through a customs union would be a way of freeing up trade and strengthening the

---

<sup>106</sup> Hansard, House of Commons debate, January 22, 1948; Milward, *The Rise and Fall of a National Strategy*, 31-32.

<sup>107</sup> The National Archives, CAB 129/25, Ernest Bevin, “The Threat to Western Civilisation”, March 3, 1948.

<sup>108</sup> Gowland and Turner, *Reluctant Europeans*, 33.

European economies so decimated by the war.<sup>109</sup> But this wouldn't be an easy sell, as Edmond Hall-Patch, a Deputy-Secretary in the Foreign Office, warned Bevin that there was "a well-established prejudice in Whitehall against a European Customs Union. It goes back a long way and is rooted in the old days of free trade. It is a relic of a world which has disappeared probably never to return."<sup>110</sup> Bevin had initially raised the concept of a Western European Customs Union in late 1946, urging the Labour Cabinet to initiate an examination of its benefits and drawbacks to Britain. The Treasury and the Board of Trade, led by Hugh Dalton and Cripps, respectively, instantly resisted the concept, contending that a customs union would unavoidably mean an end to Britain's system of imperial preference, which would be damaging both to British manufacturers and to Britain's leadership in the Commonwealth.<sup>111</sup> This was because a European customs union, if completed, would threaten, and possibly even destroy, the British Commonwealth and the sterling area, which in many minds represented the last great hope for retaining and sustaining Britain's global aspirations.

Nevertheless, Bevin persisted and in January 1947 the Cabinet agreed to employ a committee of experts to look at the customs union question.<sup>112</sup> This committee reported back in June, saying that while a European customs union would not be the best conceivable economic outcome for Britain, should one form, UK participation would carry some economic rewards while a British boycott would "be harmful to British

---

<sup>109</sup> Young, *This Blessed Plot*, 36.

<sup>110</sup> Milward, *The Rise and Fall of a National Strategy*, 25.

<sup>111</sup> Michael J. Hogan, *The Marshall Plan: America, Britain and the Reconstruction of Western Europe, 1947-1952* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 152.

<sup>112</sup> Hogan, *The Marshall Plan*, 46.

interests.”<sup>113</sup> Simply put, if there was to be a European Customs Union, Britain ought to be part of it.

Much like with the Western political union, Bevin saw a European customs union as a key part of his “Middle Power” idea, allowing Britain to pursue its course without relying on the United States or the Soviet Union. And as with the political union, originally he saw no reason why a European Customs Union could not dovetail with Britain’s Commonwealth obligations. To this effect, Bevin wrote to Attlee on September 16, 1947 to emphasize that a European Customs Union was crucial as ‘we must free ourselves of financial dependence on the United States of America as soon as possible. We shall never be able to pull our full weight in foreign affairs until we do so.’ Bevin did not cast-off the matter of the Commonwealth and the Empire, but judged that a European Customs Union could be established simultaneously “not only (with) closer trade relations with the Commonwealth and Empire but also of an intensified effort for development with them.”<sup>114</sup>

Bevin summed up his thinking in a March 6, 1948 memorandum for the full Cabinet co-written with Cripps ahead of the first meeting of the Organization for European Economic Co-operation (OEEC), an intergovernmental body set up to assist in the administration of the United States’ Marshall Plan to rebuild Europe. It is this memo. setting out the government's attitude towards European economic cooperation, which best encapsulates Bevin's pre-1949 thinking on the economic integration of the continent, and as a result deserves to be quoted at length.

---

<sup>113</sup> Milward, *The Rise and Fall of a National Strategy*, 25.

<sup>114</sup> Grob-Fitzgibbon, *Continental Drift*, 69-70.

To start, Bevin and Cripps stated they believed that Marshall aid to be a first step to the recovery of the Western European economy, but it was questionable whether that alone would allow Europe to “recover to anything approaching the pre-war standard of living.” In such ominous circumstances, “it must be doubted whether Western Europe could survive in the sense in which we have known it in the past. Either we should have to become permanent pensioners on the United States or we should survive in a state of continuous economic uncertainty and poverty with all the disintegrating political and social results that would follow.” Britain’s economy was in dire straits along with its European neighbors, and it could not thrive without a thriving continental economy:

The only practical course which is open to us is to go to work with the European countries in order to try and work through our common difficulties. It is only by positive action by this country, in full association with the Commonwealth, that we ourselves must be saved. It would, in theory, be possible for us to seek solutions to the problem of the Commonwealth and Empire by our own efforts and to turn our backs on Europe. But the resources of the Commonwealth are not sufficient to make this a practical solution for our problems within the time available. Nor would we remain unaffected by this continuing economic crisis in Europe and its political results.

This is a startling admission of the weakness of the Commonwealth option economically, one that would not be heeded (even by the Labour government) in the years ahead.

What was the solution to Europe’s difficulties? Bevin and Cripps argued that it was something resembling a customs union, including the Commonwealth and other European-controlled overseas dependencies: “There is therefore no option for us. We must link ourselves more closely with Western Europe. It is however of the utmost importance that this closer linkage with Europe should not weaken our connection with

the Commonwealth. We should take the greatest care to keep them informed of what we are doing and why we are doing it and to see their positive support and help.” A customs union, bringing together “the countries of Western Europe and their overseas territories backed, we hope, by the members of the Commonwealth,” was the answer to Europe’s post-war economic difficulties and a way out from under American economic domination.

Bevin and Cripps acknowledged that, “Changes of a radical nature in our industrial and agricultural structure may become necessary to secure the economic independence of the Western European countries as a whole and to use our collective resources to the best advantage” and that while it was “not possible to foresee what those changes will be,” clearly “the conception of a planned European economy to take the place of the several uncoordinated economies which exist today must entail important changes both for us and for the other participating nations.” They also conceded that these closer economic links “will involve closer political and social ties with the other participating countries,” partners “whose political condition is unstable and whose actions may be embarrassing to us.” However, it was worth the risk, as “It is only by changes and in re-integration of our economies that we can have our economic freedom.” In conclusion, they declared that “It remains to be seen whether our action, in conjunction with other European nations, can give the necessary lead, and raise in the hearts and minds of the peoples of Europe that confidence which will restore their vigour and faith.”



However, they were sure that “living here as we are among the potential dangers which threaten us, that this action is necessary for our security and our survival.”<sup>115</sup>

In summation, big problems called for imaginative solutions, and in March 1948 the Foreign Secretary and Chancellor the Exchequer of the United Kingdom believed that a Western European customs union, combined with America’s Marshall Aid, was the way to economically pull the continent out of the rubble of the Second World War. This remarkable memo also shows that much like Churchill, Amery and Sandys on the Conservative side, Bevin and Cripps at this stage plainly did not view Europe and the Commonwealth and Empire as separate units, and asserted that the two had to be handled as a single, integrated issue. Not only does this indicate a willingness by the British government to enter into economic integration on the continent in the very earliest years after the war, it also demonstrates just how closely aligned the Labour and Conservative Parties were in their policies towards Europe in these years.

#### Bevin’s Hopes Dashed

All of these expectations for closer European integration with Britain at its heart were soon shattered. Bevin rapidly changed direction, finding that a Western European/Commonwealth political grouping, serving as a “Middle Power” between the United States and Soviet Union, was all but impossible to configure. In a Cabinet memorandum on his European policy dated October 18, 1949, he wrote that, “Political cohesion of the Commonwealth countries with Western Europe is even less likely than with the United Kingdom.” He had concluded that “The Commonwealth alone cannot

---

<sup>115</sup> The National Archives, CAB 129/25, Ernest Bevin and Sir Stafford Cripps, “European Economic Co-Operation”, March 6, 1948.

form a Third World Power equivalent to the United States or the Soviet Union” and that “Commonwealth solidarity is more likely to be promoted by the consolidation of the West than by the formation of a Third World Power independent of America.”<sup>116</sup> This had been emphasized particularly in the wake of the Berlin airlift which had shown that Western Europe was not strong enough economically or militarily to stand without aid from the United States.<sup>117</sup> This meant that “the closest association with the United States (was now) essential, not only for the purpose of standing up to Soviet aggression but also in the interests of Commonwealth solidarity and of European unity.” Therefore, Bevin contended, “The best hope of security for Western Europe lies in a consolidation of the West on the lines indicated by the Atlantic Pact” and that the United Kingdom must “seek to maintain its special relations with the United States of America.” Hence, as much as Bevin preferred a “Middle Power” grouping of Western Europe and the Commonwealth, he had to grudgingly concede that it was in the best interests of Britain to create a “consolidated West” rather than simply a united Europe.<sup>118</sup>

Likewise, by the autumn of 1949 Bevin had also retreated on the idea of a Western European customs union. Powerful Whitehall officials, such as Roger Makins, assistant under-secretary at the Foreign Office, and Oliver Franks, soon to be Britain’s ambassador to the United States, had successfully convinced Bevin that any customs union implied “social and political” association. For Britain, this could happen only at the expense of links with the Commonwealth, the weakening of which would lead in turn to

---

<sup>116</sup> The National Archives, CAB 129/37, Ernest Bevin, “European Policy”, October 18, 1949.

<sup>117</sup> Grob-Fitzgibbon, *Continental Drift*, 115.

<sup>118</sup> The National Archives, CAB 129/37, Ernest Bevin, “European Policy”, October 18, 1949; Grob-Fitzgibbon, *Continental Drift*, 116-117.

the “disintegration of the sterling area and spell the end of Britain as a world power.”<sup>119</sup>

Not everyone agreed. Hall-Patch regarded the choice identified by Makins and Franks as a false one and in August 1947 he wrote Bevin that this claim of an either/or choice between Europe and the Commonwealth “had successfully blocked for two years our efforts to look at these proposals objectively” and suggested Britain be more imaginative.<sup>120</sup>

Despite this morsel of push back in the Foreign Office, the argument that a European customs union would potentially destroy the Commonwealth and the sterling area, which at this point were massively more important to British finance and trade than Europe, was pervasive in the Whitehall economic departments and the FO, and eventually won out.<sup>121</sup> This was reflected in a memorandum to the Cabinet drawn up by Bevin and Cripps in October 1949 regarding “Proposals for the Economic Unification of Europe.” It was, suffice to say, radically different from the memo they had co-penned on ‘European Economic Co-operation’ just 18 months previously. The policy set out in this document was one in which British government ministers “were not to involve themselves in the economic affairs of Europe beyond the point from which they could, if they wished, withdraw.” Furthermore, the government “should not accept measures or proposals” that would have the effects of “hindrance to our own efforts to reach and maintain equilibrium between the dollar area and the sterling area” or “materially affecting the system of Imperial preference.” In summary, the principal objective of the policy was “to reconcile our position as a world power, as a member of the British

---

<sup>119</sup> Young, *This Blessed Plot*, 37.

<sup>120</sup> Charlton, *The Price of Victory*, 71.

<sup>121</sup> Young, *Britain and European Unity*, 38.

Commonwealth, and as a member of the European community. We believe that we can effect this reconciliation but that, if we are to do so, we cannot accept obligations in relation to Western Europe which would prevent or restrict the implementation of our responsibilities elsewhere.” As a result, “The economic union of free Europe should not create an exclusive trading area.” On the contrary, the “door would be open to the exchange of goods and services of fair terms with all the world.”<sup>122</sup> Britain’s support for a Western European customs union was effectively dead, struck down by a continuing reluctance to put the economic relationship with the Commonwealth in jeopardy.

Accordingly, in preparation for a meeting of the newly created Council of Europe that November, Bevin advised the Cabinet that Britain could not “agree to any proposals which mean our getting involved in the economic affairs of Europe beyond the point at which we could, if we wished, disengage ourselves.” The supranational aspects of any political or customs union with Europe had gone a long way in turning Bevin and his Labour colleagues away from those proposals, in large part because of the harm they could end up doing to Commonwealth links. To that end, he now stressed that “Any surrender of political sovereignty in matters of vital importance would jeopardise our ability to maintain the policy (of not getting involved in European affairs to an inextricable degree). We must therefore maintain a very strict reserve in regard to schemes for the pooling of sovereignty or the establishment of European supra-national machinery.”<sup>123</sup> From this statement it can be seen that the Labour government largely

---

<sup>122</sup> The National Archives, CAB 129/37, Ernest Bevin and Sir Stafford Cripps, “Proposals for the Economic Unification of Europe”, October 25, 1949.

<sup>123</sup> The National Archives, CAB 129/37, Ernest Bevin, “Council of Europe”, October 24, 1949.

missed the point of why this supranationality was attractive to the continentals: that it could further the goals of national reconstruction. Bevin's successor in the Foreign Office, Anthony Eden, would recognize this but thought any such policy would only weaken Britain's position. As a result his preferred policy would be much the same as Bevin's: abstention.<sup>124</sup>

In his memo, Bevin also asserted that while "Britain should continue to support the Council of Europe and to play an active part in its development," there was "a potential conflict between a policy of full participation in the Council of Europe and the wider interests which His Majesty's Government are always obliged to keep in mind." He continued on that note, arguing that, "Our relationship with the rest of the Commonwealth ... ensures that we must remain, as we have always been in the past, different in character from other European nations and fundamentally incapable of wholehearted integration with them." He concluded: "It should, in my view, be our object to postpone (for) as long as possible being faced with a choice between, on the one hand, overstepping the limits of safety in integration with Europe and, on the other, appearing to abandon the ideas of the Council of Europe."<sup>125</sup> This policy of postponement was one Britain would continue to follow well into the next decade. Wider commitments and an aversion to European supranationalism would again be the basis of staying out of a customs union six years later, and this time it would have a much more detrimental effect

---

<sup>124</sup> Milward, *The Rise and Fall of a National Strategy*, 97.

<sup>125</sup> The National Archives, CAB 129/37, Ernest Bevin, "Council of Europe", October 24, 1949.

in regards to the British economy and Britain's future place in the process of European integration.<sup>126</sup>

Bevin's recommendations in the autumn of 1949 signified a marked modification in regards to his diplomatic philosophy concerning Europe. Whereas in the years 1945-1948 he had been committed to Britain being at the heart of the process of integration on the continent, and was similarly certain that this United Europe should be strongly integrated with the Commonwealth as a "Middle Power" settled between the capitalist United States and communist Soviet Union, he now accepted that the United Kingdom, acting on behalf of the Empire and Commonwealth, should associate itself closely with the United States in opposition to the Soviet Union. Britain's relationships with the other nations of Western Europe would still hold an important place in Britain's foreign policy, but they were no longer central players as Bevin's mindset turned powerfully in the direction of the emerging Cold War.<sup>127</sup>

Indeed, prior to 1950 Bevin's views on Europe (supported by Attlee and Cripps) were close enough to Winston's Churchill's (supported, as ever, by Amery, Macmillan and Sandys) to permit the two parties to present a mostly united front on European policy. These men were all arch backers of the Empire and Commonwealth, but also believed that Britain had an important part to play in progressing closer European integration.<sup>128</sup> But as the 1940's came to a close, for all the talk of British leaders, the United Kingdom had accomplished very little in the terms of helping to create any kind of 'United States of Europe.' For the most part, the story in these first five years after the

---

<sup>126</sup> Ellison, *Threatening Europe*, 33.

<sup>127</sup> Grob-Fitzgibbon, *Continental Drift*, 116.

<sup>128</sup> Grob-Fitzgibbon, *Continental Drift*, 118.

war was British leaders coming up with various schemes for an integrated Europe, nearly all on the basis of intergovernmental cooperation, but not being able to follow through and make them a reality due to their fear of supranationalism and the harm any such European institutions may have on the Commonwealth. However, it still had not missed the boat on any schemes proffered by its European neighbors, and could still rightly believe that when a united Europe did come about, Britain would be at its center. As the clock ticked over to 1950, however, that was all about to change.

## CHAPTER 2: LABOUR'S MISSED CHANCE

*It is also untrue that we are suspected of being no friends of European unity. We have been working for European unity and, as my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer pointed out, a vast amount of work has been done to build up that unity; and that work does not merely mean making speeches but means the difficult working out of concrete plans with representatives of a great many nations. Then the right hon. Gentleman (Anthony Eden) tries to make ill blood between us and other members of the Commonwealth by suggesting that we have not given them all the information. They have not made those complaints, and the French have not made those complaints. It is the right hon. Gentleman who makes those complaints.*<sup>129</sup>

--- Clement Attlee, 1950

*I have never for one moment at any meeting of the Council or Executive (of the European Movement) disguised from them the fact that this country as the center of the Commonwealth cannot enter a European political federation and that our approach to the problem of European unity must always be functional rather than constitutional.*<sup>130</sup>

--- Robert Boothby, 1950

The first major turning point in the history of European integration came late in the life of Attlee's Labour government, when on May 9, 1950, French Foreign Minister Robert Schuman unveiled his "European Coal and Steel Community," commonly referred to as the Schuman Plan.<sup>131</sup> Schuman's speech, in many minds, including one official of Britain's Board of Trade at the time, "changed the history of Europe and the

<sup>129</sup> Hansard, House of Commons debate, June 27, 1950.

<sup>130</sup> Hansard, House of Commons debate, June 27, 1950.

<sup>131</sup> For the full text of Schuman's declaration on May 9, 1950, see Appendix B.



world” and truly started “the great adventure of the unification of Europe.”<sup>132</sup> Indeed, the present European Union traces its lineage through various European Communities all the way back to that day in Paris: The four institutions set up to run the ECSC – the High Authority, Common Assembly, Special Council and Court of Justice – would come to serve as the blueprint for today's European Commission, European Parliament, Council of the European Union and European Court of Justice, respectively.

As Schuman said in his declaration unveiling the plan, it was a “leap into the unknown.”<sup>133</sup> Conceived as a way to prevent another war between France and Germany – or in its namesake’s immortal words, to “make war not only unthinkable but materially impossible” – the Schuman plan proposed to create a common market for coal and steel among its member states in order to defuse competition between European countries over natural resources. France’s Schuman was joined in this stated aim of creating the ECSC by German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer, who had been consulted on the plan in the days before it was publicly announced and readily consented.<sup>134</sup> In a speech to the Bundestag on June 13, Adenauer announced, “There was no better way of dispelling French doubts about the German people’s love of peace than to bring together the two countries’ coal, iron and steel, which were always the mainstay of rearmament, so that each partner in this pact would know everything that was happening in this important sphere.”<sup>135</sup> With the weighty aim of marking the birth of a united Europe, the Schuman Plan would do just

---

<sup>132</sup> Roy Denman, *Missed Chances: Britain and Europe in the Twentieth Century* (London: Cassell Illustrated, 1996), 185.

<sup>133</sup> Dell, *The Schuman Plan and the British Abdication of Leadership in Europe*, 283. Dell’s work remains the benchmark of historical research on the Schuman Plan and, as a result, will be extensively quoted here.

<sup>134</sup> Grob-Fitzgibbon, *Continental Drift*, 128.

<sup>135</sup> Dell, *The Schuman Plan and the British Abdication of Leadership in Europe*, 15.

that when it came into being in on July 23, 1952, with Germany, France, Belgium, Italy, the Netherlands and Luxembourg (the same six nations that would later found the European Economic Community) as founding members. This was to begin the process of formal European integration which would lead to the formation of the EEC in 1958.

In response to Schuman's declaration, on May 17 Harold Macmillan said that the proposal was "an act of high courage and of imaginative statesmanship" and he hoped that "British statesmanship will at least be equal to this new responsibility and this new opportunity."<sup>136</sup> It was not to be. Britain had its chance to make the 'Six' the 'Seven' and join the ECSC in the early 1950's; if it had made this choice, it is hard to doubt that the entire history of European integration would be much different. Certainly, if Britain had joined the ECSC at its inception it almost definitely would have later joined the EEC at its inception. Instead, when Britain declined membership in the ECSC it set a precedent, meaning it was much less likely that it would be an active contributor in the next phase of European integration.<sup>137</sup> As the leading work on the subject suggests, the Labour government of the time, followed by Churchill's government from autumn 1951, 'abdicated' British leadership in Europe when confronted with the Schuman Plan despite the fact that it represented a huge move forwards towards Franco-German reconciliation and the signs, apparent at the time, that Britain could have involved itself in the community without major prejudice to its wider (Commonwealth) interests due to its considerable clout on the continent in the wake of the Second World War.<sup>138</sup> As Britain would many times in the future, it decided to stay outside the ECSC circle rather than

---

<sup>136</sup> Macmillan, *Tides of Fortune*, 189.

<sup>137</sup> Dell, *The Schuman Plan and the British Abdication of Leadership in Europe*, 300.

<sup>138</sup> Dell, *The Schuman Plan and the British Abdication of Leadership in Europe*, 283.

trying to change the direction of European integration more towards its liking from within.

In hindsight, British failure to enter the ECSC has come to be regarded by many as a pivotal point in Britain's relations with Western Europe. As Dean Acheson, the United States Secretary of State at the time, later wrote, "Some decisions are critical. This decision of May 1950 was one. It was not the last clear chance for Britain to enter Europe, but it was the first wrong choice." Acheson's verdict was that Britain's refusal to join the ECSC was "the greatest mistake of the post-war period."<sup>139</sup> Not only did it denote the beginning of Britain's split with the Six which would prove so difficult for Macmillan to later mend, it also marked the first post-war occasion where France successfully took the initiative in Europe without British help. Unlike Bevin and Churchill, Schuman and the French were able to take their proposal for an integrated European economic body and make it a reality, in large part because they were able to overcome their qualms with the supranational aspects of the plan. As described in chapter one, this was something that, due to the Commonwealth connection, British leaders in the past had been unable to do. The vacuum created by a lack of British strategic thinking and subsequent action on European integration was filled by the French. This produced a major shift in the balance of political forces in Western Europe, increasing the weight of France.<sup>140</sup> As a later UK Ambassador to France, Sir Nicholas Henderson, would put it in

---

<sup>139</sup> Dean Acheson, *Present at the Creation: My Years In the State Department* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1987), 387; Oliver J. Daddow, "The Historiography of Wilson's Attempt to Take Britain into the EEC", in *Harold Wilson and European Integration: Britain's Second Application to Join the EEC*, edited by Oliver J. Daddow (Portland, OR: Frank Cass, 2003), 3-4.

<sup>140</sup> Barker, *Britain in a Divided Europe*, 87.

a forthright dispatch to the Foreign Office, in the immediate aftermath of the war “We had every Western European government ready to eat out of our hand ... For several years our prestige and influence were paramount and we could have stamped Europe as we wished.” The government, however, failed to “respond” to Europe’s wish for leadership, and this failure marked a ‘turning-point in post-war history.’<sup>141</sup>

### A Federal Approach

From the start Britain found it hard to stomach the federal aspects of the Schuman Plan, which called for the control of any signatory country’s coal and steel industries by a supranational High Authority with sovereign powers. “By pooling basic production and by instituting a new high authority,” Schuman’s resolution read, “whose decisions will bind France, Germany, and other member countries, these proposals will build the first concrete foundation of the European federation which is indispensable to the preservation of peace.” Some French leaders, too, had problem swallowing this federal idea; in a May 9 Cabinet meeting on plan, just hours before Schuman would announce it to the world, a robust debate occurred in the French Cabinet, with Prime Minister Georges Bidault saying he was reluctant to relinquish any sort of national sovereignty. Schuman, however, won the agreement of most of the Cabinet, and the plan was promoted as a first step towards a federal Europe.<sup>142</sup>

For Britain it would not be so easy to accept these federal aspects, and the fact that ‘Europe’ became identified with moves towards federation and the surrender of national sovereignty would be a major stumbling block to the United Kingdom’s

---

<sup>141</sup> Grob-Fitzgibbon, *Continental Drift*, 171.

<sup>142</sup> Dell, *The Schuman Plan and the British Abdication of Leadership in Europe*, 13-16.

participation in the Schuman Plan.<sup>143</sup> Britain's disdain for European federation largely came out of its conviction that it was in a special position vis-à-vis the other European nations; that is, that it was a world power at the head of a Commonwealth. If a united Europe was federally organized, Britain feared it could potentially lose the leadership of its Commonwealth and Empire and its freedom of action as a world power.<sup>144</sup> Britain's close relations with the Commonwealth instigated and reinforced its insistence on the intergovernmentalism and made the United Kingdom overly cautious to the idea of European union on a federal basis. Relations with the Commonwealth had always been informal and intergovernmental with no written arrangements, meaning that eventually decisions always lay with the national governments. Britain, with its proud history of an unwritten constitution, preferred this set up to the formal, constitutional relationships that would result from supranational agreements, such as what would result from Schuman's proposal. As a result, whenever there were European problems that required collective action, Britain would insist on an intergovernmental approach that enabled collective action while providing protection for national interests that would have been lost under federation.<sup>145</sup>

Writing a think piece for the Foreign Office on this topic during the inter-department debates on whether Britain should enter the Schuman negotiations, civil servant Robert Hall concluded that,

Apart from the facts that the Commonwealth is working now, and that it is a more suitable area for us than most of Western Europe, the main thing is probably that

---

<sup>143</sup> Bullock, *Ernest Bevin: Foreign Secretary*, 789.

<sup>144</sup> Wendell R. Mauter, "Churchill and the Unification of Europe", *The Historian* Vol. 61, no. 1 (1998): 76.

<sup>145</sup> Dell, *The Schuman Plan and the British Abdication of Leadership in Europe*, 97-99.

the sterling rea and the Commonwealth have developed away from any written or formal agreements. This can only be the result of a long growth and there can be little doubt that if anything is achieved in Paris it will have to be done with much more formality, so that on paper we might seem to be tied more closely to Europe than the Commonwealth, which we should very much dislike.<sup>146</sup>

Accordingly, Britain did not want to be tied into any binding agreements before the Schuman negotiations started. This response was based on the certain procedures that the French were insisting upon as the basis for negotiations, and the two nations' disagreement on this matter were laid bare in an exchange of communiques between the French and British governments in late May 1950. In a memorandum sent by the French on May 25, they said "If it were desired to reach concrete results it was necessary that the Governments should be in agreements from the beginning on the principles and the essential undertakings defined in the French Government's document." To this the British responded, "If the French Government intend to insist on a commitment to pool resources and set up an authority with certain sovereign powers as a prior condition to join the talks, His Majesty's Government would reluctantly be unable to accept such a condition."<sup>147</sup> France wanted a commitment from the start that Britain would agree to pool its resources and accept the High Authority. This was in effect handing the French a political blank check – assenting in writing to the pooling of coal and steel without first seeing just how this would be achieved, something the British leaders thought they could not do.<sup>148</sup> France's stance left a bad flavor in the mouths of Britain's ministers, with

---

<sup>146</sup> Dell, *The Schuman Plan and the British Abdication of Leadership in Europe*, 98.

<sup>147</sup> Dell, *The Schuman Plan and the British Abdication of Leadership in Europe*, 144-145.

<sup>148</sup> Grob-Fitzgibbon, *Continental Drift*, 133; Milward, *European Rescue of the Nation State*, 425.

Treasury Minister Douglas Jay saying he believed it had been a premeditated act to “exclude” Britain from the Schuman Plan to “steal the leadership of Europe.”<sup>149</sup>

If that was the French plan, it certainly worked. It was in the midst of these disagreements between a formal (federal) and informal (what the British called ‘functional’) approach and just how the talks would proceed that Britain made the fateful decision not to participate in the Schuman Plan negotiations. It is shocking, but characteristic of the Labour government’s indifference towards the new coal and steel proposal, that the formal decision not to go to the European bargaining table was taken at a Cabinet meeting on June 2, 1950 that was not attended by Attlee and Cripps, who were away on vacation (in France, of all places), or Bevin, who was in the hospital.

Despite the absence of the top three members of the Cabinet, it was during this crucial meeting that it was “Agreed that the United Kingdom Government should not participate in the examination of the French proposal for the integration of the coal and steel industries of Western Europe.” As Minister of State Kenneth Younger, filling in for his boss Bevin, laid out, “The French Government were insisting that all Governments participating in the proposed examination of this proposal should commit themselves in advance to accepting the principle of the scheme before it was discussed in detail.” Lord President of the Council Herbert Morrison, who chaired the meeting, said the he and Younger had been able that morning to discuss France’s terms with Bevin, “who also felt that this latest French proposal must be rejected.” This was because the “The bulk of public opinion in this country, as reflected in Parliament and in the Press, was likely to support the view that the Government could not be expected to commit themselves in

---

<sup>149</sup> Young, *Britain and European Unity*, 30.

advance to accepting the principle of this proposal before they knew what practical shape it would take and what it was likely to involve.”<sup>150</sup> While it was not described in exactly these terms that June day, in reality these reservations were all about the proposed supranational authority any such negotiations were likely to bring about, which was anathema to Britain. This was acknowledged in a Cabinet memorandum nearly a year later, which explained that the United Kingdom had not taken part in the initial Schuman discussions “because of the initial condition imposed of prior acceptance of the setting up of a supra-national authority.”<sup>151</sup>

Although the five other Western European governments invited to participate in the discussions had accepted the latest French formula, the Cabinet pointed out that “some of them had done so with reservations. It would, however, be undesirable for the United Kingdom Government to take this course; for nothing would be more likely to exacerbate Anglo-French relations than for us to join in the discussions with mental reservations and withdraw from participation at a later stage.”<sup>152</sup> Instead of joining in the deliberations and trying to change the substance of the emerging coal and steel community from the inside, the British instead decided to pick up their ball and go home from the beginning, robbing themselves of any possibility of joining the community. As Dell writes, “There was no good reason why the UK could not accept supranationalism within a coal and steel community and then work within the negotiations to ensure that

---

<sup>150</sup> The National Archives, CAB 128/17, “Integration of French and German Coal and Steel Industries”, Cabinet conclusions, June 2, 1950.

<sup>151</sup> The National Archives, CAB 129/46, Hugh Gaitskell, "Schuman Treaty", May 31, 1951.

<sup>152</sup> The National Archives, CAB 128/17, “Integration of French and German Coal and Steel Industries”, Cabinet conclusions, June 2, 1950.



the form would be politically acceptable.... It was hardly conceivable in the atmosphere of the time that the negotiating partners would not have been prepared to accommodate Britain in all reasonable respects once they were convinced that doing so would lead to its membership of the new Community.”<sup>153</sup>

This was particularly true because exactly that process of negotiation had transpired in the past. Britain had succeeded in stripping federalism out of early proposals for the Council of Europe and the Organisation for European Economic Cooperation, two earlier European organizations whose initial conceptions had been littered with supranational aspects, but which, through negotiations, Britain had succeeded in creating as intergovernmental associations. Why the Labour government and Whitehall officials – either due to lack of imagination for what it could accomplish at the bargaining table, blindness to the economic possibilities of the plan, a short memory of past successes, an ingrained predisposition against ambitious new schemes, or simple exhaustion after five long years in government – didn’t believe they could do the same in the Schuman negotiations is largely a mystery. But there can be little doubt that the Labour government of the day miscalculated the chances of success and eventual the continuing significance of the Schuman Plan.<sup>154</sup>

It is also worth noting that old biases also played their part in the British government’s decision to stay out of the Schuman negotiations. Despite their thoughtful consideration for French feelings in not wanting to “exacerbate Anglo-French relations,” some Ministers in the June 2 meeting also apprehensively declared that they “thought that

---

<sup>153</sup> Dell, *The Schuman Plan and the British Abdication of Leadership in Europe*, 232.

<sup>154</sup> Barker, *Britain in a Divided Europe*, 87-88.

the French Government must have some underlying political motive for urging this precipitate acceptance of the principle of integrating the coal and steel industries of Western Europe.”<sup>155</sup> This cynical take carried the day in the Cabinet’s discussions. It doesn’t seem that the Cabinet also took under consideration the possibility that France’s demand that all potential negotiating countries agree to the principles of their proposal before the talks started was simply an opening bargaining position, one that the French could have been haggled down from. No, perfidious Gaul, it was generally thought in the Cabinet that momentous June day, must be up to something, and it was best for Britain not to be carelessly dragged into such a plot.

British leaders were hardly pushed one way or the other by the forces of public opinion when the Schuman Plan was announced. In the days after Schuman dropped his bombshell the *Times*, the *Manchester Guardian* and *The Financial Times*, all of whom had thriving letters pages, saw correspondence from readers about the plan virtually absent from their papers. This lack expression was despite the fact that the newspapers all ran frequent stories and long editorials on the subject.<sup>156</sup> When a Gallup poll of the British population was taken in June 1950 asking about the proposal, 29 percent polled responded that they did not know whether the Schuman Plan was even a good idea or not; in the same poll, 62 percent of a clearly more engaged French public returned an answer of no.<sup>157</sup> Not only does this indicate that the French government was willing to make the hard choices by going against public opinion and into the coal and steel community; it

---

<sup>155</sup> The National Archives, CAB 128/17, “Integration of French and German Coal and Steel Industries”, Cabinet conclusions, June 2, 1950.

<sup>156</sup> Dell, *The Schuman Plan and the British Abdication of Leadership in Europe*, 234-235.

<sup>157</sup> Milward, *The Rise and Fall of a National Strategy*, 72.

also reveals an ignorance and indifference to the questions of European integration in the general British population, a trend of overall apathy that would largely be continued for the rest of the decade and wasn't shared by the publics of the continent.

### 'European Unity'

Perhaps the most revealing British response to the Schuman Plan came just over a month after it was made public. In an official Labour Party statement (ironically titled 'European Unity') drafted by the international secretary Denis Healey and released June 12, 1950, the National Executive Committee of the Labour Party rejected the Schuman plan wholeheartedly. Supposedly, this was because of federalist nature of the Plan; in reality, two sentences in the document give a clearer and more concise picture of the reasoning behind the government's rejection of Schuman's idea: "In every respect except distance we are closer to our kinsmen in Australia and New Zealand than we are to Europe. We are closer in language and in origins, in social habits and institutions, in political outlook and in economic interest." The implication was clear: Britain should not put at risk the Commonwealth for the sake of unreliable continentals.<sup>158</sup> In some surprising quarters the reaction was far from positive: the Labour-supporting *Manchester Guardian* lampooned 'European Unity', writing in a June 13 editorial: "The document is much weakened by this assumption of superior virtue over the benighted Europeans of the Continent ... the Labour Party is all for union if everybody will be like the

---

<sup>158</sup> Radice, *Offshore: Britain and the European Idea*, 93.

British!”<sup>159</sup> However the sentiments, widely shared by Conservatives in later years, would resonate over the next decades in the incessant debates on Europe.<sup>160</sup>

However, in the months afterwards, the government’s rejection of the Schuman Plan was attacked mercilessly by the Conservative opposition. In a cutting speech in his Bromley constituency, Macmillan said, “This has been a black week for Britain; for Empire; for Europe; and for the peace of the world.” The political significance of Schuman’s plan “far outweighs its economic or industrial aspects. Its purpose is the unity of France and Germany. With British participation, this will secure peace.” But without Britain, Macmillan presciently predicted that Franco-Germany unity “could be a source not of security but danger. In the not too distant future, we may have to pay a terrible price for the isolationist policy which British Socialism has long practiced and now openly dares to preach.”<sup>161</sup> Indeed, in a letter to Churchill on June 20, Macmillan argued that “The situation created by M. Schuman may well be a major turning-point in European history. It is certainly a turning-point in the fortunes of the Tory Party. This issue affords us the last, and perhaps only, chance of regaining the initiative.”<sup>162</sup> At the same time another pro-Europe Conservative MP, Robert Boothby, wrote to Churchill on similar lines, saying that the Conservatives had “got the Labour Party on the run” and could win the next general election if it provided “the leadership for which the whole western world is praying.”<sup>163</sup>

---

<sup>159</sup> Dell, *The Schuman Plan and the British Abdication of Leadership in Europe*, 248.

<sup>160</sup> Simms, *Britain’s Europe*, 178.

<sup>161</sup> Horne, *Harold Macmillan: Volume I, 1894-1956*, 319.

<sup>162</sup> Macmillan, *Tides of Fortune*, 193-194.

<sup>163</sup> Horne, *Harold Macmillan: Volume I, 1894-1956*, 320.

With this in mind, in late June during a two-day House of Commons debate on the issue, the Conservatives relentlessly attacked the Labour government's refusal to attend the Schuman Plan negotiations. Throughout the debate, Churchill and his shadow Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden condemned the government for its handling of the initiative. They argued that Franco-German rapprochement was vital for the future peace and security of Europe, that lack of British attendance at the talks only strengthened the standing of the Soviet Union on the continent, and that the Labour government was yielding the leadership of Europe to the French. Given the necessity for continued British world leadership, both in Europe and in the Commonwealth, the Labour government had a duty to enter the Schuman negotiations.<sup>164</sup>

It was during this debate that Churchill made perhaps his most definitive discourse in favor of British membership in further European integration, going so far as to accept some elements of supranationalism: "We are prepared to consider and, if convinced, to accept the abrogation of national sovereignty, provided that we are satisfied with the conditions and the safeguards ... national sovereignty is not inviolable, and it may be resolutely diminished for the sake of all the men in all the lands finding their way home together."<sup>165</sup> In the mind of future Prime Minister Edward Heath, who witnessed the speech live in the Commons, this showed "conclusively that, for all of his practical reservations during the late 1940s and early 1950s, Churchill was never *in principle* against our membership of the European Community."<sup>166</sup>

---

<sup>164</sup> Grob-Fitzgibbon, *Continental Drift*, 138.

<sup>165</sup> Hansard, House of Commons debate, June 27, 1950.

<sup>166</sup> Edward Heath, *The Course of My Life: The Autobiography of Edward Heath* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1998), 147.

Younger Conservative backbenchers jumped in to mercilessly criticize Labour's decision as well. David Eccles, who would go on to become President of the Board of Trade under Macmillan, condemned the "smug self-satisfaction" he saw all around him, and stated that British refusal to join the Schuman talks would be "utterly incomprehensible to the millions of Europeans who feared another war."<sup>167</sup> Following in the family tradition, Julian Amery, Leo's son, stated, "I look at this question primarily as an imperialist" and that imperial interests, instead of excluding engagement, "dictate our participation in the talks."<sup>168</sup> Quinton Hogg chimed in that he thought, "Culturally, militarily, economically and politically the Commonwealth will be nothing, unless Europe is prosperous and safe. Nor will Europe ever be prosperous and safe unless the Commonwealth is united behind the United Kingdom."<sup>169</sup>

Most forceful of all was a young Heath, who judged Labour's choice on the ECSC negotiations "a very short-sighted and, for the United Kingdom, an immensely damaging decision."<sup>170</sup> Making his maiden speech in the Commons, Heath extolled the virtues of the Schuman Plan while criticizing Chancellor of the Exchequer Cripps's characterization of Schuman's idea as "a restrictionist plan":

After the First World War we all thought it would be extremely easy to secure peace and prosperity in Europe. After the Second World War we all realized that it was going to be extremely difficult; and it will be extremely difficult to make a plan of this kind succeed. What I think worries many of us on this side of the House is that, even if the arguments put forward by the Government are correct, we do not feel that behind those arguments is really the will to succeed, and it is that will which we most want to see. It was said long ago in this House that

---

<sup>167</sup> Hansard, House of Commons debate, June 26, 1950.

<sup>168</sup> Hansard, House of Commons debate, June 26, 1950.

<sup>169</sup> Hansard, House of Commons debate, June 26, 1950.

<sup>170</sup> Philip Ziegler, *Edward Heath: The Authorised Biography* (London: Harper Press, 2010), 69.

magnanimity in politics is not seldom the truest wisdom. I appeal tonight to the Government to follow that dictum, and to go into the Schuman Plan to develop Europe and to co-ordinate it in the way suggested.<sup>171</sup>

Not everyone in the Labour Party toed the party line, either. Kim Mackay, a Labour MP who was Australian by origin and an enthusiastic European, joined Heath in questioning the argument that the United Kingdom could not integrate with Europe because of its responsibilities to the Commonwealth:

Great Britain has more investments outside the Commonwealth than she has inside the Commonwealth. She has a greater trade outside the Commonwealth than inside. The Commonwealth as a whole cannot sell its raw materials inside the Commonwealth....Therefore, the Commonwealth as an entity is not self-sufficient, but there is no real conflict in the interests of the United Kingdom and the other members of the British Commonwealth and Western Europe....No one has ever suggested any Western Europe integration which should develop otherwise than with the Commonwealth coming in.<sup>172</sup>

Mackay also laid out the new economic reality that Britain had already faced, but not faced-up to, in the five years since the end of the war, pointing out that “With a world boom for the last five years, with no competitors such as Germany and Japan ... with customers whose pockets are filled with sterling to buy our goods, we are not exporting more today than we exported in 1913.”<sup>173</sup> However, Mackay’s thinking was out of step with most of his party and would not be accepted by the majority until a decade later. Richard Crossman, the last Labour backbencher to speak on the government side on the first day of the debate, summed up his party’s position in regards to commitments to the wider world (i.e. the Commonwealth), stating that, “The purpose of the Schuman Plan politically is to tie the Germans up so tightly that they will not be a menace to the French,

---

<sup>171</sup> Hansard, House of Commons debate, June 26, 1950.

<sup>172</sup> Hansard, House of Commons debate, June 27, 1950.

<sup>173</sup> Hansard, House of Commons debate, June 27, 1950.

but what ties the Germans up so tightly that they cannot be a menace to the French might tie this country up so tightly that it could not do its service to the world.”<sup>174</sup>

The heavy hitters in the Labour Cabinet also rounded against Schuman’s plan and Mackay’s economic arguments for joining the negotiations, as evidenced by Cripps’s speech early on in the debate, which Churchill labelled “utter rubbish.”<sup>175</sup> Responding to Eden’s opening statement imploring the government “to accept the invitation to take part in the discussions on the Schuman Plan,” Cripps invoked the Commonwealth and the Empire to argue against even joining in on the negotiations:

All our great manufacturing industries and particularly the engineering industry which is now so vital an element in our export trade, are dependent upon coal and steel, so that any weakening of our coal and steel industries would be bound to have the most profound effects upon the whole of our external and internal trade. Our special trading relationships with the Commonwealth and Empire must likewise be greatly affected by the conduct of these two basic industries. Not only so, but the location and distribution of these industries in Western Europe are matters of the highest strategic importance. We cannot, therefore, enter light-heartedly upon any scheme or plan which may affect profoundly these two basic sections of our industrial and economic life. Any action which may interfere seriously with them must be preceded by the most thoroughgoing examination of the proposals made and of the consequences that would flow from them.<sup>176</sup>

A speech given by Hugh Dalton on July 20, 1950 in Middleton-in-Teesdale likewise showed where the grandees of the Labour Party stood on Schuman’s idea. Dalton, one of Labour’s longest serving MP’s and still major player in the party, was a strong opponent of European entanglement and much more optimistic about the recent success of British economic policy (as might be expected considering he had preceded Cripps as Chancellor):

---

<sup>174</sup> Hansard, House of Commons debate, June 26, 1950.

<sup>175</sup> Hansard, House of Commons debate, June 26, 1950.

<sup>176</sup> Hansard, House of Commons debate, June 26, 1950.



We British have steadily built up our strength since the war. We have made new records in capital development, in production and in exports. We have gone further than any other country in West Europe towards closing the dollar gap. We have maintained full employment through five years of peace – an achievement unprecedented in our history.<sup>177</sup>

It was this brand of triumphalism, premature though it was, combined with complacency and a certain amount of blindness on both sides of the House of Commons as well as in Whitehall, which would play a big factor in keeping Britain out of the European Coal and Steel Community and further moves toward European integration later in the decade. When it came time for the Commons to vote, a parliamentary split which for the most part mirrored the political parties occurred, with the Labour government holding a clear majority of 309 to 296 in one, and 309 to 289 in the other.<sup>178</sup> The House, much as the Cabinet before, had voted against British participation in the proposed ECSC.

Even so, the Labour Cabinet could not entirely disregard the consequences of Schuman's proposal and requested from the Colonial Office a memorandum on the effects an ECSC would have on the Commonwealth. Why it had not done so before taking the vote to stay outside of the Schuman negotiations is a question only those Cabinet ministers could have answered. The Colonial Office replied in a memo dated July 3, 1950, that the "whole nexus of our relations with European countries in recent years ... has inevitably brought into question the United Kingdom's relation to the rest of the Commonwealth." Accordingly, "in all the discussions aimed at bringing about closer unity of Europe, our policy has been governed by two factors: "(a) the need to play our

---

<sup>177</sup> Hugh Dalton, Speech of 22 July 1950 in Middleton-in-Teesdale, England. Quoted in Dell, *The Schuman Plan and the British Abdication of Leadership in Europe*, 34.

<sup>178</sup> Bullock, *Ernest Bevin: Foreign Secretary*, 783.

full part – and, indeed, to take the lead – in revivifying Europe, while at the same time (b) not engaging ourselves in anything which was likely to do damage to our relationship with other Commonwealth countries.” This was because “the Commonwealth countries would look askance at any departure from our present policy of combining our responsibilities as a Member of the Commonwealth with support for the development of European unity, and would probably react sharply to any integration of our economy into that of Europe in any manner which they regarded as prejudicing their vital interests.”<sup>179</sup> Since Schuman was disinclined to respect these anxieties in relation to the Commonwealth, the Colonial Office concluded that the government was right to reject entry into the ECSC.<sup>180</sup>

#### Labour’s Final ‘No’ to Schuman

Even so, as late as June 1951 the Labour government was debating an invitation from the French to hold discussions on the Schuman Treaty before it was ratified by the signatory nation’s parliaments. Again, this olive branch was rejected in Cabinet after Hugh Gaitskell, who had replaced Cripps as Chancellor in October 1950, circulated a report by the Treasury’s influential Economic Steering Committee studying the implications of the Schuman Treaty on the coal and steel industries of the United Kingdom. After running through the main features of the treaty, the Steering Committee’s report examined the implications for the United Kingdom, declaring that, “Our first reactions are that the creation of the Community does not create a serious threat to the United Kingdom coal and steel interests even if no arrangements were made

---

<sup>179</sup> The National Archives, CAB 129/41, Gordon Walker, “Integration with Western European coal and steel industries: Commonwealth implications”, July 3, 1950.

<sup>180</sup> Grob-Fitzgibbon, *Continental Drift*, 139.

for close relationship between the United Kingdom and the Community, but we think that our long-term interests may well make some form of mutually satisfactory association desirable.” However, this association could be dangerous, for “In very general terms, the more closely it is associated with the Community, the better the United Kingdom can influence the development of policies along lines which are not prejudicial to us, but the more our freedom of action would be circumscribed.”

In regards to the “immediate question is whether we should take advantage of M. Schuman's suggestion that there should be preliminary talks,” the Steering Committee advised that, “It would be premature, even if our own objective could be clearly defined in the near future, to embark on thorough-going discussions of a Treaty which may not be ratified.” While the report conceded that by “refusing to embark on discussions at an early stage, we might miss the opportunity of keeping in touch with the practical development of the Schuman Plan,” it concluded that, “There is no disadvantage in maintaining our previous attitude of benevolent disinterest. ... On the whole, therefore, it hardly seems desirable or necessary to embark on immediate preliminary discussions on specific points, though it would be desirable to leave the door open for such discussions later.”<sup>181</sup>

Six days after Gaitskell’s memorandum was circulated, the Cabinet wholeheartedly agreed with the Steering Committee’s conclusions. As a result, they “agreed that the French proposal that they might discuss the Schuman Treaty with the United Kingdom Government before it was ratified should be answered on the lines

---

<sup>181</sup> The National Archives, CAB 129/46, Hugh Gaitskell, "Schuman Treaty", May 31, 1951.

proposed” by the Steering Committee’s report.<sup>182</sup> That is, that the United Kingdom attitude and response towards Schuman’s offer of discussions would follow along two lines: “(a) that His Majesty's Government welcome the fact that agreement has now been reached, and (b) that we are most anxious to consider how and how far we could be associated with the proposed organisation.” However, it was also “reasonable for the Government to wish to take time to consider the situation created by the signature of the Treaty, and not to give any indication of its attitude to the arrangements or to United Kingdom association with them.”<sup>183</sup>

One last time the Labour government had passed up the opportunity to put some sort of stamp on the emerging ECSC. While the treaty had already been signed in Paris in April, at this point the French were almost laying out the red carpet for Britain to engage in preliminary talks on some sort of association with the new body. Even after signing a deal with the other five nations, the French still were trying to get Britain on board and secure some kind of British association that could help both sides. This went back to Schuman’s belief that “without Britain there can be no Europe.”<sup>184</sup> There was clearly acknowledgement on the other side of the Channel that Britain, as the leading country in Europe at this stage, should be a major player in the first true steps towards European union. But this was a recognition that was not reciprocated by the British. Britain’s indifference to French desires was most clearly shown earlier in the process, when James Callaghan, a future Prime Minister but then a junior minister at the Admiralty, had

---

<sup>182</sup> The National Archives, CAB 128/19, "Integration of French and German Coal and Steel Industries", Cabinet conclusions, June 5, 1951.

<sup>183</sup> The National Archives, CAB 129/46, Hugh Gaitskell, "Schuman Treaty", May 31, 1951.

<sup>184</sup> Mauter, "Churchill and the Unification of Europe", 77.

written to Bevin urging Britain's participation in the Schuman negotiations. In response, Bevin simply said, "They (i.e. the French) don't want us, Callaghan."<sup>185</sup> As the record shows, the French political establishment very much did want Britain involved, if for no other reason than to act as a balance against the Germans.<sup>186</sup>

Britain's Labour leaders believed that by joining the Schuman Plan, they would have lost their leadership in the Commonwealth and Empire. It seemed lost on the British that the French, too, still had an empire in the early 1950's, and yet they saw no inconsistency between joining the ECSC and keeping the fight for their empire alive. France clearly had no intention of restricting itself to a European role, and the same could have been said of the United Kingdom if it had joined the ECSC. In fact, to even think that involvement in the Schuman Plan would have undercut Britain's world role is to reveal a severe lack of confidence in the genuineness of Britain's so-called 'international status.'<sup>187</sup> This pattern would repeat itself in the EEC negotiations a few years later, when France was able to reconcile a new European role with its old world-wide interests while Britain was not.

The Economic Steering Committee's report shows another prominent trend in British decision-making towards Europe during these years: the fact that they thought the Schuman plan would fail, in that the parliaments of the six signing countries would not ratify it. This started a tendency of politicians and officials in Britain being frequently influenced by the expectation that the initiatives of the continentals would collapse. In the case of the Schuman plan, the British failed to assess the political pressures that would

---

<sup>185</sup> James Callaghan, *Time and Chance* (New York: Harper Collins, 1987), 79.

<sup>186</sup> Dell, *The Schuman Plan and the British Abdication of Leadership in Europe*, 293.

<sup>187</sup> Dell, *The Schuman Plan and the British Abdication of Leadership in Europe*, 302.

make it a success; mainly, that the end of the war had created a determination to guarantee peace in Western Europe and a conviction in the continental countries that they should not isolate themselves. This meant that once the negotiations had started they were unlikely to be unsuccessful, and once the Treaty was signed, it was unlikely to be rejected by any one nation's parliament.<sup>188</sup> As a result, Britain placing so much faith in ultimate failure was a massive mistake, one it was doomed to repeat in the coming years.

The June 5 Cabinet meeting would be the Attlee's Labour government's last major influence on the question of European integration until it was voted out of office in a snap general election that autumn. Labour would not return to government again until 1964, by which time three successive Conservative governments would also miss chances at integration with Britain's Western European neighbors.<sup>189</sup>

---

<sup>188</sup> Dell, *The Schuman Plan and the British Abdication of Leadership in Europe*, 284-285.

<sup>189</sup> Labour would return to government after fiercely opposing entrance into the EEC during its time in opposition. Prime Minister Harold Wilson would have his own variant of Churchill's three circles concept focused on the Commonwealth, United States, Eastern Europe. However, much as with the Conservatives in 1951, it did not take long for Wilson to realize the realities of governing presented a much different problem than the realities of winning power, and that the most realistic position for Britain was that of a European, not a world, power; Robert J. Lieber, *British Politics and European Unity: Parties, Elites, and Pressure Groups* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), 263.

### CHAPTER 3: THE 'MAIN RELIGION' OF THE TORY PARTY

*If you drive a nation to adopt procedures which run counter to its instincts, you weaken and may destroy the motive force of its action...You will realise that I am speaking of the frequent suggestion that the United Kingdom should join a federation on the continent of Europe. This is something which we know, in our bones, we cannot do...For Britain's story and her interests lie far beyond the continent of Europe. Our thoughts move across the seas to the many communities in which our people play their part, in every corner of the world. These are our family ties. That is our life: without it we should be no more than some millions of people living in an island off the coast of Europe, in which nobody wants to take any particular interest.*<sup>190</sup>

--- Anthony Eden, 1952

While the Labour government slogged through six years of haphazard policy towards Europe, the Conservatives waited to have a go. But though Churchill may have been one of the leading proponents of the European movement during his time in opposition, his muddled and ever-changing thinking on European integration – particularly on the topic of reconciling Europe with Britain's Commonwealth commitment – would be a hallmark of Conservative policy during Churchill's second run as Prime Minister from October 1951 to April 1955. It was during these years that the Conservative Party would gain the reputation for division and illusion over policy towards Europe from which it has afterwards rarely been able to free itself.<sup>191</sup>

---

<sup>190</sup> Anthony Eden, "Gabriel Silver Lecture", addressed to Columbia University on January 11, 1952. Quoted in Anthony Eden, *Full Circle* (London: Cassell, 1960), 36-37.

<sup>191</sup> Milward, *The Rise and Fall of a National Strategy*, 94.

Though it had been Churchill who had won praise from across Europe for his Zurich ‘United States of Europe’ speech in 1946, he made it clear to his cabinet colleagues on his return to power in 1951 that he ‘never thought that Britain or the British Commonwealth should ... become an integral part’ of the venture.<sup>192</sup> Contrast this with a speech Churchill made in London’s Albert Hall on May 14, 1947, when he seemed to have no worry about the Commonwealth problem in regards to Europe. Why, he asked then, should the Dominions not be with Britain in this cause? They felt, with the British, that Britain was geographically and historically a part of Europe and that they themselves had their inheritance in Europe.<sup>193</sup> If a united Europe was to be a living force, Churchill had said in 1947, Britain would have to play its full part as a member of the European family.<sup>194</sup> But by the time he was back in office four years later, he said that in regards to formal European integration, “I meant it for them, not us.”<sup>195</sup>

This kind of British exceptionalism, manifested by Churchill’s aloofness from the very European idea he had championed just a few years before, would become Conservative Party canon, and Churchill’s inability to resolve the competing commitments of the ‘three circles’ in his own mind foreshadowed the inability of the greater British policymaking establishment to do the same for years afterwards.<sup>196</sup> As old and close a friend as Dwight Eisenhower, writing in his diary in 1951, believed that

---

<sup>192</sup> The National Archives, CAB 129/48, Winston Churchill, “United Europe”, November 29, 1951.

<sup>193</sup> Winston Churchill, Speech of May 14, 1947 in London, England. Quoted in Dell, *The Schuman Plan and the British Abdication of Leadership in Europe*, 82.

<sup>194</sup> Barker, *Britain in a Divided Europe*, 82.

<sup>195</sup> May, "The Commonwealth and Britain's Turn to Europe, 1945-73", 31.

<sup>196</sup> For a study of the years after 1955, see Turner, *The Tories and Europe*, 49-75.



Britain “was living in past” and that Churchill “refused to think in terms of today.”<sup>197</sup> At least on the issue of Europe, the future President of the United States was proven to be exactly right. Churchill may have been the ‘father of Europe,’ but he wouldn’t also be its midwife.

Above all, it was the Commonwealth and Empire circle that would continue to engage the hearts and minds of Conservatives, to the detriment of Britain moving in step with European integration in that concept’s formative years in the early 1950’s. This was most marked during the Churchill government of 1951-1955, one of whose priorities was, as Churchill himself put it, “the unity and consolidation of the British Commonwealth and what is left of the British Empire.”<sup>198</sup> Despite the start of decolonization in the aftermath of the Second World War as Britain started its retreat from its empire, the Commonwealth retained a powerful influence over many Conservative MPs. No less an authority than R.A. Butler, Churchill’s Chancellor of the Exchequer from 1951-1955 and an MP since 1929, said that the Commonwealth remained “the main religion of the Tory Party” in the 1950s.<sup>199</sup> Certainly, throughout the decade the Commonwealth was frequently cited by British policymakers to explain away the nation’s restricted involvement and interest in large-scale plans for European integration.<sup>200</sup> A later

---

<sup>197</sup> Young, *Britain and European Unity*, 75-76.

<sup>198</sup> The National Archives, CAB 129/48, Winston Churchill, “United Europe”, November 29, 1951.

<sup>199</sup> Andrew Geddes, *Britain and the European Union* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 53.

<sup>200</sup> These noises were certainly heard in the Commonwealth capitals. In Australia, for instance, the official “attitude towards European integration had been predicated on repeated British assurances that Commonwealth interests would never be sacrificed in a trade deal with the European Community.” Quoted in Ward, *Australia and the British Embrace*, 69.

protagonist in trying to reverse this trend of remaining detached from the process of European integration would deeply regret Britain's stance towards Europe during these years; Macmillan, who served in the Cabinet as Minister of Housing and Local Government from 1951-1954 and was a key participant inside the process of Britain's policymaking on Europe during these years, referred to the views of the British government and especially the Foreign Office during this time as showing "a degree of myopia which a mole might envy."<sup>201</sup>

### Conservatives Back in Power

When the Conservatives returned to government in the autumn of 1951, there were still high hopes it could restore the United Kingdom to its rightful place. By this time, Churchill's public words of support for the European movement had created rising expectations at home and abroad, and a passionate group of younger Conservative Party members of Parliament assumed a new era of British leadership in Europe would emerge as soon as Churchill returned to power.<sup>202</sup> They believed the Conservatives could lead both in Europe and in the Commonwealth in a way, as they had hammered home during the General Election, the Labour Party had been unwilling or unable to do.<sup>203</sup>

But Prime Minister Churchill's rhetoric regarding the ECSC and European integration in full was decidedly different from his words spoken in opposition. This was outlined in a Cabinet memorandum he entitled "United Europe" in November 1951, on which he would "set forth briefly my own view and the line I have followed so far." He opened by acknowledging that he had given the initial stimulus for the European

---

<sup>201</sup> Dell, *The Schuman Plan and the British Abdication of Leadership in Europe*, 232.

<sup>202</sup> Mauter, "Churchill and the Unification of Europe", 82.

<sup>203</sup> Grob-Fitzgibbon, *Continental Drift*, 149-150.

movement with his speech in Zurich, but “As year by year the project advanced, the Federal Movement in many European countries who participated became prominent.” This, he said, was never part of his original idea, and he “never thought that Britain or the British Commonwealth should, either individually or collectively, become an integral party of a European Federation.” In the autumn of 1951 Britain was still free to make an application for membership into the ECSC, which would not come into effect until ratified by the six signing countries with the approval of their Parliaments. But in regards to the newly ECSC, Churchill wrote, “I welcome the Schuman Coal and Steel Plan as a step in the reconciliation of France and Germany, and as probably rendering another Franco-German war physically impossible. (But) I never contemplated Britain joining in this plan on the same terms as Continental partners.”<sup>204</sup>

The country was moving largely in the same direction as its leader. In a January 1952 Gallup asking whether the United Kingdom should join the Schuman Plan, 47 percent of the responses said it should not. Of course, 30 percent of the responders also answered that they didn’t know one way or the other, despite the fact that the plan was now nearly two years old and the decision by the British government not to join in the plan had long been taken.<sup>205</sup> In a Paris meeting in December 1951, Churchill and Eden told Schuman they could not join in on his plan, shutting the door for good on any chances of Britain joining the ECSC when it came into effect the next summer.

In general, in examining questions of European policy, Churchill laid out this policy in the “United Europe” memo: “We help, we dedicate, we play a part, but we are

---

<sup>204</sup> The National Archives, CAB 129/48, Winston Churchill, “United Europe”, November 29, 1951.

<sup>205</sup> Milward, *The Rise and Fall of a National Strategy*, 72.

not merged and do not forfeit our insular or Commonwealth-wide character. I should resist any American pressure to treat Britain as on the same footing as the European States, none of whom have the advantages of the Channel and who were consequently conquered.” He concluded: “Our first object is the unity and the consolidation of the British Commonwealths and what is left of the former British Empire. Our second, the ‘fraternal association’ of the English-speaking world; and third, United Europe, to which we are a separate closely- and specially-related ally and friend.”<sup>206</sup> Churchill’s three circles were now clearly numbered by priority. The Commonwealth and Empire was at the top of the list, while Europe found itself at the back of the queue.

The memorandum, drafted just a month into Churchill’s second term as Prime Minister, indicated a whopping retreat from the vociferous backing for European integration he had conveyed as Leader of the Opposition. Put frankly, Churchill had manipulated the European Movement for personal gain while on the opposition benches, using the cause as an international forum to boost his stature as a world leader and score political points against the Labour government. In the process, he had “left his rhetoric just vague enough to buoy both American and European expectations that Britain would participate in the emerging United Europe” without any clear intention to do so.<sup>207</sup>

But it wasn’t just Churchill. Eden, too, had come a long way (i.e., he was now in government) since brutalizing the Labour government for its failure to join the Schuman negotiations in the June 1950 debate. Answering suggestions that Britain should join “a federation on the continent of Europe” in a speech at Columbia University in January of

---

<sup>206</sup> The National Archives, Cab 129/48, Winston Churchill, “United Europe”, November 29, 1951.

<sup>207</sup> Mauter, “Churchill and the Unification of Europe”, 82.

1952, he explained, "This is something we know in our bones we cannot do. We know that if we were to attempt it, we should relax the springs of our action in the Western Democratic cause."<sup>208</sup> This was because Britain was not "an isolated unit" but "the focal point of a wider group of states and peoples: the British Commonwealth and Empire, which together make up a family bound by ties of sentiment and common interest."<sup>209</sup>

Macmillan, distraught by this turn away from Europe in the thinking of the leadership of the Conservative Party in the first months of Churchill's new government, wrote to Eden soon after the Columbia speech, saying that Britain should give a lead to Europe in the formation of a confederation organized on the same lines as the Commonwealth, with a common currency and a European customs preferential area dovetailing with Imperial preference. The old ideal of integrating Europe and the Commonwealth wasn't dead, at least in Macmillan's mind. But when he brought up the idea later in Cabinet, Eden was dismissive, only replying that Macmillan ignored that "much of Europe wants to federate."<sup>210</sup> In retrospect, Macmillan believed Eden was motivated by patriotism: "I think he was unaware of the changes in the world which had taken place as a result of the Second World War," and Eden was blinded by "a dislike of foreigners and a determination to avoid permanent entanglements. These were very much Foreign Office principles."<sup>211</sup> As we will see, Macmillan wouldn't much change these

---

<sup>208</sup> Edward Cowan, "Eden Calls for Strength as Barrier to Aggression," *Columbia Daily Spectator*, Volume XCVI, number 65, January 14, 1952.

<sup>209</sup> Anthony Eden, "Gabriel Silver Lecture", addressed to Columbia University on January 11, 1952. Quoted in Grob-Fitzgibbon, *Continental Drift*, 164.

<sup>210</sup> Richard Lamb, "Macmillan and Europe", in *Harold Macmillan: Aspects of a Political Life*, edited by Richard Aldous and Sabine Lee (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 76.

<sup>211</sup> Horne, *Harold Macmillan: Volume I, 1894-1956*, 349.

“Foreign Office principles” he so derided when he became head of the FO three years later.

The realities of government, of having actually having to follow through on grand declarations with actual policy, had clearly caught up to Churchill and the Conservatives in 1951. They had been free to act as agitators while in opposition, but once back in government failed to back up their protestations of European commitment with any real substance. The Conservative Party’s mindset in opposition had been one of unprincipled opportunism. They played Europe against the Labour government without any sincerity to actually live up to what they had said once back in office. This began a tradition in which, with considerable damage to the United Kingdom’s interests, opposition parties exploit the European question against the government of the day by making speeches and proposals to which they have no intention of living once back in office. What this showed was that in reality, “despite the brave European vapourings of Churchill and his colleagues while in opposition, there was in practice nothing to choose between Conservative policy towards Europe and Labour policy towards Europe.”<sup>212</sup> It didn’t matter what party held power: In the first decade of the post-war world, Britain’s ‘official mind’ had been made up on European integration.

#### The European Defense Community

As Britain continued to drag its feet on the grand topic of European integration, the rest of Western Europe pushed further ahead. The first official application of Churchill’s ‘United States of Europe’ idea, the ECSC, would officially come into being

---

<sup>212</sup> Dell, *The Schuman Plan and the British Abdication of Leadership in Europe*, 229-232.

with the Signing of the Treaty of Paris on April 18, 1951.<sup>213</sup> That same year a sister plan, the European Defense Community, was signed by the same six nations. Much as the ECSC was designed to end the danger of Germany again gaining the economic power on its own to make war, the EDC was an ambitious scheme meant to inhibit the military possibility of Germany making war again by tying it into a pan-European defense force that would substitute for the national armies of the six nations. The EDC plan included proposals for a European Defense minister responsible to the European Assembly (which had been created by the Schuman Plan), a European Defense Council of Ministers, a single European defense budget and even a common uniform. The participating countries would contribute contingents, but likely at no more than the brigade level; crucially, this meant that Germany would contribute to the common defense but there would be no autonomous Germany army or German general staff.<sup>214</sup>

A deep aversion among the chiefs of staff to any loss of control over British forces meant that militarily Britain was never likely to embrace the concept. When asked by the Foreign Office to put together a list of both the political and military advantages and disadvantages of participation in the EDC, the Joint Planning Staff reported that the “Government do not wish to become part of a Federated Europe, as this would: (i) involve derogation of sovereignty; (ii) weaken the ties between the UK and the rest of the Commonwealth, and consequently (iii) impair our international standing.”<sup>215</sup> Churchill

---

<sup>213</sup> Perhaps fittingly, Bevin, who had done so much to shape Britain’s stance toward European integration in the years previous, had died four days earlier while reading his official papers, “the key to his red box still clutched in his hand.” Quoted in Bullock, *Ernest Bevin: Foreign Secretary*, 835.

<sup>214</sup> Denman, *Missed Chances*, 193.

<sup>215</sup> Milward, *The Rise and Fall of a National Strategy*, 95.

also read aloud in Cabinet a letter from Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery opposing the European Defense Force, with Churchill adding that he was “in general agreement with these views.”<sup>216</sup> As this shows, the British military was deeply opposed to the scheme for an integrated army, and taking these into account objections into account the political beasts ended up killing any chances of British participation in the EDC.<sup>217</sup>

Churchill had actually floated a similar proposal to the EDC, based on intergovernmental cooperation, as far back as August 1950 in the aftermath of the Schuman Plan debates. While the Labour government’s policy had been to associate itself with the proposed ‘European Army’ but not to join it – Bevin had quipped that it “looks like a mere shop-window force” – at the time the Conservatives in opposition had implied that they would have supported British membership.<sup>218</sup> Indeed, Churchill had accused Labour of short-term thinking in an August 2, 1950 letter to Attlee, saying that if economic leadership in Britain was no longer possible, Britain could lead in the sphere of defense. Churchill told Attlee he advocated the creation of a European Army – including forces from Britain, France, Germany and the Benelux nations – “of at least thirty five divisions.” The member countries should be “of equal status and equally armed and have a proportionate share in the command.”<sup>219</sup>

However, Churchill sang a much different story once back in government. Much like the supranational aspects had turned Labour away from the proposed Western

---

<sup>216</sup> The National Archives, CAB 128/23, ‘European Army’, Cabinet conclusions, December 11, 1951.

<sup>217</sup> Young, *Britain and European Unity*, 36.

<sup>218</sup> Milward, *The Rise and Fall of a National Strategy*, 84; Grob-Fitzgibbon, *Continental Drift*, 169.

<sup>219</sup> Grob-Fitzgibbon, *Continental Drift*, 140.



European political union and the ECSC, the supranational essence of the EDC filled Churchill and most other Conservatives with horror.<sup>220</sup> To this point, Churchill wrote to his Cabinet colleagues on November 29, 1951 that, “I should doubt very much the military spirit of a “sludgy amalgam” of volunteers or conscripts to defend the E.D.C. or other similar organisations.”<sup>221</sup> A week later, his words in Cabinet were much the same, saying that he “would not be unduly disturbed if the present plans for a European Defense Community were not carried into effect. It had still to be shown that an international army could be an efficient instrument in spite of differences of language and weapons between the participating contingents. And he doubted whether the soldier in the line would fight with the same ardour for an international institution as he would for his home and his country.”<sup>222</sup> Eden, in a Foreign Office brief shortly after, echoed his boss: “We are ready to play an active part in all plans for integration on an intergovernmental basis; defence considerations, our Commonwealth connections and the Sterling area inhibit us from subordinating ourselves ... to any European supranational authority.”<sup>223</sup> Thus, Eden largely decided to continue the Labour government’s policy of keeping Britain outside the EDC – announcing as much in a press conference in Rome in November 1951 – but promising ‘close association.’<sup>224</sup> This frustrated dedicated

---

<sup>220</sup> N.J. Crowson, *The Conservative Party and European Integration since 1945: At the Heart of Europe?* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 22.

<sup>221</sup> The National Archives, Cab 129/48, Winston Churchill, “United Europe”, November 29, 1951.

<sup>222</sup> The National Archives, CAB 128/25, “European Defence Community”, Cabinet conclusions, December 4, 1952.

<sup>223</sup> Young, *Britain and European Unity*, 39.

<sup>224</sup> Lamb, “Macmillan and Europe”, 76; Barker, *Britain in a Divided Europe*, 109.

Europeans such as Boothby to no end, and he later wrote that any chance of an integrated European army “was in fact blown up by Churchill’s government of 1951.”<sup>225</sup>

Macmillan also expressed his misgivings towards the proposed defense community. As he described in his memoirs, he was an opponent of the EDC because, “Those who had any knowledge of military problems, or organization and supply as well as of strategic and tactical control, realized that quite apart from the difficulties of language, the morale of such a force would be low and that it would be of little military value.”<sup>226</sup> Macmillan’s opposition to the plan had historical roots, as he explained in a memorandum on March 19, 1953, when he asked:

Are we really sure that we want to see a Six Power Federal Europe, with a common army, a common iron and steel industry (Schuman Plan) ending with a common currency and monetary policy? If such a Federal State comes into being, will it, in the long run, be to our interest, whether as an island or as an imperial power? Will not Germany ultimately control this state, and may we not have created the very situation in Europe to prevent which, in every century since the Elizabethan age, we have fought long and bitter wars?<sup>227</sup>

It was a fear of German domination and European supranationalism that disturbs Conservative ministers to this day. However, two years earlier Macmillan had also laid out the problems as he saw them of Britain standing to the side as Western Europe moved closer together:

I thought that the Schuman plan and the European army might break down. But was there not a danger that if it went through, the position in ten years would be still worse. There would be a European Community which would dominate Europe and would be roughly equal to Hitler’s Europe of 1940. If we stay out, we

---

<sup>225</sup> Robert Boothby, *Recollections of a Rebel* (London: Hutchinson, 1978), 222.

<sup>226</sup> Macmillan, *Tides of Fortune*, 220.

<sup>227</sup> The National Archives, CAB 129/60, Harold Macmillan, “The EDC and European Unity”, March 19, 1953.

risk that German domination of Europe which we have fought two wars to prevent.<sup>228</sup>

As it would many times thereafter, Britain was caught between a rock and a hard place, expressing a strong distaste for supranational European institutions but fearing what would happen if they stayed outside of them. Indeed, as is seen from his writings above, Macmillan couldn't decide whether Britain should stand outside of the European institutions, for fear they would be German dominated, or go inside of them, for fear that by Britain staying out, they would be German dominated. It was muddled, indecisive thinking, and showed a clear lack of belief that even by joining, Britain could take the lead in any such European organizations.

In the case of the EDC, a middle road to nowhere was decided upon as the British Cabinet agreed to enter "into formal treaty arrangements with the European Defence Community, by which each would be obliged to give military assistance to the other, if either were the object of an armed attack in Europe."<sup>229</sup> Thus when on May 27, 1952 the Six signed a treaty setting up the EDC, Eden agreed to a fifty-year mutual security treaty with the new organization that signed his country up to military cooperation with the new body in all fields, meaning that Britain would fight alongside the EDC in event of war.<sup>230</sup> Had the body come into effect, this would have tied Britain into a permanent alliance with the EDC, but given them no say in the official decision-making structure since the

---

<sup>228</sup> Macmillan, diary entry of December 4, 1951 in *The Macmillan Diaries, Volume I*, 121.

<sup>229</sup> The National Archives, CAB 128/24, "European Defence Community", Cabinet conclusions, April 4, 1952.

<sup>230</sup> Kevin Ruane, *The Rise and Fall of the European Defence Community: Anglo-American Relations and the Crisis of European Defence, 1950-55* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000); Beloff, *The General Says No*, 64; Young, *Britain and European Unity*, 39.

British government was unwilling to enter the EDC because of its supranational structure and, once again, for fear of alienating the nations of the Commonwealth.<sup>231</sup> As a result, Britain would have had many of the commitments of membership in the EDC, but without formal representation at the negotiating table and with little ability to shape or direct policy from within the alliance.

In the end, it seems strange that Britain could go so far as what Eden deemed an extremely close association with the EDC, but could not take the last step and become a member itself. The French, after all, also had an extra-European role and extra-European obligations.<sup>232</sup> Macmillan summed up Britain's odd predicament, much of it its own making, in an April 1952 diary entry:

Unwilling to join (the EDC) ourselves, we are therefore reduced to the old policy of 'guarantee'. The history of the guarantee, when one thinks of Belgium, and Roumania seems hardly encouraging. But the French seem to like it and the Cabinet agreed. How odd it is that we undertake these obligations in a rather haphazard way! Of course, it is right and really commits us to no new position. But I still feel we should have taken the lead ourselves in Europe, instead of adopting this method, wh(ich) does not save us from the risks but deprives us of the control.<sup>233</sup>

Much as was the case with the ECSC, Britain could not join the EDC because of largely because of two reasons: (a) what it saw as its Commonwealth obligations and (b) because it viewed the EDC as a step towards European federation. Instead, Britain was simply drifting on the sidelines, part of Europe but not truly in it due to the fact that, because of the Commonwealth, Britain did not want to be seen as 'just a European power' in a new federalized Europe. Only a no vote in the French Assembly on the EDC

---

<sup>231</sup> Grob-Fitzgibbon, *Continental Drift*, 171.

<sup>232</sup> Barker, *Britain in a Divided Europe*, 115.

<sup>233</sup> Macmillan, diary entry of April 5, 1952 in *The Macmillan Diaries, Volume I*, 156.

Treaty in August 1954, in part because France had just suffered a catastrophic defeat at Dien Bien Phu in Indo-China but also because the French were wary of joining with Germany in a defense community that would not also include British soldiers, stopped the plan for the supranational European military force and saved Britain from this unfortunate position it had backed itself into.<sup>234</sup> French vetoes wouldn't be of the same comfort to Britain in the future.

Ultimately, as the EDC case demonstrates, whenever there was a proposal for a purely European effort at joint-decision making that could override national views, Britain decided to stand aside.<sup>235</sup> While the EDC would never go into effect, with Germany joining the already-established intergovernmental NATO alliance instead, Britain had again sat on the outside of the key negotiations, preferring to play a peripheral role and not signing the treaty. As the government's official history puts it, "the history of the United Kingdom's relationship with the proposed EDC in fact became one of increasing support for and commitment to it, while still maintaining that membership was too dangerous."<sup>236</sup> Considering that Churchill had been the originator of the whole European Army idea, this refusal to enter the EDC began to confirm the suspicions held by the continental Europeans that Britain was untrustworthy on the question of Europe.<sup>237</sup>

---

<sup>234</sup> Alistair Jones, *Britain and the European Union* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 12-13.

<sup>235</sup> David Butler and Uwe Kitzinger, *The 1975 Referendum* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1976), 5.

<sup>236</sup> Milward, *The Rise and Fall of a National Strategy*, 87.

<sup>237</sup> Grob-Fitzgibbon, *Continental Drift*, 169.

### Thorneycroft's Warning

So by the end of the first nine years of European post-war integration, Britain was largely left on the outside looking in. Much of this was of its own making, as both Attlee's Labour government and Churchill's Conservative government had continuously resisted any attempt to tie Britain into the emerging European institutions. Largely, this was down to their fear that tightening the bond with Europe necessarily would come at the expense of the Dominions, which in 1955 still absorbed a larger share of British exports than the Six combined.<sup>238</sup> It was this fear that had torpedoed Bevin's proposals for the Western political union and the European customs union in the late 1940's and kept Britain out of the European Coal and Steel Community and the proposed European Defense Community in the early 1950's. This was the dawn of the Commonwealth's restraining effect on Britain entering the European Communities, and this Commonwealth dimension would continue to manifest itself as the principal restraining factor even as Britain edged closer and closer towards a European commitment in the second half of the 1950's.

However, before the story of the ultimately-doomed European Defense Community is concluded, there is one last piece from these opening salvos of European integration worth noting here: Britain's uneasy reaction to the fact that the foreign ministers of the Six had discussed adding a commitment to a common market to the text of the EDC Treaty. In response to this, in a memorandum in February 1953, President of the Board of Trade Peter Thorneycroft laid out a "Commercial Policy in Europe," in

---

<sup>238</sup> Milward, *The Rise and Fall of a National Strategy*, 189.

which he declared that, “We are faced by considerable difficulties, political as well as economic, in Europe because of the way in which the trade situation is developing.”

Taking a far different line than what the Conservatives had pursued in the 18 or so months beforehand, Thorneycroft asserted that “There are strong arguments in favour of the United Kingdom taking a new initiative in Europe in an attempt to create on these lines a wide European market for a range of goods in which such a market would serve to strengthen the economy of Europe as a whole.” The strongest of these arguments, he deemed, was that, “Failing some such initiative on our part, there may well be a tendency for the principal European countries to go forward among themselves on the precedent of the Schuman Plan, thus leading to European arrangements from which we could not stand apart save to our own detriment and in which we should have little chance of participating on our own terms unless we had taken the initiative.” Thorneycroft acknowledged that there would be “substantial risks” to such a policy, not least that Britain “might be pressed to make tariff changes of a kind that would weaken the structure of Imperial Preference.” The previous experience of staying outside of the Schuman Plan negotiations, Thorneycroft thought, provided “significant pointer to what these latter risks may be.”<sup>239</sup> He concluded that, “The choice, it seems to me, is between taking risks in relation to a constructive initiative under our own control and accepting whatever risks may be brought to us by leaving the initiative to the other Governments of Europe.” Thorneycroft would soon experience intense frustration as he saw the latter

---

<sup>239</sup> The National Archives, CAB 129/59, Peter Thorneycroft, “Commercial Policy in Europe”, February 19, 1953.

course taken by Britain and its conservative decision-making culture during the EEC negotiations of 1955-1957.<sup>240</sup>

Thorneycroft's argument that Britain should take the imitative in Europe by bringing the six Schuman nations, along with Switzerland and Scandinavia, together in a 'wide common market' on an agreed list of goods of course fell on deaf ears in a Cabinet distinguished by skepticism of an increased British role in European integration.<sup>241</sup> But the fact that Thorneycroft thought it imperative to write and circulate this far-sighted memorandum, in which he forecast the peril Britain would find itself in a half decade later as it lingered outside the common market, to the Cabinet shows that the British government was not blind to the potential devastating effects of staying outside the continuing process of European integration in the early 1950's. The collapse of the EDC in 1954 saved Britain from having to make this choice between staying outside of the customs union, which was likely to be a powerful economic stimulator for western Europe, or joining it, despite its supranational aspects and the (perceived) anti-Commonwealth consequences.

However, this reprieve wouldn't last for long as the idea for a customs union of the Six, regional, regulated and Eurocentric, emerged unscathed from the debris of the EDC.<sup>242</sup> It would emerge again less than a year later at the Messina Conference of June 1955, the most momentous episode in the history of the story of European integration since Schuman had unveiled his audacious plan in May 1950. It was this conference that started the march toward the Six signing of the Treaty of Rome in March 1957, from

---

<sup>240</sup> Kaiser, *Using Europe, Abusing the Europeans*, 87; Ellison, *Threatening Europe*, 45.

<sup>241</sup> Ellison, *Threatening Europe*, 23.

<sup>242</sup> Milward, *The Rise and Fall of a National Strategy*, 125.



which sprung the European Economic Community that Macmillan's Britain would haphazardly attempt to join in 1961. It is to the crucial year of 1955, the last before Britain would begin to belatedly come to the realization that it had to face up to its scaled-down capabilities and could no longer afford, either politically or economically, to keep the closest ties possible with the Commonwealth at the expense of staying outside of the emerging European community, that we now turn.

## CHAPTER 4: OUT OF THE COMMON MARKET

*I do not myself think that the movement for European economic integration is losing ground and will collapse: rather the reverse. The very strength of the present vested interests in Europe makes people more and more inclined to go for drastic 'across the board' solutions like the Common Market, and to be impatient with the sort of piecemeal work which has so far been accomplished.*<sup>243</sup>

--- Russell Bretherton, 1955

*The French will never go into the 'common market' – the German industrialists and economists equally dislike it.*<sup>244</sup>

--- Harold Macmillan, 1955

Anthony Eden at last ascended to the role of Prime Minister of April 6, 1955, replacing his long-time boss Churchill. The man who had been in waiting for the leadership of the Conservative Party for more than a decade finally had the top role in British politics, a position solidified by a substantially increased Conservative majority in the election Eden decided to call upon entering office. But on his arrival at No. 10 Downing Street he changed very little from Churchill's Cabinet, only moving Macmillan from Defense to the Foreign Office and promoting Selwyn Lloyd to Defense. This would be a ministry of continuity, not change, and it would be evident in the Eden government's stance towards Europe, which would differ little from Churchill's in that it carried a heavy distrust of European entanglements.<sup>245</sup> Going forward, the decision from a third

---

<sup>243</sup> Milward, *The Rise and Fall of a National Strategy*, 213.

<sup>244</sup> Macmillan, diary entry of December 14, 1955 in *The Macmillan Diaries, Volume I*, 517.

<sup>245</sup> Beloff, *The General Says No*, 73; Grob-Fitzgibbon, *Continental Drift*, 202-203.

successive Prime Minister to yet again keep Britain outside the early processes of European integration would have a major impact on Britain's relationship with Europe.

Arguably, it was in 1955 that the United Kingdom reached the point of no return. This was the year when the six countries of the European Coal and Steel Community would start the vital process of forming the European Economic Community, which for the first time created a European customs union and a single market for goods, labor, services, and capital across the six EEC member states. The 'Common Market' would go on to become an economic powerhouse in the late 1950's and 1960's, leaving Britain in the dust just as the Commonwealth started to become drastically less important for British trade.<sup>246</sup> And once again, due entirely to its own making, Britain found itself on the outside looking in.<sup>247</sup> This self-exclusion from the EEC, which three successive prime ministers after Eden would attempt to correct, set the stage for the next two decades of British relations with its Western European neighbors as Britain struggled to reconcile its interests with the burgeoning EEC.<sup>248</sup>

### The Messina Conference

While the road towards a European Common Market started at the Messina Conference, a meeting of the six Foreign Ministers of the European Coal and Steel

---

<sup>246</sup> For the years of 1958-1970, the United Kingdom's gross national product rose from \$65 to \$121 billion, or a growth in GNP per head of \$1258 to \$2170. During this same period, the GNP of the Six skyrocketed from \$163 to \$485 billion, or \$955 to \$2557 per head. Meanwhile, the sterling became the most stagnant area of British exports, with its share of total British exports diminishing from 48% in 1950 to 27% in 1970; Kitzinger, *Diplomacy and Persuasion*, 28-29.

<sup>247</sup> Macmillan admitted the mistake in his memoirs, writing that Britain "should have been more alert to the dangers" in 1955. Quoted in Harold Macmillan, *Riding the Storm, 1956-1959* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 69.

<sup>248</sup> Helen Parr, *Britain's Policy Towards the European Community: Harold Wilson and Britain's World Role, 1964-1967* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 1.

Communities nations held over the course of three days at the start of June 1955, the idea that this non-descript tourist town in Sicily would be the hometown of the EEC would have seemed absurd to many in British official circles in the weeks ahead of the conference. Summing up the overriding opinion, Gladwyn Jebb, the United Kingdom's Ambassador to France, wrote in a memorandum the day before the conference began that "no very spectacular developments are to be expected, as a result of ... Messina."<sup>249</sup> It wasn't just the politicians and Whitehall civil servants, either, as not a single British media correspondent was sent to cover conference.<sup>250</sup>

As ever when it came to Britons and the topic of European integration, this was a total misread of the situation. Twelve days before the conference was to begin the Benelux countries (Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg) had sent a joint memorandum to the other ECSC nations that would change the shape of Western Europe for ever. This message, dated May 20, contained suggestions for a general common market. This would extend the customs union that had already been created among the three by the Benelux Agreement of 1948 to the rest of the Six and any others who wished to join.<sup>251</sup> The Benelux memorandum suggested that the proposed common market be administered by a strong central authority, although the exact division of power between such an institution and the national governments remained to be hammered out.<sup>252</sup>

However, while it skirted the 'intergovernmental vs. supra-national' argument in the

---

<sup>249</sup> John W. Young, "British Officials and European Integration, 1944-60", in *Building Postwar Europe: National Decision Makers and European Institutions, 1948-63*, edited by Anne Deighton (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), 95.

<sup>250</sup> Young, *This Blessed Plot*, 78.

<sup>251</sup> Colin Pilkington, *Britain and the European Union Today*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), 10; Jones, *Britain and the European Union*, 13.

<sup>252</sup> Kaiser, *Using Europe, Abusing the Europeans*, 28.

wake of the failure of the European Defense Community the previous year, the Benelux memo did decisively make the point that an institution granted with real power would be essential for any common market: “the establishment of a European Economic Community, in the sense meant by the Benelux countries, necessarily presupposes the establishment of a common authority endowed with the powers necessary to the realisation of the agreed objectives.”<sup>253</sup>

The reaction of British officials was typically dismissive; when given a memorandum by Paul Henri-Spaak<sup>254</sup> on the subject of the proposed customs union in late May, Christopher Warner, British Ambassador to Belgium, considered its contents “extremely woolly and impractical.”<sup>255</sup> Two weeks before Messina, an official in Foreign Office had minuted that Britain should “continue to deprecate, if asked, any further measures of economic integration at this stage.” And the day before the meeting began, John Coulson, a senior official in the FO, wrote that “there can of course be no question of our entering any organization of a supra-national character.”<sup>256</sup>

It was an inauspicious start, but one totally in keeping with the wishes of the minister leading the department. At the beginning of June 1955, Macmillan had sent a direction on European unity to his underlings. It read, “Our purpose should definitely be, in my view, the strengthening of everything that leads to the unity of Europe on a basis

---

<sup>253</sup> Miriam Camps, *Britain and the European Community, 1955-1963* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1964), 28.

<sup>254</sup> As we will see, Spaak, who had previously been Prime Minister of Belgium on three occasions as well as the President of the Common Assembly of the ECSC and the President of the United Nations General Assembly, would go on to play a major role in the formation of the EEC.

<sup>255</sup> Young, “British Officials and European Integration, 1944-60”, 95.

<sup>256</sup> Young, *This Blessed Plot*, 82.

which is acceptable to the British government, that is what we used to call a confederation as opposed to the federal concept.”<sup>257</sup> Macmillan wasn’t saying anything new here; in fact, it could have been copied right out of the playbook of his predecessors at the Foreign Office, Bevin and Eden. Ministers came and went, but the FO’s policy remained the same.<sup>258</sup> The British response to the common market proposal was the outcome of an agreed wisdom at the official level in Whitehall, which would be unchallenged by top ministers, that the common market conflicted with stated British policy and should consequently be resisted.<sup>259</sup> As with the Schuman proposals in 1950, the British continued to believe that involvement in a West European common market was objectionable because it would undercut British independence, devastate Commonwealth preferences, lead to a disorder in Britain’s economic practices and blunt the search for freer world trade by erecting the customs union tariffs on imports from outside nations.<sup>260</sup> The Benelux nations’ proposal didn’t fit into the concept of what Britain thought European integration should look like. And in any case, the British believed that the efforts of the Six would fail, much as they had with the earlier ECSC proposal; certainly, less than one year after the failure of the EDC, most British ministers “were, if anything, bored by the apparently futile efforts of the Six.”<sup>261</sup> These judgements would continually cloud the minds of British ministers and officials in the critical months ahead.

---

<sup>257</sup> Macmillan, *Riding the Storm*, 69.

<sup>258</sup> Kaiser, *Using Europe, Abusing the Europeans*, 43.

<sup>259</sup> Simon Burgess and Geoffrey Edwards, “The Six plus One: British Policy-Making and the Question of European Economic Integration, 1955,” *International Affairs* Vol. 64, no. 3 (1988): 393-413.

<sup>260</sup> Young, “British Officials and European Integration, 1944-60”, 95.

<sup>261</sup> Kaiser, *Using Europe, Abusing the Europeans*, 44.

Out of the Messina Conference (held June 1-3) came the words that European federalists had been working towards for years.<sup>262</sup> The Messina resolution states that,

The Governments of the Federal German Republic, Belgium, France, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands believe that the time has come to make a fresh advance towards the building of Europe. They are of the opinion that this must be achieved, first of all, in the economic field. They consider that it is necessary to work for the establishment of a united Europe by the development of common institutions, the progressive fusion of national economies, the creation of a common market and the progressive harmonisation of their social policies. Such a policy seems to them indispensable if Europe is to maintain her position in the world, regain her influence and prestige and achieve a continuing increase in the standard of living of her population.<sup>263</sup>

On the basis of this resolution, the Messina Conference attendees agreed to set up an *ad hoc* committee under Spaak's chairmanship to scrutinize numerous proposals for restarting the process of European integration.<sup>264</sup> At Messina, the Six also decided to invite Britain to join the preparatory talks in Brussels and possible subsequent negotiations, despite the fact that Britain was not a full-fledged member of the ECSC. From the very beginning of the process, Britain would in fact afforded special treatment rendered to no other non-member of the ECSC. Spaak had even shown the draft of the Benelux memorandum to the British before he showed it to the Germans, French or Italians. His first priority, he had told Warner, was not to be seen doing anything behind Britain's back.<sup>265</sup> And after the conference, Dutch Foreign Minister Johan Willem Beyen conveyed in a meeting with British Chancellor of the Exchequer R.A. Butler on June 21

---

<sup>262</sup> Pilkington, *Britain and the European Union Today*, 11.

<sup>263</sup> The National Archives, CAB 129/76, R.A. Butler, "European Integration", Annex A, June 29, 1955. For the full text of the communique released at the end of the Messina Conference, see Appendix C.

<sup>264</sup> Milward, *The Rise and Fall of a National Strategy*, 177; Pilkington, *Britain and the European Union Today*, 11.

<sup>265</sup> Young, *This Blessed Plot*, 81.

that “the six countries very much hoped that the United Kingdom” would be able to accept the invitation.<sup>266</sup> The Six, it seemed, desperately wanted Britain integrated in the scheme. The question was, did Britain want the Six?

### Britain Responds

These overtures seem to barely have registered in Britain, despite the fact that the Messina communique was quite obviously a major step on the way towards a full-fledged customs union and common market. In fact, the British response was littered with condescension. A few days after the conference Butler said he had heard of “some archaeological excavations” at an old Sicilian town, intoning that Britain regarded the venture as digging up a past that would better remain buried. Butler also scribbled “very weak and uninteresting” in the margin of the first Treasury paper he saw setting out the Messina communique.<sup>267</sup> The Chancellor’s tone did not misrepresent British establishment opinion. On June 15, 1955, in his maiden speech to the House of Commons as Foreign Secretary, Macmillan referred to “important events” during the previous weeks that “marked the opening of a new phase in post-war European history.”<sup>268</sup> Amongst these were the formal end of Western Germany’s occupation and its accession to NATO. However, Macmillan somehow made no reference in his speech to the Messina Conference and its resolution to find a way towards a common market.<sup>269</sup>

Macmillan’s omission of the Messina conference from his catalog of significant

---

<sup>266</sup> The National Archives, CAB 129/76, R.A. Butler, “European Integration”, Annex B, June 29, 1955.

<sup>267</sup> Young, *This Blessed Plot*, 83.

<sup>268</sup> Hansard, House of Commons debate, June 15, 1955.

<sup>269</sup> Macmillan seems to have given little attention to the matter privately as well. From April through November of 1955, there is only one fleeting reference in his diary to the Messina Conference.



European events was an early sign of Britain's distrust of the Six's plans, which would later ensure that Britain was not one of the founding members of the EEC.<sup>270</sup>

Despite the oversight in his June 15 speech, Macmillan was certainly completely conscious of this most recent and remarkable manifestation of the Six's resolve to advance Western European integration. On same day as his Commons speech, Macmillan had also officially notified the Luxembourg Minister of Foreign Affairs that the British government would "consider most carefully" their response to an invitation from the Six to participate in studies for a European Common Market.<sup>271</sup> This invitation came largely due to the belief among the Six that the failure of the EDC was due to Britain's refusal to partake in the scheme, and that the support of the British government would be a basic prerequisite for the realization of any endeavor at further integration.<sup>272</sup> And in marked contrast to the situation five years earlier, when France had insisted on British consent to a supranational authority as a precondition for participating in the Schuman talks, Britain would be allowed to participate in the Committee's work on any terms it chose.<sup>273</sup> This was confirmed by Beyen in his June 21 meeting with Butler.<sup>274</sup>

In response to the invitation, Butler had his officials draw up a report on the implications of the communique issued after the Messina Conference. As the only memorandum in all of 1955 drawn up by Whitehall officials and meant for Cabinet ministers' eyes in response to the Messina objectives and the resulting negotiations, it

---

<sup>270</sup> Ellison, *Threatening Europe*, 13.

<sup>271</sup> Ellison, *Threatening Europe*, 13.

<sup>272</sup> Kaiser, *Using Europe, Abusing the Europeans*, 28.

<sup>273</sup> Camps, *Britain and the European Community, 1955-1963*, 30.

<sup>274</sup> The National Archives, CAB 129/76, R.A. Butler, "European Integration", Annex B, June 29, 1955.

deserves special inspection. In the report, dated June 29, it is clear that the Treasury's view was that Messina's economic plans were highly suspect. It begins by reminding ministers that, "We have repeatedly made it clear that we cannot accept as an objective for ourselves the creation of or participation in a common market." However, it may be "the intention of the six Governments that they should do no more than consult with us as to how best they could achieve a common market among themselves. We could not object to this; but the process which they envisage would almost certainly affect the obligations which the six Governments (and also the United Kingdom) already have to the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade and the Organisation for European Economic Co-operation." The threat to the United Kingdom was that, "developments of this kind may lead to some form of discriminatory bloc in Europe, even though the six countries profess that their aim is to encourage competition and economic efficiency by creating a wider and freer market."

The officials went on to list the possible pitfalls of Britain accepting an invitation to participate in the building of a common market in which they could not participate: "The United Kingdom does not accept the objectives on which the six countries have agreed in principle, and joining in discussion to work out the means of achieving their aims must not be taken to commit us in any way to joining or supporting any common institutions which may be set up. This reservation should be made publicly known, to avoid any misunderstanding of our position either at home or in Europe."<sup>275</sup> Much like they had in May 1950 in the wake of Schuman's proposals, British officials were already

---

<sup>275</sup> The National Archives, CAB 129/76, R.A. Butler, "European Integration", June 29, 1955.

conceding that they could not, through negotiation, broker their way into any proposed scheme for closer European integration by bargaining the other nations towards a proposal that would be more acceptable to Britain. This early resignation that Britain could not steer the proposed economic union towards their own interests would prove far too premature as the year went on, but the position never changed: Britain could not possibly enter into what the Six were proposing.

However, the officials said this did not mean that Britain should stay away from the proposed negotiations entirely: "It is not suggested that we should reject an invitation to take part in discussions." This was because "Politically, refusal to have anything to do with the work of the Preparatory Committee would undoubtedly be misunderstood by the countries launching it." Plus, while "there was much in these proposals as they stand at present which is unacceptable ... in itself this may be an argument for joining the discussions. We cannot stop the six countries doing what they want, but if we accept their invitation we can seek to ensure that their actions are as little prejudicial to our interests as possible." And moreover, though Britain might have preferred "a pause for thought in Europe before any re-opening of controversial issues, we have a strong interest in any new links binding Germany with the West and, in principle, can only look with favour on efforts by the Messina countries to achieve closer association between themselves, provided their association does not create a cleavage between them and us."<sup>276</sup>

Still, the consensus in both the Foreign Office and the Treasury was that the Spaak Committee would be on a wild goose chase and that the discussions would

---

<sup>276</sup> The National Archives, CAB 129/76, R.A. Butler, "European Integration", June 29, 1955.

ultimately lead nowhere.<sup>277</sup> At a high-level Foreign Office meeting on June 29 to review European policy, Macmillan declared, “We had always been inclined to say rather loosely that we did not mind other European powers federating if they wished, but in fact if they did so and became really strong it might be very embarrassing for us. Europe would be handed over to the Germans, a state of affairs which we had fought two wars to prevent.”<sup>278</sup> In the view of his senior officials, with this statement the foreign secretary had dictated “a complete thumbs down on Messina.”<sup>279</sup>

The Treasury report of the same days expresses the same misgivings, stating that “The impression obtained from the discussion with Dr. Beyen was that the proposals of the Messina Conference were strongly influenced by political motives. They have not been very carefully thought out and may well increase rather than reduce the difficulties of the movement towards multilateral trading policies which are being pursued in other international organisations. It is thought therefore that it would be better not to become too closely identified with the deliberations of the Preparatory Committee.” As a result, the officials recommended to ministers that, “When we receive an invitation to take part in the work of the Preparatory Committee, we should accept, but as observers only.”<sup>280</sup>

The Cabinet considered the treasury officials’ report the next day on June 30, nearly a full month after the conclusion of the Messina conference and just 10 days before Spaak’s committee was scheduled to commence its work. The conclusions from

---

<sup>277</sup> Alistair Horne, *Harold Macmillan: Volume II, 1957-1986* (New York: Viking, 1989), 30; Milward, *The Rise and Fall of a National Strategy*, 210.

<sup>278</sup> Ellison, *Threatening Europe*, 18.

<sup>279</sup> Peter Mangold, *The Almost Impossible Ally: Harold Macmillan and Charles De Gaulle* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2006), 79.

<sup>280</sup> The National Archives, CAB 129/76, R.A. Butler, “European Integration”, June 29, 1955.

the Cabinet meeting state that “in the discussion support was expressed for the view that the utmost caution was required on our part in relation to the specified objectives of the six E.C.S.C. countries. It was suggested, on the other hand, that we ought not to create the impression that we disapproved of their efforts to promote a greater measure of economic integration between themselves.” Butler wholeheartedly agreed with the report’s findings, not a surprise considering it was his department that had drawn them up. He recommended “that we should agree to take part in the work of the proposed Preparatory Committee as observers only, and subject to suitable reservations about our attitude to the specified objectives.”<sup>281</sup>

However, Macmillan disagreed, arguing that “while we should preserve our full freedom of action and make it clear that we were not in any way committed to joining any body or bodies which might eventually be set up, we might be able to exercise a greater influence in the forthcoming discussions if we were to enter them on the same footing as the other countries concerned and not in the capacity of an observer.” Instead of simply an official, Macmillan wanted to send a minister. Clearly uninterested in the shenanigans of the continentals that in all likelihood would come to nothing anyway, and in a meeting that included 10 other subjects, the Cabinet simply, ‘Authorised the Foreign Secretary and the Chancellor of the Exchequer to settle, in consultation, the terms of the reply to be sent to the invitation to participate in the forthcoming discussions on this subject.’<sup>282</sup>

---

<sup>281</sup> The National Archives, CAB 128/29, “Europe: Economic Integration”, Cabinet conclusions, June 30, 1955.

<sup>282</sup> The National Archives, CAB 128/29, “Europe: Economic Integration”, Cabinet conclusions, June 30, 1955.

It was Butler, with the support of the Prime Minister and most of Whitehall, who would win out over Macmillan.<sup>283</sup> This was despite the protestations of Anthony Nutting, Macmillan's number two as the Minister of State in the Foreign Office and Eden's former protégé, who later said he "begged Anthony to let me go as an observer, just to sit there, just to show some presence."<sup>284</sup> But to send a minister would at least have guaranteed a certain equality of representation with the Six. That degree of distinction, of "favoring Europe with its brightest stars," was precisely what Whitehall did not want."<sup>285</sup> Macmillan succeeded only so far as convincing the Cabinet to settle on the compromise solution of sending not an observer or a delegate but a 'representative.'<sup>286</sup> However, in the letter answering the Six's invitation to participate in the studies for the common market, Macmillan was forced to coldly insist that, "There are, as you are no doubt aware, special difficulties for this country in any proposal for a 'European common market'" and that the British government would only be "happy to examine, without prior commitment and on their merits, the many problems which are likely to emerge from the studies and in doing so will be guided by the hope of reaching solutions which are in the best interests of all parties concerned."<sup>287</sup>

The June 30 meeting was to be the only Cabinet discussion on the Messina Conference and the resulting common market negotiations for the rest of 1955. The British ministers, it seems, were so convinced that the Messina initiatives would

---

<sup>283</sup> Pilkington, *Britain and the European Union Today*, 12.

<sup>284</sup> Charlton, *The Price of Victory*, 169.

<sup>285</sup> Young, *This Blessed Plot*, 83.

<sup>286</sup> Kaiser, *Using Europe, Abusing the Europeans*, 45.

<sup>287</sup> Horne, *Harold Macmillan: Volume I, 1894-1956*, 363; Camps, *Britain and the European Community, 1955-1963*, 30.

ultimately fail that they saw no reason to discuss it. Eden and Macmillan, especially, were much more concerned with other issues, such as East-West *détente* and Cyprus emergency. The Cabinet was hardly pushed by their own backbenchers or the opposition, either. The Messina Conference was not even mentioned in the House of Commons until June 1956, when Boothby submitted a written parliamentary question about British European policy that led to a short debate in July.<sup>288</sup> This complete abdication of the issue by the politicians left the civil servants to play the major role in shaping British policy on European integration in 1955.<sup>289</sup> From July through November, then, the British governmental debate on British European policy instead took place almost exclusively at the official level. For these officials, it was enough to know that in Cabinet there was little support for any major reorientation in government policy towards Europe.<sup>290</sup>

#### Bretherton Goes to Brussels

The official chosen for the job of leading the British delegation to the Spaak Committee was Russell Bretherton, an Under-Secretary at the Board of Trade who forever after would be known for his “infamous role” in the Spaak Committee.<sup>291</sup> One historian deemed Bretherton “the wrong man in the wrong place, representing the wrong policy.”<sup>292</sup> Another called him “an obscure middle-ranking official” and deems “his presence at the scene of combat was designed not to intimidate but to insult ... He was a

---

<sup>288</sup> Kaiser, *Using Europe, Abusing the Europeans*, 59.

<sup>289</sup> Young, “British Officials and European Integration, 1944-60”, 95-96.

<sup>290</sup> Kaiser, *Using Europe, Abusing the Europeans*, 28, 43.

<sup>291</sup> Ellison, *Threatening Europe*, 14.

<sup>292</sup> Thomas Raineau, “Europeanising Whitehall? The British Civil Service and Europe, 1957-1972”, in *Europeanisation in the 20<sup>th</sup> century: The Historical Lens*, edited by Matthieu Osmont, Emilia Robin-Hivert, Katja Seidel, Mark Spoerer and Christian Wenkel (Brussels: P.I.E. Lang, 2012), 59.

nominee, void of power or status or the faintest resemblance to the roaring British lion, whom the politicians sent to register their continuing absence from the integration of Europe.”<sup>293</sup> In large part, Bretherton was a ‘sacrificial agent’ sent to do the dirty work constructed for him by his superiors in London. His role was make limited contributions to the Six’s discussions on a Common Market, and report the developments back to London.<sup>294</sup> He was given no plenipotentiary powers, apparently due to Britain’s confidence that the Committee would break down with nothing accomplished.<sup>295</sup> As the Whitehall official history states, “Bretherton could not have had a weaker hand to play” as he sat in on the Spaak Committee’s work.<sup>296</sup>

The committee first met in Brussels on July 9, setting itself the incredibly quick deadline of completing their preliminary work by October 1.<sup>297</sup> Bretherton’s instructions from his superiors were clearly to serve as a restraint on the committee’s work and attempt to place a damper on any move towards the creation of supranational institutions.<sup>298</sup> It was essential, he was told, to make the Six understand that if they were again up to their ‘supranational tricks’ they could not expect London to take them seriously.<sup>299</sup> As a result, at the very first meeting of the committee, Bretherton made it clear that he was not a delegate but a ‘representative.’ This was intended to specify that the British were ready to take an active part in the work of the Committee, but that they

---

<sup>293</sup> Young, *This Blessed Plot*, 71.

<sup>294</sup> Ellison, *Threatening Europe*, 14.

<sup>295</sup> Pilkington, *Britain and the European Union Today*, 12.

<sup>296</sup> Milward, *The Rise and Fall of a National Strategy*, 207.

<sup>297</sup> Camps, *Britain and the European Community, 1955-1963*, 29; Young, *This Blessed Plot*, 81.

<sup>298</sup> Horne, *Harold Macmillan: Volume I, 1894-1956*, 363.

<sup>299</sup> Beloff, *The General Says No*, 74.



were doing so without the prior commitment to the Messina resolution that the other six countries shared.<sup>300</sup> Considering that the other participants were committed towards this goal as stated out in the Messina communique, Bretherton's opening statement spawned the worst possible feelings and set the tone for British participation.<sup>301</sup> This was confirmed decades later by Robert Rothschild, a member of Spaak's team, who said he could "still see (Bretherton's) face in front of me. He usually had a rather cynical and amused smile on his face, and he looked at us like naughty children, not really mischievous, but enjoying themselves by playing a game which had no relevance and no future."<sup>302</sup> Much as it would be three years later, when Macmillan tried to pressure Charles De Gaulle into "giving up" the by-then established Common Market and as a result pushing the French President into the hands of the other five EEC nations, the signal service played by Bretherton was to unite the rest of the Six against him and motivate them even more to find common ground on a common market.<sup>303</sup>

There were two deep-seated differences between the UK and the Six that became evident from the very start: First, the British preference for a free trade area rather than a customs union; second, the British desire to make maximum use of the seven-year-old Organization for European Economic Cooperation and continue to use the OEEC intergovernmental method rather than to establish new institutions. While the Six did not share Britain's preference for a free trade area, due to the fact that unlike the customs union it would not include a common external tariff, they regarded it as a reasonable

---

<sup>300</sup> Camps, *Britain and the European Community, 1955-1963*, 30.

<sup>301</sup> Horne, *Harold Macmillan: Volume I, 1894-1956*, 363.

<sup>302</sup> Charlton, *The Price of Victory*, 180.

<sup>303</sup> Jean Lacouture, *De Gaulle: The Ruler, 1945-1970* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1992), 213.

position to take. However, what they did not find reasonable was Britain's insistence that little new machinery outside the OEEC framework was required and that most of the objectives sought at Messina might be better pursued by strengthening the OEEC. While the Six had yet to agree on what kind of institutions they wanted, all of them were sure that the OEEC would not be suitable for these new responsibilities and that new institutions would be required.<sup>304</sup>

It was clear from the start what direction the Spaak Committee was heading in, and Bretherton's first report from Brussels should have sent shivers up the spine of his superiors in London. The first meeting of the committee, he wrote, had shown "firm determination to implement the Messina proposals." And on his first trip back to London, he told colleagues that his brief, which was to "steer Spaak Britain's way" was unlikely to be achieved. The Customs Union was already almost agreed in principle. In a short amount of time, Bretherton became well aware that Messina had more relevance and more future than anyone in London dared imagine.<sup>305</sup> The working party had already accomplished far more than British government had anticipated, but his response was completely curbed by his watching brief.<sup>306</sup> By the end of July, Bretherton confirmed to London that Britain's preferred option of a free trade area was out of the question. Nevertheless, he would be forced by his superiors back in London to bring up the idea over and over again for the next three months.<sup>307</sup> This hardly ingratiated the British representative with his partners on the committee.

---

<sup>304</sup> Camps, *Britain and the European Community, 1955-1963*, 34, 39-40.

<sup>305</sup> Young, *This Blessed Plot*, 89.

<sup>306</sup> Pilkington, *Britain and the European Union Today*, 12.

<sup>307</sup> Kaiser, *Using Europe, Abusing the Europeans*, 47.

Bretherton had originally supposed that the British government could steer the Brussels talks in any direction, provided it was prepared to participate fully. However by early August, as he continually received wholly negative directives from London, Bretherton began to realize that his brief to ‘influence’ and ‘steer’ was a complete illusion.<sup>308</sup> In a memo on August 4 summing up his difficulties, he warned that “If we take an active part in trying to guide the final propositions ... it will be difficult to avoid the presumption that we are, in some sense, committed to the results.”<sup>309</sup> In other words, how could he insist on a certain point, get it accepted into the committee’s conclusions, and then back out on the whole deal if Britain decided that it could not be party to the final result? But, on the other hand, if he took the other option and sat back and said “nothing, it’s pretty certain that many more things will get into the report which would be unpleasant from the UK point of view whether we in the end took part in the Common Market or not.”<sup>310</sup> With his superiors in London constantly disregarding Bretherton’s warnings that the Six could succeed with or without Britain, the strategy of cooperation without commitment became a complete farce.<sup>311</sup> In fact, by the end of August, Bretherton received an instruction from London “not to imply, in saying that certain features of the proposals would make it very difficult for the UK to join, that we would join if our points were met.” So, in reality, even if Bretherton got his way on every single point, Britain still wouldn’t necessarily say yes to the bargain.<sup>312</sup>

---

<sup>308</sup> Young, *This Blessed Plot*, 89; Kaiser, *Using Europe, Abusing the Europeans*, 47.

<sup>309</sup> Young, “British Officials and European Integration, 1944-60”, 96.

<sup>310</sup> Young, *This Blessed Plot*, 89.

<sup>311</sup> Kaiser, *Using Europe, Abusing the Europeans*, 47.

<sup>312</sup> Young, *This Blessed Plot*, 89.

This was all the more absurd a position to take as Bretherton began to become conscious of just how much there might be for Britain gain if only he was freed from his ‘cooperation without commitment’ shackles. In his August letter, he had also written, “We have, in fact the power to guide the conclusions of this conference in almost any direction we like, but beyond a certain point we cannot exercise that power without ourselves becoming, in some measure, responsible for the results.”<sup>313</sup> In an interview decades later, Bretherton went even further. When asked if he had ever begun to change his mind on Britain’s negotiating stance as the weeks went on, replied, “Oh yes.” Specifically, he recalled, France had been resolute that British entry was a precondition for her own, and was ready to pay Britain’s high price for that: “If we had been able to say that we agreed in principle, we could have got whatever kind of Common Market we wanted. I have no doubt of that at all.” But, he added, “I don’t think anybody took notice.”<sup>314</sup>

### British Reasoning

Despite Bretherton’s reports back from Brussels indicating great opportunity if Britain was willing to take some risks, the civil servant mandarins in the Foreign Office and the economic departments were clearly dead set against any British entry into a customs union and common market from the start. While already briefly addressed above, it is important to fully understand why these Whitehall departments, who completely drove Britain’s resistance to the Spaak committee talks in these months, were so against what the Six were attempting to set up. In effect, Whitehall’s resistance to the

---

<sup>313</sup> Young, *This Blessed Plot*, 90.

<sup>314</sup> Charlton, *The Price of Victory*, 184.

idea did not appear out of the blue in 1955 but was part of an engrained resistance to European integration that had been built up over the previous decade, which is examined in chapters one, two and three.

The policy decided on in Britain in 1955 was a synthesis of political and economic and commercial interests, and the Foreign Office, Treasury and Board of Trade all played a part in keeping Britain out of the EEC.<sup>315</sup> To this point, a working group of the interdepartmental Mutual Aid Committee (MAC), which evaluated international economic cooperation, worked from July through November evaluating the proposed British membership in a customs union, eventually coming down heavily against joining. Not only does a study of Whitehall in these months serve as a perfect example of British standoffishness in regards to European integration, it also shows the complexity of the decision-making structure in Britain, again reaffirming that any study of this topic can not simply try to cherry pick one reason for why Britain decided to stay aloof from the European communities in these years.

The disagreement between the Six and the United Kingdom was fundamental, which goes a long way towards explaining why it was so hard to bridge the gap between the two positions. Essentially, the key feature of the envisaged customs union under discussion in the Spaak Committee entailed the abolition of internal tariffs among the member states, and the introduction of a common external tariff for outside third countries.<sup>316</sup> The fundamental difference between the Six and Britain was on the need for

---

<sup>315</sup> Ellison, *Threatening Europe*, 14.

<sup>316</sup> Kaiser, *Using Europe, Abusing the Europeans*, 29.

this common external tariff.<sup>317</sup> It was the “idea of a common market, with its consequences for industry, for agriculture, for the Commonwealth, for almost every aspect of GDP, which attracted the highest level of British concern. That is what engaged the Whitehall combatants, and gave rise to the bedrock objection to the common market.”<sup>318</sup>

On the economic side, participation in any West European customs union and common market appeared to the Treasury as irreconcilable with British trade patterns in 1955. They had good evidence to back up this stance; taken together, in 1955 just 14 percent of British exports went to the Six, and only 25 percent to Western Europe as a whole, while nearly 50 percent still went to Commonwealth countries. So, on the face of it, partaking in a West European customs union with the common external tariff would in turn lead to ‘negative preferences’ (tariff discrimination in comparison with products coming inside the customs union) against Commonwealth products in the British market.<sup>319</sup> As a result, any membership of the common market would weaken, the Treasury maintained, the economic ties with the Commonwealth and colonies.<sup>320</sup>

Along with the all too familiar Commonwealth restraining effect, the inherent conservatism of Whitehall at the time called for caution; after all, Britain couldn’t know exactly what the economic rewards or penalties of joining the EEC might be. In that case, it was probably best to stick to the status quo. This line of thinking is clearly seen in a report from the Treasury by Burke Trend. The chairman of the MAC working group and

---

<sup>317</sup> Camps, *Britain and the European Community, 1955-1963*, 38.

<sup>318</sup> Young, *This Blessed Plot*, 88.

<sup>319</sup> Kaiser, *Using Europe, Abusing the Europeans*, 30.

<sup>320</sup> Milward, *European Rescue of the Nation State*, 426.

a rising star in Whitehall who would go on to become Cabinet Secretary in 1963, Trend's voice was an influential one throughout the civil service. His report, dated October 14, stated:

If the basic assumption is that the United Kingdom's abstention from this project would cause it to collapse, and if the comparison is, therefore, between the preservation of the status quo and a common market incorporating the United Kingdom, it is extremely difficult to strike any clear balance of economic advantage and disadvantage. But it would be very venturesome to argue that the net benefits, which the United Kingdom might expect to derive, in the long run, from membership of a European common market which it had encouraged to come into being would be greater than the benefits which it might hope to derive, in the absence of a European common market, from the continued pursuit of its existing policies for the expansion of world trade.<sup>321</sup>

The Board of Trade shared the Treasury's structural opposition to the Messina Six. On July 13, in the MAC it had presented a sturdy defense of British non-involvement in any common market, advising that Britain's balance of payments position, especially in relation to the dollar area, and world-wide trade commitments with the United States, the Sterling Area, and the Commonwealth would be hindered by membership of a Common Market. Joining a Common Market, which would in turn mean an end to the imperial preference system, was anathema to the Board.<sup>322</sup> Of course, this analysis by both the Treasury and Board of Trade largely ignored the fact that the Australian and the Canadian economies were becoming more and more integrated in the Pacific and the North American economic spheres, respectively, and moving away from a reliance on Britain.<sup>323</sup> This would hit home in the years ahead, when the dominions would ask to renegotiate the preference system that had been set up back in 1932. But in 1955 the

---

<sup>321</sup> Milward, *The Rise and Fall of a National Strategy*, 208.

<sup>322</sup> Ellison, *Threatening Europe*, 23-24.

<sup>323</sup> Kaiser, *Using Europe, Abusing the Europeans*, 31.

British government was determined not to erode or abolish Commonwealth preference, which would be inescapable in the Six's proposed scheme.<sup>324</sup>

This is why London's economic departments urged Bretherton to argue so strongly in favor of a free trade area, which would not include the common external tariff. However, the Six had agreed that the Common Market should have the form of a customs union, not a free trade area, as Beyen had told Butler in their June 21 meeting.<sup>325</sup> For one, the Six felt that the Messina resolution had implied a customs union since it had listed the "gradual unification of their tariffs against third countries" as the topic to be studied by Spaak's committee. In addition, it also became clear that the Six recognized the unifying effect of a common tariff, and as a result wanted a customs union for psychological and political as well as for practical and economic reasons.<sup>326</sup> Thus, opposition towards the Six became the prevailing view in the Treasury. Edward Bridges, the Permanent Secretary in the department, went so far as to tell his boss Butler that it had been a "great pity" that anyone from Britain had been sent to work with Spaak. Indicating a strong prejudicial religious element, Bridges also asserted that he was firmly convinced that Britain should have no part, as it only "appeals to European Catholic federalists."<sup>327</sup>

Bridges had been the Treasury's top official since 1946, and his longevity in the role goes a long way towards explaining the department's continued reticence to join any kind of European economic union. This included Bevin's proposals in 1948 and

---

<sup>324</sup> Lamb, "Macmillan and Europe", 77.

<sup>325</sup> The National Archives, CAB 129/76, R.A. Butler, "European Integration", Annex B, June 29, 1955.

<sup>326</sup> Camps, *Britain and the European Community, 1955-1963*, 39.

<sup>327</sup> Young, *This Blessed Plot*, 91.



Schuman's plan in 1950, and Treasury policy in 1955 was simply a broadening of this previous resistance. In the late 1940's, the department had claimed that the primacy of the Sterling Area made extra-European trade more important than intra-European trade. And from the early 1950s, the Treasury had also persevered in its goal of reestablishing sterling as an international currency. Any European-only institutions lay in direct contrast of these policies.<sup>328</sup> In spite of an accumulation of evidence that Britain's economic security was not being sufficiently delivered by these Treasury policies, there was no challenge to the established view and the assertion that leadership of Western Europe could best be sustained through strength from outside of Europe went unquestioned in 1955. Laziness had a part to play as well. In contrast to France, which embarked on a thorough study into the relative manufacturing costs in a wide range of European industries, Britain decided to dust off a report written by a group of economists that Bevin and Cripps had commissioned way back in 1947. Of course, this had nothing to say about the pattern of trade since that time, but the nonchalance of the British attitude again exposed the fact that few in the Treasury thought that the Messina resolution would actually lead to a common market.<sup>329</sup>

On the political side, the Foreign Office presented the broader arguments in such a manner as to lead to the apparently inevitable conclusion that membership in the common market was irreconcilable with Britain's world power role. Much as the Treasury went back to the 1940's for its contention that Britain should stay out of the common market, a FO memorandum from September 1955 simply reaffirmed the

---

<sup>328</sup> Ellison, *Threatening Europe*, 21.

<sup>329</sup> Milward, *European Rescue of the Nation State*, 426.

customary policy of the country since Churchill's 1946 Zurich speech: supporting integration from outside whenever it went further than intergovernmental cooperation. The memo went on to explain that Britain could in no way join in a common market, because membership would result in a prejudiced emphasis on the European role, ending the equilibrium of the three circles doctrine. Membership in a West European customs union would also endanger the political cohesion of the Commonwealth by weakening the Commonwealth nations' confidence in British leadership. Accordingly, the diplomatic repercussions would be so harmful as to eliminate any prospect of British participation. Edmond Hall-Patch's warning to Bevin all the way back in 1947 that there was "a west-established prejudice in Whitehall against a European Customs Union" continued to prove accurate eight years later.<sup>330</sup>

Consequently, there was an explicit consensus in the FO, shared by Macmillan, that participation in a common market in Western Europe was neither in Britain's wider interest, nor was it politically realistic.<sup>331</sup> Other departments jumped on the same bandwagon. Harry Crookshank, the private secretary to the Secretary of State for Commonwealth relations, agreed wholeheartedly, warning in September that "if we join in these later stages, we would be in danger of finding ourselves drawn step by step, possibly over many years, into a European Customs Union, which would require us to give priority to the development of our trade with Europe at the expense of our trade with the Commonwealth."<sup>332</sup> Thusly, with the full support of his department as well as others, in September Macmillan refused to attend an ECSC foreign minister's conference, which

---

<sup>330</sup> Milward, *The Rise and Fall of a National Strategy*, 25.

<sup>331</sup> Kaiser, *Using Europe, Abusing the Europeans*, 36-37, 43.

<sup>332</sup> Milward, *The Rise and Fall of a National Strategy*, 206.

reviewed the Spaak Committee's work up to that point, to avoid too close an identification with the Six.<sup>333</sup>

As evidenced by Macmillan's quote in the epitaph at the start of this chapter, the Foreign Office also simply did not think that either the French or Germans would be prepared to compromise their independence in a Common Market.<sup>334</sup> The proposed customs union would find the two largest countries differing over tariff levels. The conflicts of national interest were too great for any agreement to be reached.<sup>335</sup> This analysis wildly underestimated the motives both nations had for wanting a common market. For the French, it might "be just the means for obliging the laggard French economy to adapt to the pace of its more dynamic neighbors and for blowing fresh competitive winds through the archaic and fusty places of French commerce."<sup>336</sup> There was also the consideration that the French were eager to repair the damage to their stature caused by their rejection of the EDC.<sup>337</sup> As for the Germans, Chancellor Konrad Adenauer was a strong Europeanist, and his determination to assimilate the new Germany with the other liberal democracies of Western Europe was only strengthened in 1955 by the complete lack of progress towards détente with the Soviet Union.<sup>338</sup> British officials seemed absolutely blind to these circumstances, or in any case completely disregarded them, throughout 1955.

---

<sup>333</sup> Young, *Britain and European Unity*, 46.

<sup>334</sup> Young, "British Officials and European Integration, 1944-60", 96.

<sup>335</sup> Young, *This Blessed Plot*, 88.

<sup>336</sup> John Newhouse, *De Gaulle and the Anglo-Saxons* (New York: The Viking Press, 1970), 54.

<sup>337</sup> Camps, *Britain and the European Community, 1955-1963*, 29.

<sup>338</sup> Young, *Britain and European Unity*, 45.

Hence, the Foreign Office's attitude dovetailed nicely with the judgements reached by the Treasury and Board of Trade, the three departments which dominated British policy towards Europe in 1955.<sup>339</sup> They all saw closer Anglo-European relations as a threat to Commonwealth ties, Britain's foreign relations and world power role, and the British economy in general. As a result, the final report of the interdepartmental MAC working group came down firmly against the United Kingdom joining the Common Market. As the final advice to ministers, dated October 27, this was the summation of Whitehall's thinking on the matter. Trend, who drafted the final report, listed four "decisive considerations" against any change in policy in favor of British membership in the proposed customs union: One, it would weaken Britain's relationship with the Commonwealth and colonies. Two, it would be contrary to Britain's approach to freer trade and payments worldwide. Three, it may "lead gradually to further integration, and ultimately to political federation, which was not acceptable to public opinion in this country." And four, British industry would no longer be protected against European competition.<sup>340</sup> As a result, Trend's report concluded "that on the whole the establishment of a European Common Market would be bad for the United Kingdom and if possible should be frustrated."<sup>341</sup> He went on to advise that "on balance" it would "be to the real and ultimate interest of the UK that the Common Market should collapse, with the result that there would be no need for the UK to face the embarrassing choice of joining it or obtaining from joining it."<sup>342</sup>

---

<sup>339</sup> Young, *Britain and European Unity*, 46.

<sup>340</sup> Young, *This Blessed Plot*, 92; Milward, *The Rise and Fall of a National Strategy*, 212.

<sup>341</sup> Milward, *The Rise and Fall of a National Strategy*, 212.

<sup>342</sup> Young, *This Blessed Plot*, 91.

These are remarkable statements, for they displace Britain's previous stated policy of 'benevolent neutrality,' which it had practiced in the case of the ECSC and EDC, in favor of advice to actively try to sabotage the Messina initiatives.<sup>343</sup> This established a switch in British policy that would last all the way up to the signing of the Treaty of Rome in March 1957, and indeed further into the future. But instead of stopping the creation of the institutions proposed by the Messina resolution, all the British government achieved was the creation of (justified) misgivings among the Six as to the British motives in Western Europe.<sup>344</sup> This well-earned reputation was to greatly burden British initiatives in the future, as Macmillan would find out the hard way in 1963.

#### Britain Goes Home

The only question, then, was how to proceed tactically in the Spaak Committee, which had missed its goal of completing its work by October 1 but seemed scheduled to wrap up by early November. An out-and-out withdrawal, the MAC working group's report said, would be "a quite considerable gamble." The Six "might go ahead without us, and they might pull it off." Equally, if they fail, Britain might be accused sabotage, the consequences of which "are not pleasant." Playing for time might not work either, as the longer Britain stayed in the negotiations, the more tied it would be to their outcome.<sup>345</sup> And staying in the negotiations and trying to shape them to British interests of a free trade area and the OEEC, which was basically the only thing Bretherton had been

---

<sup>343</sup> Trend was far from alone. In a November 1955 memo, Jebb suggested that the British government's approach to the Messina talks should be to "embrace destructively." Quoted in Grob-Fitzgibbon, *Continental Drift*, 202-203.

<sup>344</sup> Kaiser, *Using Europe, Abusing the Europeans*, 53.

<sup>345</sup> Young, *This Blessed Plot*, 91.

allowed to do for months at the Spaak Committee, was clearly a lost cause. Speaking to Thorneycroft, his boss at the Board of Trade, in October, Bretherton declared the OEEC idea as “nonsense.”<sup>346</sup> He added that “I do not myself think that the movement for European economic integration is losing ground and will collapse: rather the reverse. The very strength of the present vested interests in Europe makes people more and more inclined to go for drastic ‘across the board’ solutions like the Common Market, and to be impatient with the sort of piecemeal work which has so far been accomplished in the OEEC.”<sup>347</sup>

To the question of tactics, Bretherton summarized two possible lines of action in a memo dated October 22. They were black and white: accept membership and try to shape the common market to meet British interests, or refuse to have anything to do with it altogether. To joining, Bretherton listed three “probably insuperable” difficulties: Agriculture and industry would oppose the elimination of all tariffs against European exports; there would be significant resistance from the Commonwealth; and there would be too great a loss of control over domestic economic and financial policies. To nonparticipation, Bretherton thought there were two meaningful objections: it threatened, politically and economically, Britain’s position in Europe, and it would be interpreted as a hostile gesture.<sup>348</sup> While to Bretherton neither option seemed satisfactory, the “probably insuperable” difficulties he recorded can clearly be seen repeated in Trend’s MAC working committee report of five days later. Britain could not take part in the common

---

<sup>346</sup> Kaiser, *Using Europe, Abusing the Europeans*, 54.

<sup>347</sup> Milward, *The Rise and Fall of a National Strategy*, 213.

<sup>348</sup> Ellison, *Threatening Europe*, 30; Milward, *The Rise and Fall of a National Strategy*, 210-211.

market, and Spaak's committee was getting to the point where that's exactly what it would recommend to the Six moving forward. The end game was nigh.

Britain's seemingly two terrible options came to a head at the last meeting of the Spaak Committee on November 7. It would turn out to be one of the most controversial gatherings in the history of European integration. The meeting, whose formal purpose was to hear reports from sub-committees for inclusion into the Spaak's report for the foreign ministers of the Six, was opened by an extensive lecture from the Dutch representative on the need for supranational apparatuses to implement any recommendations made by the Committee. Afterwards, Spaak made it clear that he would be making numerous recommendations in the report, one of which would be for a common market.<sup>349</sup> Spaak then asked for comments from those who had not accepted principles of the Messina Conference (i.e. Britain).<sup>350</sup> As Bretherton got up to respond, some claim that he declared: 'Gentlemen, you are trying to negotiate something you will never be able to negotiate. But if negotiated, it will not be ratified. And if ratified, it will not work.'<sup>351</sup> While this perfectly sums up the belief of much of the British government, considering his previous statements in the October 22 memo above, it is questionable if the typically-cautious Bretherton would have spoken these words out of turn in such a situation.

What is agreed is that Bretherton proceeded to simply read out word by word, as instructed, a Foreign Office statement (or what the FO subsequently called "a fighting

---

<sup>349</sup> Milward, *The Rise and Fall of a National Strategy*, 215.

<sup>350</sup> Camps, *Britain and the European Community, 1955-1963*, 43.

<sup>351</sup> Young, *This Blessed Plot*, 93. The claim came from a member of the French delegation.

speech”) pouring cold water on the committee’s entire effort.<sup>352</sup> He claimed that British government would not participate in a customs union and, moreover, that they saw the danger of considerable overlap with the work of the OEEC.<sup>353</sup> He added that these difficulties did not appear to be diminishing. Although he reiterated that his Government had reached no final decision and wanted to study further the questions involved, the tone of the comments and the repeated emphasis on the need to avoid any duplication with the work of the OEEC were interpreted by his audience as a clear-cut signal of British unwillingness to take part in the kind of scheme that was taking shape.<sup>354</sup>

This ‘wettest of blankets,’ as Bretherton’s speech was subsequently labelled, certainly enraged Spaak.<sup>355</sup> As Bretherton said years later, “Spaak just blew up at that point.”<sup>356</sup> Bretherton claims Spaak also said, “Well, I am astonished and very hurt at this. You are just sticking to your guns. England has not moved at all, and I am not going to move either.”<sup>357</sup> What is certain is that Spaak expressed the consensus view of the Six when he commented, dryly, that certain governments seemingly could not comprehend the new environment for European integration that had been generated by the Messina conference, that the statement by Bretherton showed a tendency for Britain to admit only one form of cooperation, and that this did not correlate to the needs of the present situation.<sup>358</sup> And if there was no commitment to the Committee’s purpose and

---

<sup>352</sup> Ellison, *Threatening Europe*, 25.

<sup>353</sup> Kaiser, *Using Europe, Abusing the Europeans*, 47.

<sup>354</sup> Camps, *Britain and the European Community, 1955-1963*, 43.

<sup>355</sup> Ellison, *Threatening Europe*, 25.

<sup>356</sup> Charlton, *The Price of Victory*, 188.

<sup>357</sup> Young, *This Blessed Plot*, 93.

<sup>358</sup> Camps, *Britain and the European Community, 1955-1963*, 44; Kaiser, *Using Europe, Abusing the Europeans*, 47.



recommendations, Spaak concluded that Bretherton could play no part in drafting its report.<sup>359</sup> From this point on, due to the lack of British will to proceed on the basis of the Messina initiatives, the Six would have to progress alone.

The fierce reaction to Bretherton's statement from Spaak and the rest of the Six was undoubtedly heightened by a meeting Beyen had held with Butler only five days before. In this November 2 discussion, Butler had given reassurances that if the Six obliged to some British conditions, "they would always find us sympathetic and 'European.'" Beyen thus left London under the impression that there was a chance for a significant shift in the British position, and in days after there was hope among the Six that there was a real possibility that the United Kingdom might join in with the Six in the developing plans. It is little wonder, then, that Beyen was left in "a state of great perturbation and indignation" by the subsequent events.<sup>360</sup> Bretherton's statement, which gave not even the slightest encouragement for further British participation, had arrived as a shock. Coming as it did "on top of the false optimism aroused by Butler, the statement sounded in Brussels even more negative and unhelpful than was the intention when it was being drafted in London."<sup>361</sup>

While Spaak's remarks on November 7 did give a Britain a convenient excuse for picking up its ball and going home, there is little indication that this was what Bretherton's superiors had hoped for when they messaged him the speech. London told Bretherton to say exactly what he said, but it was seen as a form of equivocation, a delaying mechanism until they could achieve the same result of Britain's formal

---

<sup>359</sup> Milward, *The Rise and Fall of a National Strategy*, 215.

<sup>360</sup> Ellison, *Threatening Europe*, 25-27.

<sup>361</sup> Camps, *Britain and the European Community, 1955-1963*, 45.

withdrawal from the Messina initiatives.<sup>362</sup> In fact, in Trend's report from October 27, he had stated "that we should not enter the Common Market ... would not represent any change and policy and would cause no surprise in Europe."<sup>363</sup> Butler's intervention changed this rationale entirely and ensured that Bretherton's speech would fully anger the Spaak Committee members, who after all had been working at a break-neck pace the previous four months to complete the committee's assigned work.

### Reluctant Europeans

Russell Bretherton's final appearance as representative on the Spaak Committee formalized the 'parting of the ways' between Britain and the Six. While there is considerable disagreement as to the circumstances of just what happened in the meeting and directly afterwards (as in, whether Britain left on its own accord or whether it was thrown out), neither Bretherton nor any other British official took any further part in the Messina initiative deliberations after November 7.<sup>364</sup> And in reality, debate about whether Britain withdrew or was excluded has, as Whitehall's official history acknowledges, "No worthwhile point to establish" as unmistakably neither side saw any purpose in Britain being there any longer.<sup>365</sup> This was confirmed on the British end of things when the report by Trend's MAC working group was at last considered on November 11 by the Cabinet's Ministerial Economic Policy Committee, in which there was unanimous agreement "that it was against the interests of the United Kingdom to join a European

---

<sup>362</sup> Young, *This Blessed Plot*, 93.

<sup>363</sup> Milward, *The Rise and Fall of a National Strategy*, 212.

<sup>364</sup> Pilkington, *Britain and the European Union Today*, 12.

<sup>365</sup> Milward, *The Rise and Fall of a National Strategy*, 215.

Common Market.”<sup>366</sup> Britain would, as it had in 1950 with the ECSC and in 1952 with the EDC, stay out of the emerging European communities. But even more than either of those previous missed chances, this time the choice to be out would have profound consequences for the country going forward.

Unlike in 1950, at Messina the Six wanted Britain to contribute from the start with no conditions attached, and an opening to join the EEC on terms that could have suited Britain’s Commonwealth trade requirements was thrown away. As had happened many times before, this was because Britain simply could not imagine forsaking Imperial Preference and consenting to equal status within the Six by pooling national sovereignty and entering a customs union.<sup>367</sup> Membership in an integrated West European organization still seemed irreconcilable with the goal of British foreign policy to preserve its traditional world role, and nearly every leading politician from both major parties endured in the belief that Britain had always been a world power and would remain one in the future.<sup>368</sup>

External factors played a part in the decision as well. After the French rebuff of the EDC, the British government all but wrote off the likelihood that the Six would try again to go farther and faster than Britain was ready to go.<sup>369</sup> And much like in earlier years, there was little understanding in the British government of the intensity of the

---

<sup>366</sup> Ellison, *Threatening Europe*, 25-26.

<sup>367</sup> Lamb, “Macmillan and Europe”, 77.

<sup>368</sup> Kaiser, *Using Europe, Abusing the Europeans*, 55-56.

<sup>369</sup> Roger Makins, the British ambassador to the United States in 1955 point, told the State Department in a November 22 memo that “The enterprise seemed to have an air of unreality since the French position seemed very questionable.” The ambassador “doubted very much whether, when the chips were down, the French would be prepared to make the internal adjustments which would be necessary for progress towards a common market.” Quoted in Milward, *European Rescue of the Nation State*, 425.

determination for real unity, contrasted to just intergovernmental cooperation, on the continent.<sup>370</sup> The assumption in Britain was that what the Six had launched at Messina would be a mess and end in nothing. As it had been before, it was an expectation that was to be quickly confounded.<sup>371</sup>

All of these factors meant that instead of associating with Europe on its own terms, Britain left proceedings to continue without any control over them.<sup>372</sup> This proved to be a major hindrance six years later, when Britain attempted to join a club whose rules had already been set; Britain's desire to change those rules, after they had already been set, to suit its own interests in the 1961-63 negotiations was a major factor in France's ultimate veto. The six years between Bretherton's walkout and Macmillan's announcement that Britain would try to enter the EEC would prove the actions (or inactions) of Eden's government in 1955 to be unwise. Yet, at the same time, there was no great crusade from any quarter of Britain in 1955 for closer integration with the Six and greater involvement in the Messina process would have been an unparalleled action for any government to take. This was especially so at a time when manufactures to the Six in 1955 only accounted for 13 percent of total British exports, compared to 47.8 percent for the Commonwealth.<sup>373</sup> Eden's government did not join the EEC, but this was

---

<sup>370</sup> Camps, *Britain and the European Community, 1955-1963*, 45-47.

<sup>371</sup> R.A. Butler accepted his culpability years later, saying that there was "a definite lack of foresight on the part of myself, and a much bigger lack of foresight on the part of the Treasury, and a very big lack of foresight on the part of the Foreign Office ... That is how the bad start, the late start for Europe really started. The withdrawal from the Spaak Committee, Butler contended extraordinarily, had come about more than anything "through boredom ... Anthony Eden was bored by this. Frankly he was even more bored than I was." Quoted in Charlton, *The Price of Victory*, 194.

<sup>372</sup> Young, *This Blessed Plot*, 97.

<sup>373</sup> Ellison, *Threatening Europe*, 35.

no different to the paths taken by the two governments before his in regards to the emerging European institutions. Indeed, the decision not to join the common market in 1955 was simply a reiteration of the policy laid down in 1950.<sup>374</sup> It was a structural problem, centered on the Commonwealth connection and a zealous belief that Britain was a world and not just a European power, which meant that British leaders and officials saw joining in with the continentals as impossible time and time again during the first post-war decade.

Although it wasn't grasped at the time, British withdrawal from the Spaak Committee was a critical turning point in the development of relations between the Six and the UK, and the start of a lengthy period of tension between the two.<sup>375</sup> In large part, this was because withdrawal from the Spaak Committee did not solve Britain's long-term problem, the fact that a powerful customs union might now be formed on the Continent.<sup>376</sup> It was a problem that Britain would try to solve, and fail at, for nearly the next two decades.<sup>377</sup> Britain had 'missed the bus' in 1955, and in reality had never even considered buying a ticket. Trying to get on that bus in the years afterwards would prove far more difficult than anyone in 1955 could have imagined.

---

<sup>374</sup> Milward, *European Rescue of the Nation State*, 425.

<sup>375</sup> Camps, *Britain and the European Community, 1955-1963*, 45.

<sup>376</sup> Young, *Britain and European Unity*, 47.

<sup>377</sup> The first hints of unrest began to be felt as early as 1956, when it became apparent that in short order Britain could be facing a serious predicament. Thorneycroft pointed out in June 1956 that, "If we kept out of a European system we might have to face a discriminating bloc. If we joined in one we ran the risk of disrupting the structure of Imperial preference." However, he also warned that the entire system of imperial preference was likely "to erode" and suggested that "major decisions" would have to be taken soon." Macmillan concurred that Britain could not continue to "enjoy the best of both worlds indefinitely." However, when faced with the notion that the time had come to reassess the orientation of British policy, Macmillan insisted that "we were not ready to make up our minds." Quoted in Tratt, *The Macmillan Government and Europe*, 11.

## CONCLUSION

*Great Britain has lost an empire and has not yet found a role. The attempt to play a separate power role – that is, a role apart from Europe, a role based on a 'special relationship' with the United States, a role based on being the head of a 'Commonwealth' which has no political structure, or unity, or strength, and enjoys a fragile and precarious economic relationship by means of the Sterling area and preferences in the British market – this role is about played out.*<sup>378</sup>

--- Dean Acheson, 1962

Dean Acheson's speech on December 5, 1962 at the United States Military Academy has been so extensively cited in studies of post-war British foreign policy that it has almost become cliché. However, like any aphorism, Acheson's devastatingly blunt summation of British failures in the opening years after the end of the Second World War is boilerplate because it rings so true. By the early 1960's 'three circles' paradigm, so cherished by both political major United Kingdom political parties and their stout principals like Winston Churchill and Ernest Bevin, had collapsed under the weight of its own illusions. In particular, as Acheson pointed out, the Commonwealth had become a hindrance to Britain. This was true in many different spheres: economically, as the dominions quickly diversified their economies away from relying so heavily on preference arrangements; politically, as the Commonwealth grew and became more diversified (i.e., less white) and less willing to follow Britain (as shown by the forced withdrawal of apartheid South Africa from the Commonwealth in 1961); and militarily,

---

<sup>378</sup> Dean Acheson, "West Point Address of December 5, 1962". Quoted in Douglas Brinkley, "Dean Acheson and the 'Special Relationship': The West Point Speech of December 1962", *The Historical Journal* Vol 33, no. 3 (1990), 601-603.

both as Britain made specific choices that were publicly opposed by the usually-deferential dominion governments (such as the invasion of the Suez Canal in 1956) or, more generally, as Britain's overseas military footprint slowly diminished during decolonization.

While the Commonwealth moved away from Britain, the reverse was true as well. As Alan Milward, the official historian of Britain's relationship with the European Community during this period, says of the years after 1955:

In spite of the attachment shown to Commonwealth and empire as a support for Britain's status as a world power, the subsequent history of the empire (post-1955) was marked by indifference to the future of its poorer colonial territories; a lingering and commercially disadvantageous attachment to the 'Old Commonwealth' which was said to be an insurmountable barrier to entry into a European common market; a realization that this had been a mistake; an inability to decide on a European policy which would rectify that mistake and be acceptable enough to gain entry to the European Community; and the subsequent disintegration of the empire into many separate units whose cultural and economic attachment to Britain in most cases rapidly withered away.<sup>379</sup>

The destruction of the three circles policy, and in particular the Commonwealth connection that was at the very heart of it, is evident in Britain's reaction to the former U.S. Secretary of State's speech at West Point. British pride had been wounded to the point that Macmillan felt required to issue a full rebuke in a letter to the public, saying Acheson was committing "an error which had been made by quite a lot of people in the course of the last four hundred years, including Philip of Spain, Louis XIV, Napoleon, the Kaiser, and Hitler."<sup>380</sup> He added that "Mr. Acheson seems wholly to misunderstand

---

<sup>379</sup> Milward, *The European Rescue of the Nation-State*, 219.

<sup>380</sup> Louis XIV and Napoleon were favorite targets of Macmillan's. In January 1963, after France's veto of Britain's application for entry into the EEC, he wrote in his diary that "De Gaulle is trying to dominate Europe. His idea is not a partnership, but Napoleonic or

the role of the Commonwealth in world affairs.”<sup>381</sup> While the merits of comparing one of the fathers of NATO and main developers of the Marshall Plan to a fascist dictator are questionable at best, Macmillan’s private reaction was far different. For all of this public bravura, Macmillan fretted that Acheson’s discounting of Britain’s world status would add to his government’s difficulties in convincing France and other members of the European Economic Community of Britain’s value as a member.<sup>382</sup>

This non-public response is far more revealing than the public chest-beating of a punch-drunk fighter well past his best days. The three circles paradigm, the centerpiece of British foreign policy’s grand design in the post-war years, had in reality officially died more than a year before Acheson spoke, and Macmillan was the man who held the dagger. His announcement that Britain would seek entry into the EEC on July 31, 1961 was the death knell of the ‘separate power role.’ As Ted Heath, Britain’s lead negotiator during the 1961-63 negotiations, put it in his memoirs, Macmillan’s decision to seek entry into the European community “signaled the end of a glorious era, that of the British Empire, and the beginning of whole new chapter of British history. The ‘three circles’ concept ... which had been the mainstay of British foreign policy since the war, was no longer valid.”<sup>383</sup>

The fact that Macmillan actually believed that Acheson’s (a private citizen in 1962, it should be remembered) words could throw Britain’s entire EEC bargaining

---

a Louis XIV hegemony.” Macmillan, diary entry of January 28, 1963 in *The Macmillan Diaries, Volume II*, 536.

<sup>381</sup> Macmillan, *At The End of the Day: 1961-1963*, 339.

<sup>382</sup> Brinkley, "Dean Acheson and the 'Special Relationship': The West Point Speech of December 1962" 603.

<sup>383</sup> Heath, *The Course of My Life*, 203.



position into disrepute demonstrates just how precarious and weak the British government's negotiating stance had become by December 1962, just a month before Charles De Gaulle's famous press conference where he simply said "non" to British entry.<sup>384</sup> But while the story of the 1961-63 negotiations is the climax of Britain's turn towards Europe and away from the Commonwealth during Macmillan's Premiership, it cannot be adequately told without understanding what happened in the first ten years after the Second World War, when British detachment from the early European communities and the emerging process of European integration set it on a path that it, even to this day, has never quite deviated from.<sup>385</sup> It is the tale of that first decade of Britain's European saga that this thesis has endeavored to tell.

Most importantly, this thesis has tried to put the Commonwealth at the center of Britain's reluctance to become a full-fledged member of the emerging European Communities during the first post-war decade. While some of the members of the Six,

---

<sup>384</sup> De Gaulle also famously stated that "l'Angleterre, ce n'est plus grand chose" ("England is not much anymore"). For a complete description of the series of events that led up to De Gaulle's veto, see Wall, *The Official History of Britain and the European Community, Vol. II*, 7-40.

<sup>385</sup> It is worth noting that some in Britain almost immediately realized that staying out of the EEC without a backup plan had been a mistake. Macmillan was among them. Macmillan's own lame rationalization for staying out in 1955 was that it was "too late" to reverse the Attlee government's original choice not to enter the ECSC, and that neither the British electorate nor the Commonwealth were ready to consent to the EEC with its supranational elements. But in December 1955 he replaced Butler as Chancellor, and in February 1956 he wrote a letter to his permanent secretary Edward Bridges saying, "I do not like the prospect of a world divided into the Russian sphere, the American sphere and a united Europe of which we are not a member." This led to studies for an opposing plan to the Six's which ended in the formation of the European Free Trade Association in 1960 by Austria, Denmark, Norway, Portugal, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. However, the EFTA was no match for the EEC and was ineffective in establishing a useful free trade area, leading to Macmillan's decision to apply for membership into the EEC in 1961. Horne, *Harold Macmillan: Volume I, 1894-1956*, 363; Young, *This Blessed Plot*, 116.

most notably France, had overseas dependences, none belonged to an intergovernmental organization like the Commonwealth, or were restrained in their support of European integration by anything like the political, economic, military and sentimental ties that the United Kingdom possessed with its old settler dominions.<sup>386</sup> But though these ties were real and hard for any British politician (of any party) or civil service official (of any department) to overcome, this desperate attachment to the Commonwealth was also part of the great effort made to pretend that the world had not changed.<sup>387</sup>

Even as the victors in the Second World War, Britain was in a state of relative decline by 1945. It was no longer a great power (surpassed its two great wartime allies, the United States and Soviet Union) but at the same time was completely unwilling to accept a diminished role. This psychological impediment is what led the British to so completely embrace the Commonwealth as the life jacket to which it should strap its sinking fortunes to in the first decade after the war. As a result, it was out of the question to join the emerging European communities, for fear that this would drag the country down to the level of its Western European neighbors and make Britain 'just another

---

<sup>386</sup> France was able to negotiate a place for their colonial empire into the Treaty of Rome, something Britain thought was impossible to even attempt to do for its Commonwealth. The old Bevin/Churchill/Amery/Sandys idea to integrate the Commonwealth into a customs union had in fact been seized upon by the French and implemented as a result of their considerable negotiating skills. This, of course, galled British leaders, even more so because it conflicted with Britain's desire to keep agriculture out of their attempts from 1956 on to negotiate a European Free Trade Area. As Macmillan wrote in a March 9, 1957 diary entry, "The French have got what they want, but they have put us in a great difficulty. If it had not been for the question of our forces in Europe, I would have attacked the French for the way in which they managed the last stages of the negotiations for the Common Market, esp the inclusion of the French Colonial Empire. This was got through at the last minute, and makes great difficulties for us." Quoted in Macmillan, *The Macmillan Diaries, Volume II*, 15.

<sup>387</sup> Milward, *The European Rescue of the Nation-State*, 394-395.

European nation.’ This was typical of a phenomenon, not constrained to just Britain, that the “fear of making positive decisions is perhaps the main characteristic of a power in decline ... the policy of *attentisme*, that is, waiting for events to happen instead of shaping them, is perhaps to be expected of a nation which refuses to look into the future because of the fear of what it might discover.”<sup>388</sup> Only when the majority of the politicians and officials in the British government realized that by refusing to join in the European Communities they were weakening the country more than defending its sovereignty or upholding a diminishing Commonwealth connection, did they at last decide to make the hard decisions and attempt to positively shape the UK’s destiny in Europe. But by then it was too little, too late, necessitating more than a decade of attempting to join the EEC before finally succeeding.

The break in Britain’s post-war delusion is usually seen as the Suez Crisis of November 1956.<sup>389</sup> This, it is argued, was when Britons at last realized just how little hard power they were able to unilaterally (or bilaterally with France) wield on the world stage in the political and economic spheres.<sup>390</sup> However, the events of the November previous, when the British representative walked out of the Spaak Committee and as a

---

<sup>388</sup> Kaiser, *Using Europe, Abusing the Europeans*, 57.

<sup>389</sup> As the best study of the Suez Crisis puts it, “Suez marked with brutal clarity the end of Britain as a world power.” Keith Kyle, *Suez: Britain’s End of Empire in the Middle East* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2011), 568.

<sup>390</sup> At the time of the Suez Crisis, the Treaty of Rome had not yet been signed and there were still serious disagreements between France and Germany over many of the proposals for a common market. However, to France Suez had seriously reinforced the case for concluding a treaty of European union. The fiasco had helped swing French opinion around and caused a new wave of ‘Europeanism’ the nation, fortifying the feeling in France that only through European unity could the country reclaim a position of power and independence in the world. Milward, *The Rise and Fall of a National Strategy*, 177; Camps, *Britain and the European Community, 1955-1963*, 77.

result gave up the opportunity to be one of the founding members of the European Economic Community, were just as significant in breaking British fantasies about their outsized role in the world. Because it was a delayed reaction in that it took the British years to realize that staying out of the Common Market was a mistake, and not a sudden jolt like Suez in 1956, the repercussions of that November 1955 decision – and the ten years previous, which this thesis has argued built up British resistance to the European idea that came to its logical conclusion that November day – are not as often cited as a turning point in British history. Nevertheless, the United Kingdom's aloofness from the early European institutions and especially the EEC, and the consequences that arose as a result, played just as large a part as Suez (or anything else) in Britain's retreat from empire and a world power role in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

But while British policymakers quickly absorbed the lessons of Suez, arguably the British are yet to learn anything from its detachment from the European Communities in the years after the end of the Second World War. Consequently, they may be doomed to repeat their same mistakes. As the famous poet of the British Empire Rudyard Kipling may put it if he was around today, there is no end of the lesson that the years of 1945-1955 can teach contemporary British leaders and officials in regards to the nation's stance towards Europe. But, like their predecessors of the 1940's and 1950's, they must first be willing to learn.

## REFERENCES

Primary Sources*The National Archives of the United Kingdom*

CAB 128, Cabinet Minutes, post war conclusions

- CAB 128/12
- CAB 128/17
- CAB 128/19
- CAB 128/23
- CAB 128/24
- CAB 128/25
- CAB 128/29

CAB 129, Cabinet Memoranda, post war memoranda

- CAB 129/23
- CAB 129/25
- CAB 129/37
- CAB 129/41
- CAB 129/46
- CAB 129/48
- CAB 129/59
- CAB 129/60
- CAB 129/76

*Government Publications*

Elkan, P.G. *New Zealand's Butter and Cheese in the European Economic Community*. Research paper No. 2 of the New Zealand Institute of Economic Research. Wellington: Whitcombe and Tombs Limited, 1962.

O'Neill, Sir Con. *Britain's Entry into the European Community: Report on the Negotiations of 1970-1972*. London: Whitehall History Publishing, 2000.

*Diaries and Memoirs*

Acheson, Dean. *Present at the Creation: My Years In the State Department*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1987.

Boothby, Robert. *Recollections of a Rebel*. London: Hutchinson, 1978.

Brown, George. *In My Way: The Political Memoirs of Lord George-Brown*. London: The Camelot Press, 1971.

Callaghan, James. *Time and Chance*. New York: Harper Collins, 1987.

Eden, Anthony. *Full Circle*. London: Cassell, 1960.

———. *The Reckoning*. London: Cassell, 1965.

Heath, Edward: *The Course of My Life: The Autobiography of Edward Heath*. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1998.

Macmillan, Harold. *Tides of Fortune: 1945-1955*. New York: Harper & Row, 1969.

———. *Riding the Storm, 1956-1959*. New York: Harper & Row, 1971.

———. *At The End of the Day: 1961-1963*. New York: Harper & Row, 1973.

———. *The Macmillan Diaries, Volume I: The Cabinet Years, 1950-1957*. Edited by Peter Catterall. London: Macmillan, 2003.

———. *The Macmillan Diaries, Volume II: Prime Minister and After, 1957-66*. Edited by Peter Catterall. London: Macmillan, 2011.

### *Newspapers*

*Columbia Daily Spectator*

### *Speeches*

Churchill, Winston. The Tragedy of Europe. Zurich, Switzerland, September 19, 1946.

Accessed September 14, 2016. <http://www.churchill-societylondon.org.uk/astonish.html>.

House of Commons Parliamentary Debates: Sittings of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. *Hansard Online*. Parliament.uk. <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/sittings/C20>.

MacMillan, Harold. The Common Market: Europe, Britain, and the Commonwealth.

Delivered over television from London, England, September 20, 1962. Accessed September 14, 2016. <http://eds.b.ebscohost.com/eds/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=2&sid=5a4ff69a-db7f436f-839f-d2f3e2421e25%40sessionmgr120>.

Schuman, Robert. The Schuman Declaration. The Salon de l'Horloge du Quai d'Orsay.

Paris, France, May 9, 1950. Accessed October 25, 2016. [http://www.internationaldemocracywatch.org/attachments/293\\_Schuman%20Declaration%20%209%20May%201950.pdf](http://www.internationaldemocracywatch.org/attachments/293_Schuman%20Declaration%20%209%20May%201950.pdf).

### Secondary Sources

#### *Books*

Barker, Elisabeth. *Britain in a Divided Europe, 1945-1970*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971.

Beloff, Nora. *The General Says No: Britain's Exclusion From Europe*. Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1963.

- Benvenuti, Andrea. *Anglo-Australian Relations and the 'Turn to Europe', 1961-1972*. Rochester: The Boydell Press, 2008.
- Berend, Ivan T. *The History of European Integration: A New Perspective*. New York: Routledge, 2016.
- Brivati, Brian. *Hugh Gaitskell*. London: Richard Cohen Books, 1996.
- Bullock, Alan. *Ernest Bevin: Foreign Secretary, 1945-1951*. London: Heinemann, 1983.
- Butler, David and Uwe Kitzinger. *The 1975 Referendum*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1976.
- Cain, P.J. and A.G. Hopkins. *British Imperialism, 1688-2000*, 2nd edition. New York: Longman, 2002.
- Camps, Miriam. *Britain and the European Community, 1955-1963*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1964.
- Charlton, Michael. *The Price of Victory*. London: BBC Publications, 1983.
- Cronin, James E. *Global Rules: America, Britain, And A Disordered World*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014.
- Crowson N.J. *The Conservative Party and European Integration since 1945: At the Heart of Europe?* New York: Routledge, 2007.
- Daddow, Oliver J. "The Historiography of Wilson's Attempt to Take Britain into the EEC," in *Harold Wilson and European Integration: Britain's Second Application to Join the EEC*, edited by Oliver J. Daddow, 1-36. Portland, OR: Frank Cass, 2003.
- Darwin, John. *Unfinished Empire: The Global Expansion of Britain*. New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2012.
- . *Britain and Decolonization*. London: Macmillan, 1988.
- Dell, Edmund. *The Schuman Plan and the British Abdication of Leadership in Europe*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.
- Denman, Roy. *Missed Chances: Britain and Europe in the Twentieth Century*. London: Cassell Illustrated, 1996.
- Edgerton, David. *Warfare State: Britain, 1920-1970*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

- Ellison, James. *Threatening Europe: Britain and the Creation of the European Community, 1955-58*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000.
- Geddes, Andrew. *Britain and the European Union*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.
- Gowland, David and Arthur Turner. *Reluctant Europeans: Britain and European Integration, 1945-1998*. New York: Longman, 2000.
- Grob-Fitzgibbon, Benjamin. *Continental Drift: Britain and Europe from the End of Empire to the Rise of Euroscepticism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016.
- Horne, Alistair. *Harold Macmillan: Volume I, 1894-1956*. New York: Viking, 1988.  
———. *Harold Macmillan: Volume II, 1957-1986*. New York: Viking, 1989.
- Hogan, Michael J., *The Marshall Plan: America, Britain and the Reconstruction of Western Europe, 1947-1952*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.
- Jay, Douglas. *After the Common Market: A Better Alternative for Britain*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968.
- Jones, Alistair. *Britain and the European Union*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007.
- Kaiser, Wolfram. *Using Europe, Abusing the Europeans: Britain and European Integration, 1945-63*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996.
- Kitzinger, Uwe. *Diplomacy and Persuasion: How Britain Joined the Common Market*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1973.
- Keith Kyle. *Suez: Britain's End of Empire in the Middle East*. New York: I.B. Tauris, 2011.
- Lacouture, Jean. *De Gaulle: The Ruler, 1945-1970*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1992.
- Lamb, Richard. "Macmillan and Europe." In *Harold Macmillan: Aspects of a Political Life*, edited by Richard Aldous and Sabine Lee, 75-94. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999.
- Lieber, Robert J. *British Politics and European Unity: Parties, Elites, and Pressure Groups*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970.



- Mangold, Peter. *The Almost Impossible Ally: Harold Macmillan and Charles De Gaulle*. New York: I.B. Tauris, 2006.
- Milward, Alan S. *The European Rescue of the Nation-State*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992.
- . *The UK and The European Community: Volume 1: The Rise and Fall of a National Strategy, 1945-1963*. New York: Routledge, 2012.
- Newhouse, John. *De Gaulle and the Anglo-Saxons*. New York: The Viking Press, 1970.
- Nicoll, Sir William. "Britain and the Commonwealth in the 1960s." In *Britain, the Commonwealth and Europe: The Commonwealth and Britain's Applications to Join the European Communities*, edited by Alex May, 30-38. New York: Palgrave, 2001.
- Parr, Helen. *Britain's Policy Towards the European Community: Harold Wilson and Britain's World Role, 1964-1967*. New York: Routledge, 2006.
- Pilkington, Colin. *Britain and the European Union Today*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001.
- Radice, Giles. *Offshore: Britain and the European Idea*. New York: I.B. Tauris & Company, 1992.
- Raineau, Thomas. "Europeanising Whitehall? The British Civil Service and Europe, 1957-1972." In *Europeanisation in the 20<sup>th</sup> century: The Historical Lens*, edited by Matthieu Osmont, Emilia Robin-Hivert, Katja Seidel, Mark Spoerer and Christian Wenkel, 59-74. (Brussels: P.I.E. Lang, 2012).
- Reynolds, David. *Britannia Overruled: British Policy and World Power in the Twentieth Century*, 2nd edition. New York: Pearson, 2000.
- Ruane, Kevin. *The Rise and Fall of the European Defence Community: Anglo-American Relations and the Crisis of European Defence, 1950-55*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000.
- Simms, Brendan. *Britain's Europe: A Thousand Years of Conflict and Cooperation*. London: Allen Lane, 2016.
- Tratt, Jacqueline. *The Macmillan Government and Europe: A Study in the Process of Policy Development*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996.
- Turner, John. *The Tories and Europe*. New York: Manchester University Press, 2000.

- Wall, Stephen. *The Official History of Britain and the European Community, Vol. II: From Rejection to Referendum, 1963-1975*. New York: Routledge, 2014.
- Ward, Stuart. "Anglo-Commonwealth relations and EEC membership: the problem of the old Dominions." In *Britain's Failure to Enter the European Community, 1961-63*, edited by George Wilkes, 93-107. Portland, OR: Frank Cass, 1997.
- . *Australia and the British Embrace: The Demise of the Imperial Ideal*. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2001.
- Warner, Geoffrey. "The Labour Governments and the Unity of Western Europe, 1945-51." In Ritchie Ovendale (ed.), *The Foreign Policy of the British Labour Governments, 1945-51*. Leicester: University of Leicester Press, 1984.
- Wilkes, George. "The Commonwealth in British European Policy, Politics and Sentiment, 1956-63." In *Britain, the Commonwealth and Europe: The Commonwealth and Britain's Applications to Join the European Communities*, edited by Alex May, 53-81. New York: Palgrave, 2001.
- Young, Hugo. *This Blessed Pot: Britain and Europe From Churchill to Blair*. New York: The Overlook Press, 1999.
- Young, John W. *Britain and European Unity, 1945-1992*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993.
- . "British Officials and European Integration, 1944-60." In *Building Postwar Europe: National Decision Makers and European Institutions, 1948-63*, edited by Anne Deighton, 87-106. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995.
- Ziegler, Philip. *Edward Heath: The Authorised Biography*. London: Harper Press, 2010.

#### *Journal Articles*

- Brinkley, Douglas. "Dean Acheson and the 'Special Relationship': The West Point Speech of December 1962." *The Historical Journal* Vol. 33, no. 3 (1990): 599-608.
- Burgess, Simon and Geoffrey Edwards. "The Six plus One: British Policy-Making and the Question of European Economic Integration, 1955." *International Affairs* Vol. 64, no. 3 (1988): 393-413.
- Hall, H. Duncan. "The Genesis of the Balfour Declaration of 1926." *Journal of Commonwealth Studies* Vol.1, no. 3 (1962): 169-193.
- Lewthwaite, Gordon R. "Commonwealth and Common Market: The Dilemma of the New Zealand Dairy Industry." *Geographical Review*, Vol. 61, no. 1 (1971): 72-101.

Mauter, Wendell R. "Churchill and the Unification of Europe." *The Historian* Vol. 61, no. 1 (1998): 67-84.

May, Alex. "The Commonwealth and Britain's Turn to Europe, 1945-73." *Round Table* Vol. 102, no. 1 (2013): 29-39.

Robertson, Paul, and John Singleton. "Britain, Butter, and European Integration, 1957-1964." *The Economic History Review* Vol. 50, no. 2 (1997): 327-47.

## APPENDIX A: WINSTON CHURCHILL'S 'THE TRAGEDY OF EUROPE'

SPEECH<sup>391</sup>

I wish to speak to you today about the tragedy of Europe.

This noble continent, comprising on the whole the fairest and the most cultivated regions of the earth; enjoying a temperate and equable climate, is the home of all the great parent races of the western world. It is the fountain of Christian faith and Christian ethics. It is the origin of most of the culture, arts, philosophy and science both of ancient and modern times.

If Europe were once united in the sharing of its common inheritance, there would be no limit to the happiness, to the prosperity and glory which its three or four hundred million people would enjoy. Yet it is from Europe that have sprung that series of frightful nationalistic quarrels, originated by the Teutonic nations, which we have seen even in this twentieth century and in our own lifetime, wreck the peace and mar the prospects of all mankind.

And what is the plight to which Europe has been reduced?

Some of the smaller States have indeed made a good recovery, but over wide areas a vast quivering mass of tormented, hungry, care-worn and bewildered human beings gape at the ruins of their cities and homes, and scan the dark horizons for the approach of some new peril, tyranny or terror.

Among the victors there is a babel of jarring voices; among the vanquished the sullen silence of despair.

---

<sup>391</sup> Winston Churchill, "United States of Europe", speech in Zurich, Switzerland, September 19, 1946.

That is all that Europeans, grouped in so many ancient States and nations, that is all that the Germanic Powers have got by tearing each other to pieces and spreading havoc far and wide.

Indeed, but for the fact that the great Republic across the Atlantic Ocean has at length realised that the ruin or enslavement of Europe would involve their own fate as well, and has stretched out hands of succour and guidance, the Dark Ages would have returned in all their cruelty and squalor.

They may still return.

Yet all the while there is a remedy which, if it were generally and spontaneously adopted, would as if by a miracle transform the whole scene, and would in a few years make all Europe, or the greater part of it, as free and as happy as Switzerland is today.

What is this sovereign remedy?

It is to re-create the European Family, or as much of it as we can, and provide it with a structure under which it can dwell in peace, in safety and in freedom.

We must build a kind of United States of Europe.

In this way only will hundreds of millions of toilers be able to regain the simple joys and hopes which make life worth living.

The process is simple.

All that is needed is the resolve of hundreds of millions of men and women to do right instead of wrong, and gain as their reward, blessing instead of cursing.

Much work has been done upon this task by the exertions of the Pan-European Union which owes so much to Count Coudenhove-Kalergi and which commanded the services of the famous French patriot and statesman, Aristide Briand.

There is also that immense body of doctrine and procedure, which was brought into being amid high hopes after the First World War, as the League of Nations.

The League of Nations did not fail because of its principles or conceptions. It failed because these principles were deserted by those States who had brought it into being. It failed because the Governments of those days feared to face the facts and act while time remained. This disaster must not be repeated. There is, therefore, much knowledge and material with which to build; and also bitter dear-bought experience.

I was very glad to read in the newspapers two days ago that my friend President Truman had expressed his interest and sympathy with this great design.

There is no reason why a regional organisation of Europe should in any way conflict with the world organisation of the United Nations. On the contrary, I believe that the larger synthesis will only survive if it is founded upon coherent natural groupings.

There is already a natural grouping in the Western Hemisphere. We British have our own Commonwealth of Nations. These do not weaken, on the contrary they strengthen, the world organisation. They are in fact its main support.

And why should there not be a European group which could give a sense of enlarged patriotism and common citizenship to the distracted peoples of this turbulent and mighty continent and why should it not take its rightful place with other great groupings in shaping the destinies of men?

In order that this should be accomplished, there must be an act of faith in which millions of families speaking many languages must consciously take part.

We all know that the two world wars through which we have passed arose out of the vain passion of a newly united Germany to play the dominating part in the world.

In this last struggle crimes and massacres have been committed for which there is no parallel since the invasions of the Mongols in the fourteenth century and no equal at any time in human history.

The guilty must be punished. Germany must be deprived of the power to rearm and make another aggressive war.

But when all this has been done, as it will be done, as it is being done, there must be an end to retribution. There must be what Mr. Gladstone many years ago called 'a blessed act of oblivion'.

We must all turn our backs upon the horrors of the past. We must look to the future. We cannot afford to drag forward across the years that are to come the hatreds and revenges which have sprung from the injuries of the past.

If Europe is to be saved from infinite misery, and indeed from final doom, there must be an act of faith in the European family and an act of oblivion against all the crimes and follies of the past.

Can the free peoples of Europe rise to the height of these resolves of the soul and instincts of the spirit of man?

If they can, the wrongs and injuries which have been inflicted will have been washed away on all sides by the miseries which have been endured.

Is there any need for further floods of agony?

Is it the only lesson of history that mankind is unteachable?

Let there be justice, mercy and freedom.

The peoples have only to will it, and all will achieve their hearts' desire.

I am now going to say something that will astonish you.

The first step in the re-creation of the European family must be a partnership between France and Germany.

In this way only can France recover the moral leadership of Europe.

There can be no revival of Europe without a spiritually great France and a spiritually great Germany.

The structure of the United States of Europe, if well and truly built, will be such as to make the material strength of a single state less important. Small nations will count as much as large ones and gain their honour by their contribution to the common cause.

The ancient states and principalities of Germany, freely joined together for mutual convenience in a federal system, might each take their individual place among the United States of Europe. I shall not try to make a detailed programme for hundreds of millions of people who want to be happy and free, prosperous and safe, who wish to enjoy the four freedoms of which the great President Roosevelt spoke, and live in accordance with the principles embodied in the Atlantic Charter. If this is their wish, they have only to say so, and means can certainly be found, and machinery erected, to carry that wish into full fruition.

But I must give you warning. Time may be short.



At present there is a breathing-space. The cannon have ceased firing. The fighting has stopped; but the dangers have not stopped.

If we are to form the United States of Europe or whatever name or form it may take, we must begin now.

In these present days we dwell strangely and precariously under the shield and protection of the atomic bomb. The atomic bomb is still only in the hands of a State and nation which we know will never use it except in the cause of right and freedom. But it may well be that in a few years this awful agency of destruction will be widespread and the catastrophe following from its use by several warring nations will not only bring to an end all that we call civilisation, but may possibly disintegrate the globe itself.

I must now sum up the propositions which are before you.

Our constant aim must be to build and fortify the strength of the United Nations Organisation.

Under and within that world concept, we must re-create the European family in a regional structure called, it may be, the United States of Europe.

The first step is to form a Council of Europe.

If at first all the States of Europe are not willing or able to join the Union, we must nevertheless proceed to assemble and combine those who will and those who can.

The salvation of the common people of every race and of every land from war or servitude must be established on solid foundations and must be guarded by the readiness of all men and women to die rather than submit to tyranny.

In all this urgent work, France and Germany must take the lead together.

Great Britain, the British Commonwealth of Nations, mighty America, and I trust Soviet Russia - for then indeed all would be well - must be the friends and sponsors of the new Europe and must champion its right to live and shine.

APPENDIX B: THE SCHUMAN DECLARATION<sup>392</sup>

"It is no longer a question of vain words but of a bold act, a constructive act.

France has acted and the consequences of its action can be immense. We hope they will be. France has acted primarily for peace and to give peace a real chance.

For this it is necessary that Europe should exist. Five years, almost to the day, after the unconditional surrender of Germany, France is accomplishing the first decisive act for European construction and is associating Germany with this. Conditions in Europe are going to be entirely changed because of it. This transformation will facilitate other action which has been impossible until this day.

Europe will be born from this, a Europe which is solidly united and constructed around a strong framework. It will be a Europe where the standard of living will rise by grouping together production and expanding markets, thus encouraging the lowering of prices.

In this Europe, the Ruhr, the Saar and the French industrial basins will work together for common goals and their progress will be followed by observers from the United Nations. All Europeans without distinction, whether from east or west, and all the overseas territories, especially Africa, which awaits development and prosperity from this old continent, will gain benefits from their labour of peace.

World peace cannot be safeguarded if constructive efforts are not made commensurate with the dangers that threaten it. An organized and revitalized Europe can make a contribution to civilization which is indispensable for maintaining such peaceful

---

<sup>392</sup> Robert Schuman, "The Schuman Declaration", press conference at the Salon de l'Horloge du Quai d'Orsay in Paris, France, May 9, 1950.

relations. France has always held the cause of peace as her main aim in taking upon herself the role for more than twenty years of championing a united Europe. That European task was not achieved and we had war.

Europe will not be made at once, nor according to a single master plan of construction. It will be built by concrete achievements, which create de facto dependence, mutual interests and the desire for common action.

The gathering of the nations of Europe demands the elimination of the age-old antagonism of France and Germany. The first concern of any action undertaken must involve these two countries.

With this objective in mind, the French government proposes to direct its action on one limited but decisive point: The French government proposes to place Franco-German production of coal and steel under one common High Authority in an organisation open to the participation of other countries of Europe.

The pooling of coal and steel production will immediately assure the establishment of common bases for economic development as a first step for the European Federation. It will change the destiny of regions that have long been devoted to manufacturing munitions of war, of which they have been most constantly the victims.

This merging of our interests in coal and steel production and our joint action will make it plain that any war between France and Germany becomes not only unthinkable but materially impossible. The establishment of this powerful unity for production, open to all countries willing to take part, and eventually capable of providing all the member

countries with the basic elements of industrial production on the same terms, will cast the real foundation for their economic unification.

This production would be offered to the world as a whole, without distinction or exception, with the aim of raising living standards and promoting peace as well as fulfilling one of Europe's essential tasks — the development of the African continent.

In this way, simply and speedily, the fusion of interests which is vital for the establishment of a common economic system will be realized. Thus the leaven will be introduced which will permeate and build a wider and deeper community between countries that had continually opposed each other in bloody divisions.

By pooling basic industrial production and setting-up a new High Authority whose decisions will be binding on France, Germany and other member countries, these proposals will bring to reality the first solid groundwork for a European Federation vital to the preservation of world peace.

In order to further the realisation of the objectives it has thus defined, the French Government is ready to open negotiations on the following basis:

The High Authority would be charged with the mission of assuring in the briefest delay the modernization of production and the improvement of its quality; the supply of coal and steel on identical terms to French and German markets and those of other member countries; the development of common exports to other countries; and the equalization of improvement in the living conditions of workers in these industries.

In order to attain these goals starting from the very varied conditions in which the production of the member countries are situated, transitory measures should be instituted

such as a production and investment plan, compensating mechanisms for the equalization of prices, and a restructuring fund to facilitate the rationalisation of production. The movement of coal and steel between member states will immediately be freed of all customs duties and it will not be permitted for it to be constrained by differential transport rates. Conditions will be progressively created which will spontaneously assure the most rational distribution of production at the highest level of productivity.

In contrast to an international cartel which aims at dividing and exploiting national markets by restrictive practices in order to maintain high profit margins, the proposed organization will assure the merger of markets and the expansion of production.

The principles and fundamental commitments defined above will be the subject of a treaty signed between the states. The negotiations necessary to define the measures to be applied will be undertaken with the help of an arbitrator, designated by common agreement. The latter will be charged to ensure that the agreements are in line with the principles and, in the case of unresolvable differences, will determine the solution to be adopted. The joint High Authority, responsible for the functioning of the whole regime, will be composed of independent personalities designated on an equal basis by the governments. A President will be chosen by common accord of the governments. His decisions will be binding on France, Germany and the other member countries. Appropriate measures will assure the means of appeal necessary against the decisions of the High Authority. A representative of the United Nations to the High Authority will be charged to make a public report twice a year to the United Nations Organisation,

reporting on the functioning of the new body, in particular about the safeguarding of its peaceful objectives.

The institution of the High Authority does not prejudice in any way the ownership of enterprises. In the furtherance of its mission, the joint High Authority will take into account the powers conferred on the International Authority for the Ruhr and the obligations of all types imposed on Germany as long as they continue."

-----

*(Underlining is in the original)*

APPENDIX C: COMMUNIQUE ISSUED AT THE CONCLUSION OF THE MESSINA  
CONFERENCE<sup>393</sup>

The Governments of the Federal German Republic, Belgium, France, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands believe that the time has come to make a fresh advance towards the building of Europe. They are of the opinion that this must be achieved, first of all, in the economic field.

2. They consider that it is necessary to work for the establishment of a united Europe by the development of common institutions, the progressive fusion of national economies, the creation of a common market and the progressive harmonisation of their social policies.

3. Such a policy seems to them indispensable if Europe is to maintain her position in the world, regain her influence and prestige and achieve a continuing increase in the standard of living of her population.

4. To these ends, the six Ministers have agreed on the following objectives:

1) The expansion of trade and the freedom of movement call for the joint development of the major channels of communication. A joint study will accordingly be undertaken of development plans based on the establishment of a European network of canals, motor highways, electrified railways and on a standardisation of equipment, as well as a study of possible means of achieving a better co-ordination of air transport.

2) A fundamental condition of economic progress is that the European economies should have at their disposal cheaper, and more plentiful supplies of power. For this

---

<sup>393</sup> The National Archives, CAB 129/76, R.A. Butler, "European Integration", Annex A, June 29, 1955.



reason, all possible steps will have to be taken to develop exchanges of gas and electricity as necessary to increase the profitability of investment and to reduce the cost of supplies. Study will be given to methods for co-ordinating a joint approach to questions affecting the future production and consumption of power, and for drawing up the general lines of an overall policy.

3) The development of atomic energy for peaceful purposes will in the near future open up the prospect of a new industrial revolution out of all proportion to that which has taken place over the last hundred years. The six signatory States consider that it is necessary to study the creation of a common organisation to be entrusted with the responsibility and the means for ensuring the peaceful development of atomic energy, while taking into account the special arrangements made by certain Governments with third countries.

These means should comprise:

(a) The establishment of a common fund derived from contributions from each of the participating countries, from which provision could be made for financing the installations and research work already in progress or planned.

(b) Free and sufficient access to the raw materials, and the free exchange of expertise and technicians, by-products and specialised equipment.

(c) The pooling of the results obtained and the grant of financial assistance for their exploitation.

(d) Co-operation with non-member countries.

5. The six Governments recognise that the establishment of a European market, free from all customs duties and all quantitative restrictions, is the objective of their action in the field of economic policy. They consider that this market must be achieved by stages and that its entry into force requires a study of the following questions:

(a) The appropriate procedure and pace for the progressive suppression of the obstacles to trade in the relations between the participating countries, as well as the appropriate measures for moving towards a progressive unification of their tariffs against third countries.

(b) The measures to be taken for harmonising the general policy of the participating countries in the financial, economic and social fields.

(c) The adoption of methods designed to make possible an adequate co-ordination of the monetary policies of the member countries so as to permit the creation and development of a common market.

(d) A system of escape clauses.

(e) The creation and operation of a re-adaptation fund.

(f) The gradual introduction of the free movement of manpower.

(g) The elaboration of rules which would ensure the play of competition within the common market so as to exclude, in particular, all discrimination on a national basis.

(h) The institutional arrangements appropriate for introducing and operating the common market.

6. The creation of a European Investment Fund will be studied. The object of this fund would be the joint development of European economic potentialities and in particular the development of the less developed regions of the participating states.

7. As regards the social field, the six Governments consider it essential to study the progressive harmonisation of the regulations in force in the different countries, notably those which concern working hours, overtime rates (night work, Sunday work and public holidays) and the length and rates of pay for holidays,

8. The six Governments have decided to adopt the following procedure:

1) Conferences will be called to work out treaties or other arrangements concerning the questions under consideration.

2) The preparatory work will be the responsibility of a Committee of Governmental representatives, assisted by experts, under the chairmanship of a political personality responsible for co-ordinating the work in the different fields.

3) The Committee will invite the High Authority of the E.C.S.C. and the Secretariats of O.E.E.C., the Council of Europe and the European Conference of Ministers of Transport, to give the necessary assistance.

4) The report of the Committee, covering the whole field, will be submitted to the Ministers of Foreign Affairs by not later than the 1st of October 1955.

5) The Ministers for Foreign Affairs will meet before that date to take note of the interim reports prepared by the Committee and to give it the necessary directives.

6) The Government of the United Kingdom, as a power which is a member of W.E.U. and is also associated with the E.C.S.C., will be invited to take part in this work.

7) The Ministers for Foreign Affairs will decide in due course whether other States should subsequently be invited to take part in the conference or conferences referred to in paragraph 1) above.



OHIO  
UNIVERSITY

Thesis and Dissertation Services