CHAPTER VII
THE MOVEMENT FOR A EUROPEAN UNION

An important field in which the Commonwealth factor was conspicuous was Britain's policy towards the movement for a European union. In the immediate post-war years, many in Britain thought it imperative for Britain to forge a union of Western Europe under her own leadership. Though there were valid arguments in favour of it, it was largely the Commonwealth factor that precluded Britain from playing an active role in the movement. As The Economist wrote in 1960: "The Commonwealth interest has loomed large in British policy towards the European organization, and has decisively swayed many a debate, for eight or ten years".¹

The situation that prevailed in Europe immediately after the War provided a favourable political climate for European unity. The movement was heading forward partly under the stimulus of Soviet hostility towards the West. At the end of the war, while most of the Western Powers, except the United States, were either disarmed or exhausted, the Soviet Union retained its armed strength, posing a threat to the security of Western Europe. "The Russians were out to get all they could by way of territory and reparations... we were also acutely aware of the combination of Russian old-time and Communist modern imperialism which threatened the freedom of Europe".²

Britain became critical of the Soviet Union by the beginning of 1948, when the Russian intention to wreck the European Recovery Programme became clear. In the circumstance, Ernest Bevin, Britain's Foreign Secretary, stressed the need for unity of purpose among the "free" countries of the region and felt that the time was ripe for the consolidation of Western Europe. His idea of a united Europe was based not on the creation of a single political and economic union, but on forging a series of bilateral defensive pacts with the countries of Western Europe. However, he never had even a fleeting thought of Britain's organic integration with the West European countries. Britain was insistent that any arrangement with Western Europe should not affect her world-wide relationships, including the unique relationship with the Commonwealth. In 1947, Bevin made it clear: "I have to look at the situation from


4 Even an ardent champion of the European Union, like Winston Churchill, did not encourage any sacrifice of Britain's Commonwealth links. Adverting to the "three great circles", in which Britain's foreign policy was spread over, Churchill said at the Conservative Party Conference in 1948: "The first circle for us is naturally the British Commonwealth and empire, with all that comprises. Then there is also the English speaking world in which we, Canada, and the other British Dominions play so important a part. And finally there is United Europe. These three majestic circles are co-existent and if they are linked together, there is no force or combination which could overthrow them or even challenge them". See National Union of Conservative and Unionist Associations, Report of the 69th Annual Conference, October 6-9, 1948 (London, 1948), p. 153. He stressed: "It is necessary that any policy this island may adopt towards Europe and in Europe should enjoy the full sympathy and approval of the peoples of the Dominions". W.S. Churchill, Europe United: Speeches 1947 and 1948 (London, 1950), p. 79.
the rather wider view point of whether one's policy has not got to take the whole world consideration, rather than the narrow limits of Europe.\(^5\) Therefore, in every move for a European Union, Britain always took the other Commonwealth countries into confidence.

During the discussion on an adjournment Motion\(^6\) exclusively on the Western Union on 5 May 1948, Prime Minister Attlee said: "Undoubtedly we need a Western Union and our agreements in the West, but this country cannot apply itself solely to one continent. We are interested in all continents throughout the world.... I should like to assure the House that in all these matters, we keep in the closest touch with the other Commonwealth countries".\(^7\) He said that, in advocating Western Union, Britain was prepared with other Powers to pool some degree of authority, but she was not prepared to call a constituent assembly for the purpose, as suggested in the Motion. "I believe that we shall get it far better by the practical steps which are being taken now, not forgetting that we work all the time with the

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\(^6\) The Motion said: "That in the opinion of this House, steps should now be taken in consultation with the other members of the British Commonwealth, to create in Western Europe a political union strong enough to save European democracy and the values of Western civilization, on a trading area large enough, with the colonial territories, to enable its component parts to achieve economic recovery and stability". UK, House of Commons, *Parliamentary Debates*, vol. 450, Session 1947-48, cols. 1270-71.

\(^7\) Ibid., cols. 1315-16.
Commonwealth. I was disturbed by the suggestion in the Motion that we might somehow get closer to Europe than to our Commonwealth. The Commonwealth nations are our closest friends. While I want to get as close as we can with the other nations, we have to bear in mind that we are not solely a European Power but a member of a great Commonwealth and Empire". 8

This showed the extent of Commonwealth influence on Britain's outlook towards a European union. Again this was re-emphasized by Attlee in a letter to Winston Churchill. He wrote that the Western Union had "an important bearing on Commonwealth relations, and that in consequence the Government desire to exchange views with the Commonwealth Prime Ministers in October 1948 before expressing any definite view". 9 However, British statesmen did not want a conflict between Britain's European policy and Commonwealth interests. 10

On 13 October 1948 the Commonwealth Prime Ministers discussed the question of Western European Union. All of them wanted capital and goods from Britain and therefore wanted to see more capital flowing to Commonwealth and less to Western Europe. The feeling was that, barring South Africa, and to some

8 Ibid., cols. 1318-19.


10 See the speech of J.R.H. Hutchinson in the House of Commons on 22 January 1948. UK, House of Commons, Parliamentary Debates, vol. 446, Session 1947-48, col. 475. He said: "This country will take an imperial toss if she allows herself to be driven ever more closely into a European customs union, and, at the same time, driven away ever further from her own Commonwealth. Economics, prudence, sentiment and history all cry out against such a course".
extent Australia, the Prime Ministers were not happy to see Britain's greater involvement in European affairs at the cost of the Commonwealth. But they supported the European Recovery Programme.

The communique issued at the end of the Prime Ministers meeting expressed "general agreement" that Britain's moving closer to Europe was "in accordance with the interests of the other members of the Commonwealth, the United Nations, and the promotion of world peace". The Commonwealth governments only wanted to be kept informed of "the progress of this co-operation with Western Europe". The Commonwealth Foreign Ministers' meeting, held in 1950, also believed there could be perfect

11 Robert Menzies of Australia said in London on 8 August 1948: "I for one am ... not hostile to the basic idea of European Union, but friendly to it and hopeful for it". He found no incompatibility between a European Union and the Commonwealth. The Times, 9 August 1948.


13 Considering the overall unfavourable mood of the Commonwealth members, Christian Science Monitor wrote: "On the more crucial question of Britain's relations with Europe on the one hand and the Commonwealth on the other, the flexibility most needed must come from the Dominions. It is natural that they should resist pressures which tend to drive British trade toward the continent and which would make British resources first of all available for Europe. Such pressures are felt under Marshal planning". "Britain, Commonwealth and Europe", Christian Science Monitor, 13 October 1948.

dovetailing between Britain's relation with Europe on the one hand and her time-honoured ties with the rest of the Commonwealth. 15

The Brussels Treaty, signed on 17 March 1948 (which came into force on 25 August 1948) was a significant step towards the movement for unity in Europe. 16 The treaty sought to establish an alliance of Western European states for fifty years in the economic and military spheres, and could well be characterized as a mini-NATO. According to Bevin, the treaty made Britain part of Europe. "For all five of us who signed that Treaty, it means sacrificing narrow and national interests and in some cases very substantial interests — in favour of the common European good. The treaty provided for the closest co-operation of the partners in economic, financial, social, cultural and military matters; it did not provide for union in the sense of some pooling of sovereignty or the creation of a European federated state". 17

In the opinion of Attlee, "the making of the


16 Treaty Series, No. 1 (1949). The five-Power treaty was signed by Belgium, France, Luxemburg, Netherlands and the United Kingdom. The treaty aimed at the "collaboration in economic, social and cultural matters and for collective self-defence", which included European economic recovery, defence from a future German aggression, and preservation of freedom and democracy in Western Europe. See Cmd 7599 (1949), p. 2.

17 UK, House of Commons, Parliamentary Debates, vol. 450, Session 1947-48, col. 1108. It may be recalled that earlier on 4 March 1947, Britain and France concluded, in Dunkirk, a treaty of Alliance and Mutual Assistance, a joint move to help each other in the event of any fresh German aggression. Cmd 7058 (1947), p. 2.
Brussels Treaty and of the Atlantic Pact, which was the work of Bevin, was a recognition of the fact that before Russia would consider reasonable relations with the free world, there must be a building up of strength. Strength was the only factor which the Russians considered. However, in concluding the treaty, the Commonwealth was fully consulted. During the debate on Brussels Treaty, Bevin stated: "I should like to make it clear that in all these matters it is our intention and practice to keep the other members of the Commonwealth fully informed and consulted about our policy. We must take great care in building up the new structure of Western Europe, that we do nothing to jeopardise the already existing solid framework of another union of free nations, that of the British Commonwealth."

Commonwealth governments did not raise any serious objection to the new British attitude towards Europe. Welcoming the Brussels Treaty, the Canadian Secretary of State for External Affairs, St. Laurent, said in the Canadian House of Commons, on 29 April 1948 that the 'Western Union', created by the Brussels Treaty "seeks to restrain the aggressive forces of communism, not by Maginot line but by building up in the liberal, democratic and Christian states of Western Europe a dynamic counter-attraction to them... The move towards the creation of

18 Attlee, n. 2, p. 171.
a union of all the peoples of Western Europe has been successfully started. We welcome that move and we are confident that the peoples of Western Europe will continue to respond successfully to the challenge presented to them by the threat to everything they cherish in the remorseless advance of communist totalitarianism". 20 Australia also took a similar stand, maintaining that peace in Europe was the condition of peace in Asia. Australians thought that the Brussels treaty improved the prospects of peace in Europe. 21 J.C. Smuts, Prime Minister of South Africa felt that Britain's presence would be necessary for both the Commonwealth and Western Union. 22 New Zealand had the least misgiving on the entire affair: "A closer economic, defensive and spiritual union of the United Kingdom and Europe, which they regard as necessary and desirable, can be achieved without prejudicing the historic unity of the Nations of the British Commonwealth". 23

While Britain's desire for a European Union was based on her genuine interest in insulating Europe from the danger of another world war, she never visualized such a union to go beyond the limits of close collaboration among independent states. She

21 Australian Foreign Minister, Dr Evatt, in a broadcast from London, on 27 July 1948.
never favoured the idea of building a supra-national structure also. In the early post-war years, Britain supported the creation of some European institutions, but all of them merely provided a political/legal framework for co-operation in matters of common interest among independent European states. In April 1948, the Organization for European Economic Co-operation was established in a convention of fourteen nations. This Organization was set up to administer the Marshal Aid programme for European economic recovery. Similarly in 1949 a conference of the European statesmen, held at The Hague, gave birth to the Council of Europe, whose Consultative Assembly at Strasbourg, many thought, would be the forerunner of a European Federal Parliament. This Consultative Assembly was the centre of discussion of European problems for a number of years. In April 1949 the NATO was created. Britain also took part in the creation of the European Payments Union by the OEEC in June 1950. On 5 May 1955, the Western European Union, a product of Sir Anthony Eden's efforts in 1954, came into being. But all these organizations were not supra-national in character, infringing the sovereignty of its members. The one organization which had

24 The participants in the Convention were Australia, Belgium, Denmark, France, Greece, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, Norway, the Netherlands, Portugal, the United Kingdom, Sweden, Switzerland and Turkey. For further details of the Convention see Cmd 7796 (1949).

25 This was, the first, in modern history, British association in a military alliance with all the three of the largest Western European Powers - France, Germany and Italy. Benelux countries are also members of the Western European Union.
some supra-national character was the European Coal and Steel Community, of which, however, Britain was not a member. The Commonwealth factor in Britain's policy towards European Union movement could be seen in her outlook towards three important European organizations - the Council of Europe, the European Coal and Steel Community and the European Economic Community.

THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

The idea behind the creation of the Council of Europe was to create a European Parliamentary Assembly, which would have the power to pass binding laws by majority vote. But Britain favoured an Assembly which would be responsible to a Committee of Ministers, which was in turn responsible to their respective Parliaments. Decisions would only be taken therefore with the consent of the member governments. The Council of Europe consisted of a Committee of representatives of Governments (Committee of Ministers) and of a Consultative Assembly. Britain joined the Council because it was specifically stated that "participation in the Council of Europe shall not affect the collaboration of its Members in the work of the United Nations and

26 The idea of a Council of Europe was originated by M. Paul-Henri Spaak and M. Georges Bidault of France and Belgium, and got the official support of France and Belgium in July 1948. For the Statute of the Council of Europe, see Cmd 7778 (1949). The signatories were, Belgium, Denmark, France, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and the United Kingdom, Strasbourg was the Headquarters of the Council of Europe. Besides till 1961 six other countries also became members of the Council of Europe. They were: Greece, Turkey, Iceland, Federal Republic of Germany, Austria, and Cyprus. (In 1963 Switzerland and in 1965 Malta also joined the Council of Europe).
of other international organizations or unions to which they are parties".\(^{27}\) This freedom was necessary for Britain in view of her special Commonwealth connexions. Many thought that the Council of Europe would be the forerunner of the projected federation of Europe. But opinion in Britain had cautioned her against greater involvement in this Council. A leading politician, cautioned the Government: "We cannot say that we will make Strasbourg and Western Union the centre of our political life and make the Commonwealth, the Sterling Area and the rest of it fit in as they may".\(^{28}\) However, the unenthusiastic outlook of Britain invited some criticism from others to the effect that the British Government was lacking in zeal for the plan of the Western European Union. This negative British attitude was largely due to Britain's relations with the Commonwealth. She did also not take much interest in the proposal for setting up a political authority for Europe because of the difficulty of reconciling her place in the Commonwealth with that in Europe.

Britain's negative approach to the concept of supra-national European bodies was obvious in the appointment of Hugh Dalton, a known critic of European federation, to represent Britain in the sub-committee of European Consultative Council to consider the proposal for a Consultative Assembly. However, ultimately

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\(^{27}\) See Article 1 (c) of the Statute in Cmd 7778 (1949), p. 2.

Britain agreed on the creation of the Assembly, while retaining with the Government the freedom of appointment of delegates to the Assembly. The first meeting of the Assembly took place in Strasbourg in August 1949. The Assembly was of little consequence, since its decisions were not binding on the governments of the member countries. As Ernest Davies, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Office, said later in 1950, Britain was only prepared to conceive the Council of Europe as a body for the formation of European opinion, and not as an executive authority which imposed its will upon governments. During the debate on the Council of Europe in the House of Commons on 13 November 1950, he said that it was impossible for Britain to take an exclusively European view: "We cannot look at our economic, political, cultural, social or defence co-operation simply from the point of view of Europe. We have to take into account our position not only as the centre of the Sterling Area but as the leading partner in the Commonwealth and, in doing so, I do not think, there is any lack of consideration whatsoever for the interests of Europe". A meeting of the Council of Europe, in 1951, incidentally discussed the question whether Britain could associate Commonwealth countries, as observers, with the deliberations of the Council of Europe. It took no decision on the matter.


30 Ibid., col. 1397.

31 This was stated by Christopher Hollis. UK, House of Commons, Parliamentary Debates, vol. 494, Session 1951-52, col. 96.
When Winston Churchill, the noted champion of the European unity movement, came back to the office in 1951, after the fall of the Labour Government, he sounded a note of caution. In his speech on 11 May 1953 he asked: "Where do we stand? We are not members of the European Defence Community, nor do we intend to be merged in a Federal European system. We feel we have a special relation to both. This can be expressed by prepositions, by the preposition "with" but not "of" - we were with them, but not of them. We have our own Commonwealth and Europe."  

Anthony Eden was more emphatic. In 1952 he said that Britain's joining "a federation on the continent of Europe is something which we know in our bones we cannot do". 

By 1953, the Council of Europe was in the throes of its death. But when the question of creation of a Western European Union was widely discussed, suggestions were put forth to utilise the Council of Europe as a parliamentary forum for Western European Union. The end came more or less on the lines of the fear expressed by the National Executive Committee.

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33 Eden's speech at the Columbia University, on Britain's attitude to European Federation and the Atlantic Community, on 11 January 1952. Manchester Guardian, 12 January 1952.

34 The Council of Western European Union held its inaugural meeting at Paris in May 1955.

of the Labour Party in 1950. It warned that many delegates to the European Consultative Assembly were keen to develop it into a European Parliament, with legislative powers, and usurp the function of the inter-governmental organizations.

EUROPEAN COAL AND STEEL COMMUNITY

One of the objectives behind the creation of the European Coal and Steel Community was the promotion of de facto solidarity in Europe. It was thought that "the pooling of coal and steel production should immediately provide for the setting up of common foundations for economic development as a first step in the federation of Europe". To begin with, it

36 Members of the National Executive were Attlee, Herbert Morrison, Hugh Dalton, Shinwell and Aneurin Bevan (all Cabinet Ministers).

37 It noted that: "A disagreement has already developed between the Committee of Ministers, whose members are responsible for the work of the inter-governmental organizations, and some members of the Consultative Assembly who wish it to supervise the work of the inter-governmental organizations and ultimately to usurp their functions. Unless a clear decision on this issue is made and sincerely accepted by both partners to the dispute, the Council of Europe may soon discredit itself by sterile wrangles over questions of jurisdiction." Labour Party, European Unity: A Statement by the National Executive Committee of the British Labour Party (London, 1950), pp. 12-13.

38 The French decision, on 9 May 1950, to create the ECSC, said that "The French Government proposes that an authority should be created which should take over control and production of all steel and coal in Western Europe. It would not have ownership rights, but it would have controlling power". Cmd 7970 (1950), pp. 3-4.
envisaged the immediate freeing of the movement of coal and steel between member countries, free of all customs duty.  

Britain welcomed the French initiative for the European Coal and Steel Community, since she believed that it would help to end the age-long feud with Germany, and so bring unity and peace to Europe. But she was abhorrent to its supra-national authority whose decisions would bind the member countries. A stream of correspondence flowed between Britain and France, seeking clarification on this particular point, but without ever reaching a meeting point. At the 49th Annual Conference of the Labour Party, in 1950, Hugh Dalton, spoke against "allowing vital decisions on great issues of national economic policy to be transferred from the British Parliament at Westminster to some supra-national European assembly". Therefore when six European Powers met and created the European Coal and Steel Community, on 3 June 1950, Britain chose to keep aloof, though a permanent delegation was attached to that organization. When Herbert Morrison succeeded Bevin as Foreign

39 Ibid., p. 5.
42 See the letters exchanged between the two Governments. Ibid.
44 The six countries were from Germany, Belgium, Italy, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands. All of them accepted the supra-national authority of the ECSC. For final communiqué see Cmd 7970 (1950), p. 14.
Secretary, in 1951, he expressed Britain's sympathy for the idea behind the Schuman Plan and similar projects which helped closer economic association among the various European countries. But he pointed out that his country, with its ties with the Commonwealth and its economic undertakings all over the world, could not give commitments in advance to an European organization of this type. Eventually, on 21 December 1954, an agreement was signed in London, defining the relations between Britain and the ECSC, which provided for a Standing Council of Association for consultative purposes and for the co-ordination of policies, if restrictions were being imposed on the trade of coal and steel between Britain and the Community.

While the negotiations were going on over Britain's association with the ECSC, Britain had taken full account of the views of the members of the Commonwealth. Moving a resolution, in the House of Commons on 21 February 1955, to ratify the Agreement concerning the relations between Britain and the European Coal and Steel Community, the Minister of Housing and Local

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47 See the statement of Douglas Dodds-Parker, Joint Under Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, on 3 May 1954. UK, House of Commons, Parliamentary Debates, vol. 527, Session 1953-54, col. 3. For the text of the correspondence between UK and ECSC, see Cmd 9147 (1954).

48 The Resolution said: "that this House approves the Agreement concerning the relations between the United Kingdom and the European Coal and Steel Community, signed on 21st December 1954". UK, House of Commons, Parliamentary Debates, vol. 537, Session 1954-55, col. 881.

49 The Agreement came into force on 23 September 1955.
Government, Duncan Sandys, said that it was their unanimous view that "Britain must retain her complete freedom to determine for herself her own economic policies in the interest of her people", and that any links with Europe to be forged only after considering its impact on the Commonwealth. Explaining the agreement, Anthony Nutting, the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, said: "All the parties to it have reaffirmed that full regard should be paid to the interests of consumers as well as of producers and to the interests of third countries and in that connection I need mention only the word 'Commonwealth'. The Agreement provides that due regard shall be paid to the special relationship between the United Kingdom and other members of the Commonwealth".

EUROPEAN ECONOMIC COMMUNITY

With the failure of France to ratify the European Defence Community treaty in August 1954, there followed a period of lull for about three years in the European Union movement in Britain. Britain became sceptical of the future of the Union. But the movement again became animated in Britain in March 1957 when the European Common Market was established by the six members of the

51 Ibid., col. 948.
52 The idea of the EEC was put forward as early as 1955. In June 1955 the Foreign Ministers of the six member countries of the ECSC met at Messina and expressed agreement, in principle, on the establishment of a Common Market by stages in Western Europe.
European Coal and Steel Community. The idea behind the treaty was to establish a European Economic Community, by way of setting up a customs union amongst the members. In effect, all restrictions on trade (tariffs, quotas etc.) between the members of the Community would gradually be removed, while, at the same time, a common tariff wall would be raised around the whole area. However, the opening up of national frontiers to the free movement of goods constituted the first stage of establishing the Economic Community. In brief, it was another attempt to "re-launch" the European Union.

What would it mean to Britain and her relationship with the Commonwealth, if she chose to join the EEC? Naturally its impact would have been on two fronts: (1) economic and (2) political. Economically, Britain would have to sacrifice Commonwealth Preferences and agree to discrimination against the other Commonwealth countries. The double effect of such a choice would be, to quote, Hugh Gaitskell: "The barriers go down between us [Britain] and the six countries of Europe. But they go up between us and the Commonwealth".

The implication


was that while the advantages the Commonwealth exports enjoyed in the British market under the Commonwealth Preference system disappear, a new tariff wall would be raised against them, allowing the entry of EEC manufactures into the British market duty free. Therefore the EEC goods would get preference to Commonwealth goods in the British market, endangering basic interests of most of the Commonwealth countries.

Equally important was its political impact. EEC was not only an economic institution, but also an institution with political implications. On the political plane Britain was not prepared to accept the supra-national character of the Community, and on the diplomatic plane, she could ill-afford to ignore the Commonwealth factor. Besides, whatever the British determination to join the Common Market, there were strong political and economic reasons to protect the British trade with the rest of the Commonwealth, because it was one of the means through which she could maintain her influence on other Commonwealth countries.

The Suez crisis and the attitude of Commonwealth countries towards Britain, had a profound impact on British outlook towards Western Europe. Britain took the initiative in inviting the Council of Western European Union to meet in London in February 1957.56 This was in marked contrast to that of the first Labour Government, which rather dragged its feet with regard

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56 "Britain in Europe", Scotsman, 1 February 1957. It met in London for a two-days meeting on 26th and 27th February 1957.
to the strengthening of closer links between Britain and Europe.

With this new initiative began the present British move to join
the European grouping. In Paris, on 10 March 1957, Prime
Minister Macmillan himself stated: "We are trying to devise ways
of drawing closer to Europe". This he said immediately after
his first meeting, after Suez Crisis, with the French Prime
Minister, on 9 March 1957.

Macmillan's first effort, as Prime Minister was to take
Britain closer to Western Europe in an association between the
Six and the rest in Western Europe, in a loose framework of a
European Free Trade Area in respect of all goods other than
food stuffs. In his words: "We pointed out that although
our special interests and responsibilities in the Commonwealth
precluded the acceptance of arrangements which would make it
impossible for Britain to accept agricultural imports from the
Commonwealth on terms at least as favourable as those applying
to Europe, yet we could co-operate fully in an industrial free
trade area". Macmillan's line of thought on the plan could be
seen in his note to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Peter

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57 Daily Telegraph, 11 March 1957.

58 At the Ministerial meeting of the OEEC, in July 1955, Britain
proposed a Free Trade Area, which, among other things,
emphasized respect for national sovereignty and protection to
vital Commonwealth interests (e.g. agriculture) and harmonize
interests of Britain, the Commonwealth and Europe. For
details of the British outlook to the European Free Trade
Area, see Macmillan's speech in the House of Commons, on
26 November 1956. UK, House of Commons, Parliamentary Debates,

59 Harold Macmillan, "Riding the Storm: The Memoirs of Harold
Thorneycroft. He wrote:

I feel sure that the pressure for European integration, though expressed in economic terms, really derives from the strong desire of many European countries for some form of closer political association. We should take advantage of this, since, while we are in something of a straitjacket as regards economic integration, we may well be able to show Europe that we are prepared for a closer political association. The following points ought to be considered urgently.

1) As I foreshadowed in my broadcast after the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' meeting, we might agree that the management of a European Free Trade Area should be left to a European managing board. This might well be called a 'supra-national' institution. But does it matter?

4) We must not be bullied by the activities of the Six. We could, if we were driven to it, fight their movement if it were to take the form of anything that was prejudicial to our interests. Economically, with the Commonwealth and other friends, including the Scandinavians, we could stand aside from a narrow Common Market. We also have some politico-military weapons. (60)

While Britain was considering her policy towards the European Common Market, Harold Macmillan, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, felt the necessity of a Commonwealth Prime Ministers Meeting.61 On 23 October 1956 he said that Britain would "take their decision on these questions in the light of any views which other Commonwealth Governments may express".62 He thought that emotional bonds between Britain and the Commonwealth were stronger than most material interests. "In these post-war years,

60 Ibid.
in co-operation with our European friends, we have been able to do quite a lot. But sometimes we have found that we could not go along with them without damage to the Commonwealth relationship", he said.63

The question of Britain's association with the EEC was discussed at the Commonwealth Prime Ministers Conference in 1957. As Macmillan records: "There was much discussion on the whole question of European integration, both formally and informally. The Prime Ministers and Ministers showed themselves generally sympathetic. Since under our proposals the agricultural interests of the Commonwealth countries would be fully preserved, even the violent opposition of the Beaverbrook press caused me little anxiety".64 During his Commonwealth tour in 1958, Macmillan made special efforts to drive his ideas at home, publicly and privately, with Commonwealth statesmen, and found that they were all sympathetic.65 But the French proposal in March 1959, to extend preferential tariffs in overseas Commonwealth countries to a certain quota of continental European goods, was totally unacceptable to Britain; and it blocked the success of the Free Trade Area negotiations.66 However, Britain kept the Commonwealth countries informed of the progress of her negotiation for the creation of the EFTA.67 (Further details of negotiation is given in Chapter II)

64 Macmillan, n. 59.
65 Ibid.
66 Ibid.
67 Ibid.
European Free Trade Association

When the negotiations for a European Free Trade Area failed, the non-EEC countries of Western Europe formed the European Free Trade Association on the lines of policy pursued by them collectively during the European Free Trade Area negotiations. The Association was established by those European nations who were unwilling to join the EEC, in order to safeguard their trade interests from the challenge posed by the creation of the Economic Community. The Stockholm Convention of Britain, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Switzerland, Austria and Portugal established the Free Trade Association in 1960, with the object of promoting trade between and among member countries, by way of abolishing tariffs and other barriers to trade between them. But an important feature of EFTA was that every member, unlike the EEC members, would be free to fix its external tariff to the rest of the world. This freedom was particularly necessary for Britain to safeguard her trading preferences with the Commonwealth, while enabling her to improve her economic position in Europe.

During the discussion on 20 November 1959, preceding the creation of the European Free Trade Association, British spokesmen made it clear that the other Commonwealth countries had been continuously kept informed and at the official level consultations took place between senior officials who attended the Commonwealth Economic Consultative Council in May 1959. In September 1959, there were further discussions at the
ministerial level. Besides, the Commonwealth Liaison Committee also provided a forum for fruitful discussions. 68

The Plunge

Britain's outlook towards European integration during the period immediately after the war was a passive one — a role more of less of a catalyst hoping that European unity would convert Europe into an area of peace. The main political reason for Britain's non-involvement in the European Union movement was the fear that a Union with Britain in it would infringe her sovereignty. This was one of the major reasons why Britain declined membership of the European Coal and Steel Community. The other major reason was the belief in Whitehall that active participation in the European Union would be incompatible with her Commonwealth connections and obligations. As Fitzsimons wrote: "To those intent on European Union, Britain's Commonwealth ties were a perpetual fog bank cutting England off from the Continent". 69 However, in the earlier period, she was able to carry the Commonwealth with her in her desire to join the European Union and had made it abundantly clear that in any case Britain would not sacrifice the interest of the Commonwealth for that of Europe.


69 M.A. Fitzsimons, The Foreign Policy of the British Labour Government 1945-51 (Notre Dame, Indiana, 1953), p. 120.
These three factors that inhibited Britain during late 1940s and early 1950s began to lose their importance in the late 1950s. In Britain a tendency had developed to play down the value of British sovereignty by the curious argument that Britain had already limited her sovereignty through the membership of NATO and GATT and indicated that possible further surrender of sovereignty on account of joining the European movement would be a matter of lesser concern for Britain, if it is likely to be economically advantageous to her. The critical attitude of a majority of Commonwealth countries towards Britain during the Suez crisis psychologically set the minds of Britain's official circles to feel less for Commonwealth interest than heretofore. It kindled the thought that Britain's future influence in the world and prosperity lay not in the Commonwealth, but in association with Europe. But they also felt that it would be most advantageous if she could become a part of Europe without endangering her position and influence in the Commonwealth. Macmillan saw no incompatibility in British membership of the Commonwealth and of the EEC. The year 1961 proved to be decisive in this respect.

It is important to examine why the shift took place in the British policy towards the Commonwealth and Europe. This could be attributed to a variety of reasons, cumulated over a period of time since the war. It is noteworthy that during the post-war years, Britain upheld the theory of interdependence in world politics, which, she believed, would be the best guarantee
of security. This was made easier by the absence of possible Russian threat and the disappearance of the Third World concept of the Commonwealth, which Britain cherished for long. But during the second half of the 1950s, Britain desired to tie herself up with Europe, without putting her relationship with the Commonwealth in jeopardy, because she through, thereby, saw a balance of advantage for Britain.

However, it may be recalled that before Britain decided to enter into negotiations with "the Six" in the ECM, the other Commonwealth countries were fully consulted in the matter. Prime Minister Macmillan told Parliament on 13 June 1961 that before taking a decision in the matter, it was essential "to have further discussions with all the Commonwealth countries". For this purpose, the British Government deputed the Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations and two other senior Ministers to visit other Commonwealth capitals and hold discussions with the Commonwealth governments on the political and other technical issues involved. Accordingly, the Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations, Duncan Sandys, visited New Zealand, Australia and Canada; the Minister of Civil Aviation, Peter Thorneycroft visited Singapore, Malaya, Ceylon, Pakistan and India; and the Minister of Labour, John Hare

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71 Ibid., cols. 204-5.
visited Ghana, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone. 72 In Canberra, Duncan Sandys assured the Australian Government that before the British Government took any decision, the views of the Commonwealth governments would be carefully considered. 73 He took pains to convince Australia that "the objective of closer unity in Europe was in no way incompatible with the maintenance and further development of Commonwealth ties which constitute a valuable unifying influence in a much divided world". 74 While in New Zealand, he reassured that Government that in the negotiations between Britain and the EEC, the former "would seek to secure special arrangements to protect the vital interests of New Zealand and other Commonwealth countries and that Britain would not feel able to join the E.E.C. unless such arrangements were secured". 75

But the general feeling in the Commonwealth was that "the accession of the United Kingdom to the 'Treaty of Rome' might weaken existing Commonwealth links and injure the economies

72 For the nature and outcome of discussion see Cmnd 1449 (1961).
73 See the joint statement issued in Ottawa on 14 July 1961. Ibid., p. 4.
74 See the joint statement issued in Canberra on 11 July 1961. Ibid., p. 5.
75 See the joint statement issued in Wellington on 6 July 1961. Ibid., p. 7.
of the developing countries of the Commonwealth in particular.\footnote{76}

One important problem that was discussed during these consultations with Commonwealth governments, particularly with Canada, Australia and New Zealand, was revealed by Duncan Sandys in a speech in the House of Commons on 7 June 1962. He said:

As far back as last July when I visited those three countries, before the negotiations have been started, I made it quite clear that there was one item which we could not reasonably expect to negotiate with the Six: and that was unrestricted entry for manufactured goods from the developed Commonwealth countries. That obviously stood out a mile before we entered the negotiations. Last March again we told the three Governments of the Scheme we intend to propose, and we discussed it with them in the weeks which followed. Although we naturally did not expect them to give their blessing to any concessions, I am sure that they would not complain that they had not been fully informed and fully consulted. (77)

After the completion of the consultations with the Commonwealth, Britain decided to open formal negotiations with the EEC for membership.\footnote{78} Britain sent on 9 August 1961 a formal application for negotiations with a view to joining the Community. On

\footnote{76 See the Indian opinion at the joint statement issued in New Delhi on 14 July 1961. See Ibid., p. 9. India feared that it might do serious damage to India's export trade if Britain joined the EEC without adequate safeguards "for the future trade of the Commonwealth with special emphasis on the types of products which come from the developing countries". In the light of this, the Ministers of both the countries examined the kind of exports which might be affected on account of Britain's entry into the EEC. Mr Thorneycroft assured the Indian Minister that Britain would keep India's interests in mind in the negotiations for entry into the Economic Community. Ibid., p. 10.}

\footnote{77 UK, House of Commons, Parliamentary Debates, vol. 661, Session 1961-62, cols. 700-01. In 1961 manufactured goods represented about 2 per cent of Canada's exports to the United Kingdom, Australia's 0.7 per cent and New Zealand's 00.5 per cent.}

\footnote{78 See the statement of Prime Minister Harold Macmillan, on 31 July 1961. UK, House of Commons, Parliamentary Debates, vol. 645, Session 1960-61, cols. 928-33.}
8 November 1961 negotiation for full British membership of EEC began in Brussels.

However, in July 1961, Macmillan forewarned the House of Commons that the consequences might be serious for everybody if "the Six", by asking too high a price, forced Britain into an impossible choice. "If we cannot succeed in bringing this negotiation to a satisfactory conclusion, we of course will not abandon the obligations that we have both internally and externally, but if it fails, then, I think we ought to be quite clear ourselves and perhaps the countries with which we are to negotiate ought to be quite clear, that quite a lot of things will happen and quite major changes may have to be made in the foreign policy and the commitments of Great Britain". In August 1961, while presenting his case to the House of Commons, he emphasized that the decision to apply was not a decision to join but rather, as the Government's Motion put it, "to see if satisfactory arrangements can be made to meet the special interests of the United Kingdom, of the Commonwealth and of the European Free Trade Association". He pledged that Britain would not make a firm agreement, "until it has been approved by this House after full consultation with other Commonwealth countries". This was the spirit with which Macmillan looked at the negotiations with the EEC.

79 Ibid., cols. 937-38.
80 Ibid., col. 1480.
It is significant that unofficial opinion in Britain never favoured a choice between the Commonwealth and Europe. Among the two major political parties, the Labour Party took active interest in bringing at the unity of Europe immediately after the war, though it was not at all keen to take Britain into it.\footnote{According to Michael Stewart, Foreign Secretary in the Wilson Cabinet, Britain was not keen then because of the fear that the Commonwealth would feel that they were neglected. In an interview with the author on 9 September 1970, in London.} While applauding the Labour Government's contribution during its term of office between 1945-1951, in launching, fuelling and steering the European Union movement, the Labour Party National Executive said:

The Labour Party cannot see European unity as an overriding end in itself. Britain is not just a small crowded island of the Western Coast of continental Europe. She is the nerve centre of a world-wide Commonwealth which extends into every continent. In every respect except distance we in Britain are closer to our kinsmen in Australia and New Zealand on the far side of the world, than we are to Europe... The economies of the Commonwealth are complimentary to that of Britain to a degree which those of Western Europe could never equal. Furthermore, Britain is also the banker of the sterling Area. This is the largest multi-lateral trading system in the world – within which exchange controls are not applied and all transactions are conducted in a single currency. We believe it is in the interest of the world at large that this system should be protected and maintained. In any case, it is a vital British interest. (\footnote{Labour Party, n. 37, pp. 3-5.})

The Party was emphatic that "any changes in Britain's relations with Western Europe must not impair her position as nerve-centre of the Commonwealth and banker of the Sterling Area".\footnote{Ibid.} Therefore
it was neither possible nor desirable to form a complete political or economic union with Europe. This attitude remained unchanged throughout the period under review.

Similarly, in Parliament, the Labour Party expressed its abhorrence to the British participation in the European Economic Community, at the cost of Commonwealth relationship.

Its spokesman Douglas Jay said:

If, of course, which I hope will not happen, French intransigence or anything else were to force this country, against its will, into choosing between membership of the Common Market on the one hand or the Commonwealth and the rest of Europe on the other, I think there is no harm in making it plain, in that sense, this country would be bound to choose the Commonwealth alternative. That must be so for two reasons, either of which is decisive in itself, one political and the other economic. Politically it must be so, because the strength of Commonwealth unity and coherence must always be a paramount aim of British policy. I think that we are all agreed on that. (85)

Just before the British Government's decision on Common Market in 1961, the Labour Party, through a pamphlet, stressed that the British policy should be based upon an assessment of the potential effects of British membership of the EEC upon the Commonwealth. It said that British membership in the EEC would have a far-reaching effect on the Commonwealth since she would be "entering into a closer economic and political relationship with the Six than it now has with the Commonwealth". 87

84 Ibid., p. 6.
87 Ibid.
On the other hand, the Conservative Party adopted an attitude of reconciliation of British interest with Commonwealth and Europe. Expanding the Party policy on 15 June 1950, Anthony Eden said:

We have many times made it very clear that in any conflict of friendship or interest the British Commonwealth and Empire will always come first. We say this not merely out of loyalty or affection, but because we know that it is as the heart and centre of the Commonwealth family that we can make our fullest contribution to promote our own prosperity and the peace of the world.... But while these convictions must always have first place in our minds, we should still have confidence to be able to play a full and constructive part in world affairs in Europe and elsewhere. There should be no clash of interests here, for it is to the advantage of the nations of the Commonwealth that peace should be grown in Europe, while it is to Europe's advantage that the British Commonwealth and Empire should be united and strong. (88)

Earlier on 5 May 1948, he stated:

The fact that the result of the pursuit of this policy must be to bring us closer to the nations of Western Europe underlines the essential importance of the position of the British Commonwealth and Empire in relation to these discussions. For us in this House as a whole the welfare of the Commonwealth and Empire must always be the first consideration. This is paramount. I hope, therefore, that the Prime Minister will be able this afternoon to give us some information about the conversations which must undoubtedly have taken place on these questions with our great partners overseas. We have seen the speeches of Field-Marshals Smuts and, if I remember rightly, Mr MacKenzie King warmly supporting the conception of the Western European Union, and I have no doubt the Governments of the Commonwealth are not only being kept informed at every stage of these discussions but... being consulted. (89)

88 Conservative Research Department, Notes on Current Politics (London), 17 July 1950, p. 11.

In fact in 1949 the Conservative Party, in a pamphlet, accused the Labour Party of neglecting the Commonwealth, while giving greater attention to Europe. It said: "It is significant that, whilst the Socialist Government have been led to play a leading part in the development of the organization for European Economic Co-operation, they have done nothing to promote a similar organization for the Empire, yet the needs of Imperial economic co-operation are far greater than those of European Co-operation. A Conservative Government will therefore examine immediately with the Dominions and colonies the possibility of providing a machinery for economic consultation as our counter part to the organization for European Economic Co-operation". 90

The Party supported the Government stand to negotiate for Britain's membership of the EEC, thinking that it would enable Britain to "act as European broker to the interests of the developed countries of the Commonwealth, and a bridge between advanced industrial Europe and the underdeveloped world". 91

In the House of Commons Winston Churchill said on 27 June 1950, that "With our position as the centre of the British Empire and Commonwealth and with our fraternal association with the United States in the English speaking world, we could not accept full membership of a federal system of Europe". 92 In the context of the establishment of the European

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Economic Community, a party spokesman, Derick Heathcoat Amory said: "We liked the prospects of stronger allies and more prosperous friends, but we had to accept the fact that we could not join it ourselves. The reasons for that decision are... First, our strong ties with the Commonwealth could not be thrown overboard. If we had agreed to bring our tariff into line with the common external tariff of Six, that would have meant the end of Commonwealth preference and the end of Commonwealth free entry into this country". Another member R.H. Turton warned the Government that "our influence, our employment and our own standard of living depend upon that Commonwealth partnership.... If we neglect the Commonwealth, if we become so engrossed in Europe... let there be no doubt at all that we shall sink back and become a small, insignificant, overpopulated little island, and we shall not be able to support our population". When Diefenbaker of Canada suggested, in 1957, an early Commonwealth trade and economic conference in the light of European economic integration, a group of Conservative members of British Parliament issued a statement to support it. It said: "We have a duty to give Commonwealth manufacturers preference in our home market... Equally we cannot be sure that all vital British industries could compete with free imports of continental manufactures. Closer British economic association

94 Ibid., col. 1095.
with continental Europe must give first preference to British and Commonwealth goods".\textsuperscript{95}

The maintenance of influence in world politics was the touchstone of post-war British policy towards Europe\textsuperscript{vis-a-vis} Commonwealth. It was for this reason, during the earlier period, that she dragged her feet in respect of the European union movement and stood firmly by the Commonwealth, while desiring that Western European countries should unite themselves. Britain could not consider Western Europe and Commonwealth on equal terms, because she herself was a part of the Commonwealth. Therefore, as Prime Minister Attlee emphasized, Britain wielded greater influence in the world when she acted in consultation with the Commonwealth.\textsuperscript{96} Hence, British participation in the European organizations was limited only to the extend that it did not impair her relationship with the Commonwealth.\textsuperscript{97}

The Suez crisis, and the critical attitude adopted by a majority of Commonwealth countries eroded substantially the British attachment to the Commonwealth. This was followed by the establishment of the European Economic Community, posing a serious threat to British trade, compelling Britain to think about an enduring arrangement with the new West European

\textsuperscript{95} \textit{The Times}, 5 July 1957.


\textsuperscript{97} The European Organization in which Britain participated were, the Council of Europe, European Payments Union, Organization for European Economic Co-operation, Western European Union and European Free Trade Association.
economic bloc. In an attempt to achieve this objective without jeopardizing her relationship with the Commonwealth, she proposed the European Free Trade Area. When negotiations for the Free Trade Area failed she formed the European Free Trade Association, in which, to protect Commonwealth trade, she retained the freedom to determine the level of tariff for import from countries outside the Association. But, by the beginning of 1960s, in a positive policy towards Europe, she began to give increasing, though not dominant, importance to Western Europe, culminating in the British application for EEC membership in 1961. This was facilitated by the gradual shift in the traditional pattern of trade between Britain and the Commonwealth. But a factor conspicuous was that, at no stage, Britain desired closer association with the Western Europe at the cost of her Commonwealth relationship or sacrificing Commonwealth interests. However, over the years Britain refused to participate actively in the European integration movement largely because of the fear that it might lead Britain to choose between the Commonwealth and Europe. Prime Minister Attlee was the symbol of this thinking. Therefore Britain chose to play only an external role to help nations of Western Europe to unite themselves. But Prime Minister Macmillan envisaged a new bridge-building role for Britain between the Commonwealth and Europe, a role of conciliation rather than choice. Macmillan believed that Britain would be able to protect Commonwealth interests while negotiating for EEC membership. That was why, even in 1961, he sought
authority only to negotiate with the EEC "to see if satisfactory arrangements can be made to meet the special interests of the United Kingdom, of the Commonwealth and of the European Free Trade Association". 98 He was emphatic that if a closer relationship between Britain and the EEC were to disrupt the ties between Britain and the nations of the Commonwealth, then "the loss would be greater than the gain". 99 On 2 August 1961, he told the House of Commons that the underlying issues like European unity, the future of the Commonwealth and the strength of the Free World, were all important and Britain wanted to play her role in all of them. But,

Britain in isolation would be of little value to our Commonwealth partners, and I think that the Commonwealth understands it. It would, therefore be wrong in my view to regard our Commonwealth and our European interests as conflicting. Basically they must be complementary.... Nevertheless we recognize to the full our duty and our obligations to the Commonwealth. In the words of the motion, our aim in these negotiations is to make satisfactory arrangements to meet the special interests of the Commonwealth, particularly, of course, in the economic field.... If I thought that our entry into Europe would injure our relations with and influence in the Commonwealth, or be against the true interest of the Commonwealth, I would not ask the House to support this step. (100)

Thus there is no doubt that the Commonwealth factor was dominant in Britain's policy towards Europe. For many years,


it inhibited closer British involvement in the movement for European unity. Even when it was formally decided to open negotiations with the "Six", the Government was faced with mounting public opinion in Britain to give the Commonwealth a higher priority. This made the Government continue its working with the European Union, half heartedly, even after the 1961 decision. Some leading British newspapers even criticized the Government for having given greater importance to the Commonwealth than for economic and/or political integration with Europe in British foreign policy.\(^{101}\) The ambiguous attitude of British statesmen towards the question of European unity led a former French Prime Minister Paul Reynaud to say: "The trouble is, I know, that in England, statesmen are pro-European when they belong to the opposition and anti-European when they are in power".\(^{102}\)
