

Joining the Club

Introduction

Britain's relations with the European Union since the 1950s need to be related to the character of that organization (supranational and with some lurking federal ideas) and to key developments in British domestic and foreign policy. The two went hand in hand as Britain stood aside from the first steps taken towards European integration in the 1950s, then re-evaluated its role and sought membership of the EC in the 1960s and 1970s. The chapter develops the 'Britain in Europe' theme by providing an overview of Britain's relationships with the EC from the post-war leader of a landslide Labour government, Clement Attlee, until accession in 1973. The chapter is particularly concerned with the factors that shaped British government attitudes towards supranational integration, the capacity to attain UK European policy objectives, and the ways in which these preferences and objectives changed over time between the late 1940s and the early 1970s. In the 1950s, the development of European integration is assessed alongside Britain's long-standing preferences for free trade and the maintenance of economic relations with the Commonwealth and USA, an aversion to supranationalism, and a desire to recover great power status. In the face of competing influences, British governments in the 1950s chose not to participate in the early moves towards European integration. This stance was re-evaluated in the early 1960s and led to membership applications in 1961–3 and 1967, both of which were rebuffed by President de Gaulle. A key underlying point is to demonstrate the ways in which national history and national self-understanding played (and still play) a key role in British relations with the EU.

From the contemporary vantage point it is easy to condemn the choices that were made by Britain's political elite when the first steps towards European economic and political integration were taken and the lack of 'European vision' implicit within them. Yet, whilst 20-20 hindsight is

a great asset for the contemporary historian, in the 1950s it could not have been known that the ECSC would develop into what we now know as the EU. It would also have constituted a remarkable about-turn for the British government in the early 1950s to abandon its foreign and trade policy priorities and throw in its lot with the supranational European Coal and Steel Community and its progeny, the European Economic Community. It is more fruitful to explore the decisions that were made, the historical and institutional context within which they were taken, and then analyse their implications without necessarily having to embark on a hunt for the 'guilty men'.

East versus West

After the Second World War Europe was divided and faced severe economic and political challenges. To the east the Soviet Union consolidated its strength. To the west states looked to their principal ally, the USA, for help. As Story (1993: 11) puts it, 'Europe had become an object of world politics with the shots being called by the great powers.' American assistance to Europe came in the form of Marshall Aid, named after Secretary of State George C. Marshall, who developed the plan to rebuild west European economies. Around \$13 billion worth of aid was distributed among west European countries between 1948 and 1952. West Germany was the main beneficiary of Marshall Aid, receiving \$4.5 billion. This served to draw it firmly into the Western bloc. By establishing the Organisation for European Economic Co-operation (OEEC) in May 1948, the Americans sought to involve recipient countries in the Marshall Aid distribution process. Significantly, the British, then the strongest power in Europe, resolutely advocated intergovernmental co-operation in the OEEC rather than the institution of supranational structures with powers over member states.

The USA was keen to see the establishment in Western Europe of open capitalist economies with liberal-democratic political systems. It made sound commercial sense for the USA to seek to restore the economies of the west because it could then trade with them. Hence the USA was a sponsor of European integration and sought the inclusion of its closest European ally, the UK, into this organization. It was not only the external threat from the east that perturbed the Americans; there were also strong Communist parties in France and Italy. The restoration and consolidation of economic prosperity within a liberal, capitalist order was seen as a defence against Communism in these countries.

On Soviet insistence, Marshall Aid was not accepted in Eastern Europe. Both Czechoslovakia and Poland rejected it. This, and the Czech Communists' seizure of sole power in February 1948, led Britain, the Benelux countries (Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg) and France to form the Brussels Treaty organization in March 1948 whereby they pledged mutual military aid and economic co-operation. Also in March 1948 the three Western occupying powers in Germany – France, Britain and the USA – unified their occupation zones and convened a constitutional assembly, which introduced currency reforms that created the Deutschmark. This caused similar steps to be taken in the east of Germany by the fourth occupying power, the Soviet Union. A Soviet attempt to blockade Berlin in the winter of 1948 (which, although occupied by the four powers, was surrounded by the Soviet zone of occupation) was breached by Allied airlifts.

In April 1949 the Treaty of Washington established NATO. This firmly committed the USA to defend Western Europe. In September 1949 the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) was created. In October 1949 the GDR was established in the east. The division of Germany provided firm evidence of the Iron Curtain that had fallen across the continent of Europe.

Intergovernmentalism versus supranationalism

It has been argued that British political elites made three fundamental miscalculations about the first steps taken in the 1950s towards European economic and political integration (Beloff, 1970):

- 1 British governments held the view that supranational integration was idealistic rather than practical and that it would inevitably fail. The EC's federalizing tendencies would soon founder on the rocks of member states' national concerns. The evidence for this is that the British refused to join the ECSC and the European Defence Community (EDC) and only sent a senior civil servant to the negotiations, which led to the Rome Treaties of 1957.
- 2 Britain believed that the problems of the post-war era could be met by establishing a free trade area (EFTA), and that supranational integration was unnecessary.
- 3 The British under-estimated the obstacles to accession once a distinct course of action had been decided upon. de Gaulle blocked the applications made by Macmillan (1961–3) and Wilson (1967).

The restoration of nation states after the Second World War had dashed the hopes of constitutional federalists who had sought a United States of Europe. In their opinion, only such a dramatic step could transcend the bitterness and divisions that had plagued the continent and generated two world wars in the space of 30 years. For them, ways forward in a Europe of nation states were unclear. In the meantime, nation states were re-established and became closely linked to the performance of welfare state functions that further served to consolidate the national state as the recipient of citizens' loyalty.

What was clear was that a basic divide was emerging between Britain, on the one hand, and the six countries that were to found the ECSC in 1951 on the other. The Attlee government was prepared to sponsor co-operation with other European countries, but primarily as a way of ensuring that Britain remained top dog. The Foreign Office view was that 'Great Britain must be viewed as a world power of the second rank and not merely as a unit in a federated Europe' (cited in Ellison, 2000: 16). The British had no intention of participating in a supranational organization, but supranational plans that fundamentally changed relations between European states were being hatched. The Benelux countries had in 1948 taken steps towards 'pooling' their sovereignty when they set up a customs union.

It has been argued that the European policies of the Labour government (1945–51) and Conservative governments of the 1950s directly contributed to the outcome that was supposed to be avoided: the fear that Britain would become, as Labour's post-war Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin put it, 'just another European country'.

Early tensions between supranationalists and intergovernmentalists became apparent at the May 1948 Congress of Europe in The Hague, where over 700 prominent Europeans met to discuss the future of the continent. The outcome of the meeting was creation of the Council of Europe in May 1949. It was located in Strasbourg, on the Franco–German border, in order to symbolize reconciliation between these two countries. Britain's preference for intergovernmentalism prevailed in the Council of Europe: decisions in its Council of Ministers are taken on the basis of unanimity. It has come to be identified with the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), signed in November 1950. This, after the atrocities of the Second World War, signified a commitment to human rights as binding on sovereign states. By 2003 the Council of Europe had 41 members and was the largest pan-European grouping.

Schuman's plan

A core group of west European countries felt frustrated by Britain's opposition to supranationalism and, as the Benelux countries had already done in their customs union, sought economic integration. France and West Germany formed the key axis within this supranational project. Plans developed by the French foreign minister, Robert Schuman, were for a common market in coal and steel. The ECSC was an attempt to resolve the question of how to both restore West German economic prosperity, from which the French would benefit, whilst binding West Germany to a peaceful west European order. The Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg had already taken steps to pool their sovereignty, while for the Italians supranational integration could offer an external guarantee of economic and political stability.

Schuman's plan, proposed on 9 May 1950, led to the creation of the ECSC by the Treaty of Paris in April 1951. It created a common market for coal and steel and supranational structures of government to run the community. Schuman's ambitions were not limited simply to coal and steel. As he put it, 'Europe will not be made all at once or according to a single general plan. It will be built through concrete achievements which first create a *de facto* solidarity' (cited in Weigall and Stirk, 1992).

The ECSC broke new ground in two ways: it laid the foundations for a common market in the basic raw materials needed by an industrial society; and it was the first European inter-state organization to show supranational tendencies.

Schuman advocated step-by-step integration. A united Europe was the goal, but it would be achieved through 'spillover' effects (see Chapter 3). A leading ally of Schuman was the Frenchman, Jean Monnet, who became the first President of the High Authority of the ECSC (the forerunner of the Commission).

Britain was not opposed to the creation of the ECSC, but was opposed to British membership of it. As Hugo Young (1999: ch. 2) shows, there was strong opposition from Labour politicians and senior Whitehall mandarins to British participation in the 'institutional adventures' of Monnet and Schuman. Coal and steel had only recently been brought under state control, so ceding competencies in this area was an unattractive proposition. But more than this, integration also risked offending key trade unions; or, as Herbert Morrison put it: 'It's no damn good – the Durham miners won't wear it' (cited in Forster, 2002a: 299). That said, if supranational integration were to pacify Franco–German relations then it

would be advantageous (it could hardly be argued otherwise). Also, the fact that the US government supported the ECSC affected the British government's stance.

A divide in interpretations of British responses to European integration in the early and mid-1950s has been identified between diplomatic historians and economic historians (Ellison, 2000: 5). Diplomatic historians focus on foreign policy and see UK policy as motivated by opposition to supranationalism, a strong preference for an Atlantic basis for European security, and a need to balance relations with Europe with those with the Commonwealth and USA (J. Young, 1993). Economic historians focus on financial policy and see that while the EC6 sought to develop a common market, Britain sought to maintain sterling's convertibility with the US dollar as a route to the re-establishment of former glories (Milward, 1992). Whatever the focus, a point that unites the two camps is the general view that Britain was not particularly successful in achieving either its diplomatic or commercial policy objectives.

The European Coal and Steel Community's institutions

The ECSC was a major innovation in international politics because participating states agreed to relinquish aspects of their sovereign authority to common institutions. This was an ambitious plan and there were those in Britain that saw it as doomed to fail because high-minded ambitions would founder on the rocks of hard-headed *realpolitik*. What these harbingers of failure did not grasp was that the ECSC was not solely motivated by high minded idealism but by calculations of national interest, particularly French ideas about how to develop peaceful relations with West Germany. Four main institutions were created to operate the ECSC:

- 1 The High Authority had two main tasks: to make policy proposals and to ensure that member states complied with their obligations. Member states were not allowed to give subsidies and aid to their national coal and steel industries and restrictive practices were outlawed. The High Authority was more than just a bureaucracy; it also had an important political role. Its nine members were not national representatives, but they were intended to advance the purposes of European integration.
- 2 The Council of Ministers was the legislature of the ECSC. There were six members of the Council, with each member state having one

representative. As member states were unwilling to lose complete control over key industries, decisions were usually made on the basis of unanimity, which meant that decision-making structures were weak because it was often difficult to get all participants to agree. The Council of Ministers introduced an important element of intergovernmentalism into the ECSC.

- 3 The Common Assembly was meant to provide a democratic input into the working of the ECSC. However, members of the Assembly were not directly elected, but were chosen from the ranks of national parliamentarians. They had a purely advisory role and possessed no legislative authority.
- 4 A Court of Justice was established to settle disputes between member states and the ECSC. When members signed the Treaty of Paris they entered into a binding legal commitment. The role of the Court was to interpret ECSC law in the event of disputes, and thus to define the parameters of supranational integration.

Although the ECSC's institutions created a supranational authority, member states were keen to have the final say in decisions that were taken. They ensured that this happened by making the Council of Ministers the decision-making body of the ECSC. Even today, decision-making power in the EU still resides to a large extent with member states in the Council of Ministers. As we see in the next chapter, this institutional hybridity has been a key feature of the EU's institutional system.

Two steps forward, one step back

Stanley Hoffmann (1966) has argued that European integration has tended to falter when it has had to deal with matters of 'high politics', such as foreign affairs and defence, and to prosper when confronted with matters of 'low politics', chiefly trade. In the early 1950s the morale of federalists was raised by the success of the ECSC, and they looked to build on this success by creating a European Defence Community. This represented a move into the domain of 'high politics' of defence, security and foreign policy.

In 1950, the leader of the opposition, Winston Churchill, had called for a unified European army acting in co-operation with the USA and West Germany. In office, though, Churchill's Conservative government of 1951 to 1955 was as hostile to supranationalism as had been its Labour predecessor, and it refused to join the EDC. The French Left was

also opposed to rearmament of Germany within the EDC. The plan was killed off in August 1954 when it was rejected by the French National Assembly. Instead, in the same month, the six ECSC members plus Britain, as the west European, intergovernmental, pillar of NATO, established the West European Union (WEU). The WEU incorporated the vanquished axis powers of Germany and Italy into the collective defence structures of Western Europe.

All roads lead to Rome

The creation of the WEU could be portrayed as a triumph for intergovernmentalists and a setback for integrationists, although Milward (1992: 386) argues that the setback provided momentum for the negotiations that led to the Treaty of Rome and creation of the Common Market. By the mid-1950s integrationists sought a common market, like that set up by the Benelux countries in 1948. In June 1955 a conference of foreign ministers was convened in the Sicilian coastal town of Messina and a committee led by the Belgian foreign minister, Paul-Henri Spaak, was asked to look at options for further integration.

The British representative on the Spaak committee was a Board of Trade official, Russell Bretherton – ‘the sacrificial agent’ as Hugo Young called him – rather than a senior minister. This indicated the British government’s lack of serious intent. The discussions centred on creation of a common market and an atomic energy authority. When, in November 1955, Spaak drew up his final report Bretherton asked that no reference to Britain’s position be made. This was seen as tantamount to British withdrawal from the process, an impression that the British government was not concerned to dispel (J. Young, 1993: 47).

The outcome of the Spaak committee was two treaties of Rome signed by the six founder members (Belgium, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Luxembourg and West Germany) in March 1957: one established the European Economic Community (EEC) and the other set up the European Atomic Energy Authority (EAEA or Euratom). Thus, there are three founding treaties of the European Communities: the Treaty of Paris (1951) that created the ECSC and the two Treaties of Rome (1957) that established the EEC and Euratom. Subsequent treaties, such as the Single European Act (1986), the Maastricht Treaty (1992), the Amsterdam Treaty (1997) and the Nice Treaty, amend these founding Treaties.

The EEC became the predominant organization. Its founding Treaty was premised on ‘an ever closer union of the peoples of Europe’. It sought

the abolition of trade barriers and customs duties and the creation of a common external tariff, thereby making the EEC a customs union. The EEC was also designed to promote the free movement of workers, goods, services and capital within a common market. The member states transferred to the EEC powers to conclude trading agreements with international organizations on their behalf.

Four main institutions, modelled on those set up to run the ECSC, were created to manage the EC, as shown below:

- 1 The Commission, a supranational institution responsible for both policy proposals and implementation.
- 2 The Council of Ministers, the legislative authority.
- 3 The Common Assembly (now known as the European Parliament), with a consultative role and no legislative authority.
- 4 The Court of Justice, to umpire matters of dispute relating to EC law.

The EEC Treaty also made provision for a Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). Agriculture was an obvious candidate for a common policy for three main reasons. First, it would have been illogical to leave this important area of economic activity with member states. Second, the EEC and the ECSC addressed a range of industrial issues, such that an agricultural policy was seen as a balance to these concerns. Third, France, with its large agricultural sector, sought protection for its farmers as well as access to markets in other member states. Through the CAP France has been highly effective in dressing the national interest as the European interest and thus protecting one of its key economic sectors. The CAP had three founding principles:

- common agricultural prices in the EEC
- common financing (meaning an agricultural budget)
- community preference over imports.

Much of the Treaty framework was vague and depended heavily on the impetus given to integration by member states. The speed and direction of European integration have always depended heavily on their collective endeavour.

Many have argued that the 1950s were a decade of lost opportunities for the British. John Young detects national arrogance in the views of those such as the former Conservative politician, Anthony Nutting, who argued that 'Britain could have had the leadership of Europe on any terms she cared to name' (cited in J. Young, 1993: 52). The historian,

Mirian Camps, also claimed that the 1950s was a decade of 'missed opportunities' in which the leadership of Europe was Britain's 'for the asking' (Camps, 1964: 506). John Young (p. 52, emphasis in original) goes on to make a contrasting point very clearly:

Britain could not have had the leadership of Europe *on its own terms* because Britain saw no need to abandon its sovereignty to common institutions, whereas the Six saw this as vital. Britain could only have played a key role in European integration, paradoxically, *if* it had accepted the continentals' terms and embraced supranationalism, but very few people advocated this before 1957.

The British response

By November 1955, the British were developing a plan that they hoped would lure the EC 'six' away from the supranational integration and towards the British preference for a free trade association without supranational pretensions. The result of Britain's alternative plan was the creation of EFTA, set up by the Stockholm Convention of July 1959. EFTA was in accord with the British preference for intergovernmentalism. The seven signatories – Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Portugal, Austria, Switzerland and Britain – established a free trade area which brought down barriers to trade between members and sought to keep in touch with EC tariff reductions. Europe was now at sixes and sevens.

By the early 1960s it had become apparent to the British that EFTA was peripheral to the fast-growing economies of the EC. A powerful trading bloc was emerging on Britain's doorstep from which it was excluded. In the 1960s the EC appeared to be going from success to success as the Common External Tariff was put in place and the CAP established. Britain was forced into a re-evaluation of previous policy and sought membership of the EC. However, as will be seen, de Gaulle was distinctly underwhelmed by the prospect of British membership and vetoed the first two British accession bids.

The origins of the European Community

A rapid process of European integration was instigated in the 1950s by the institution of the ECSC, the EEC and Euratom. An anti-Europeanism evident in British politics during the 1950s hardened into an anti-Common

Market stance motivated by a dislike of supranational integration's implications for the British political elites view of their country's place in the world (Forster, 2002a).

During the 1950s, supranational integration remained largely confined to the area of low politics and failed to break into the domain of high politics following rejection of the EDC in 1954.

Britain remained aloof from supranational organizations. However, this was not just the product of its distrust of supranationalism; as the former US Secretary of State, Dean Acheson, put it in 1960, the British had lost an Empire and were trying to find a role. Despite decolonization, the Empire/Commonwealth retained a powerful influence over many Conservative MPs and remained 'the main religion of the Tory Party' in the 1950s as R.A. Butler put it (cited in Forster, 2002a: 299). These historical ties and economic entanglements created some real tensions within the British elite when trade policies and relations with the USA, the Commonwealth and the European Community were discussed.

By the end of the 1950s a basic divide had emerged in Europe between the 'EC6' and the 'EFTA7'. The EU proved to be the magnet to which EFTA countries have been attracted. By 2002 most of the EFTA member states had joined the EC (Austria, Britain, Denmark, Portugal and Sweden). Norway rejected membership in referendums in 1972 and 1994, but is associated with the EU through the European Economic Area.

1960s: Britain says yes, de Gaulle says no

Britain is commonly referred to as awkward or reluctant, but other member states have been 'awkward' too. In the 1960s France under the leadership of de Gaulle unilaterally vetoed British accession and strongly opposed the development of qualified majority voting in the Council of Ministers. Kaiser (1996) argues that the UK had come to terms with majority voting as early as 1961. British policy towards the EC was re-evaluated in the 1960s. Both Macmillan (between 1961 and 1963) and Wilson (in 1967) pursued membership of the Community, only to be rebuffed by de Gaulle's veto. The other member states supported UK accession, but the General's '*non*' was enough to block British membership. It was left to Heath to lead Britain into the EC in January 1973.

De Gaulle's vision was of Europe as a third force between the super-powers of both east and west, ideally with him as its leader. He thought Britain would seek to dominate the EC and place it firmly in the American bloc. Britain and America shared a 'globalist' perspective, of

which central features were commitment to an open world trading order and rejection of protectionism.

Four broad characteristics of British policy towards the EC in the 1950s should be highlighted: first, aloofness towards Europe based on a perception, as Churchill put it, that Britain was 'with them' against the greater foe of Communism, but not 'of them' in participating in integration. Second, there was opposition to the sovereignty-eroding implications of supranational integration. British national identity had, if anything, been strengthened by the experience of the Second World War. The sovereignty that had been so keenly defended then was not about to be ceded to supranational institutions in Europe. Third, the other side of this perspective was that accession would be a sign of failure and of Britain's diminished status in the world. Fourth, the development of an alternative policy focused on the Empire and the 'special relationship' with the USA, but by the early 1960s the British government was questioning its aloofness towards the EC. The 'special relationship' with the USA had been dented by the Suez crisis of 1956, when the USA had declined to support Britain's military intervention in Egypt. The relationship was beginning to seem more special in British eyes than in American, and post-war hopes of partnership had been replaced by an economic and military dependence by means of which Britain was consigned to a role of 'increasingly impotent avuncularity' (Edwards, 1993: 209).

Britain was also worried that its close ties with America could be supplanted by links between the USA and the EC. The USA feared that de Gaulle's 'third force' aspirations for Europe would weaken the Western alliance, and hoped Britain would steer the EC in a direction sympathetic to American interests. In July 1962 President Kennedy called for an Atlantic partnership between the USA and the EC, including Britain. He wanted to see an outward-looking and open EC and wanted Britain to be part of it.

In the 1960s the Commonwealth ideal that nations of the former Empire could co-operate on an equal footing took several dents. Divisions emerged between the 'black' and 'white' Commonwealth over, for example, Britain's less than wholehearted denunciation of the racist South African regime after the Sharpeville massacre of 1961. Conflict also arose between India and Pakistan over the disputed territory of Kashmir, and over the unilateral declaration of independence made by Ian Smith's regime in Rhodesia in 1965.

By the time Harold Wilson became Prime Minister in 1964, economic concerns impelled the membership bid. EFTA was not proving a success when compared to the dynamic economies of the EC, and Commonwealth

trading patterns were changing as Australia and New Zealand looked to markets in the USA and Japan. Wilson had come to office espousing 'the white heat of the scientific revolution' that would modernize the British economy. Larger markets were needed for high technology industries – such as aircraft and computers – but exclusion from the EC meant separation from the supranational institutions that united fast-growing neighbouring economies.

On all usual economic indicators Britain was lagging behind the EC. For example, between 1958 and 1968 real earnings in Britain rose by 38 per cent, compared to 75 per cent in the EC. Fear of isolation is apparent in a memorandum sent by Macmillan to his Foreign Secretary, Selwyn Lloyd, in 1959: 'For the first time since the Napoleonic era the major continental powers are united in a positive economic grouping, with considerable political aspects, which, although not specifically directed against the United Kingdom, may have the effect of excluding us both from European markets and from consultation in European policy.'

1973: membership

In 1969 the political complexion of the two countries at the heart of European integration – France and West Germany – changed in a way advantageous to Britain's membership hopes. In France President de Gaulle resigned and was replaced by Georges Pompidou, who (as will be seen) favoured British accession. In West Germany the new Social Democratic government, led by Willy Brandt, was also keen to see enlargement of the EC.

However, prior to the accession of new member states the founder members laid down a budgetary framework for the Community at a heads of government meeting in The Hague in 1969. This was formalized by Treaty in 1970 and provided a classic example of rules that were not to Britain's advantage being determined in the absence of input from the British government. Britain was obliged to accept the *acquis communautaire* (the entire body of European law), including the budgetary arrangements. When Britain joined it contributed 8.64 per cent of the budget, rising to 18.72 per cent in 1977. Construction of the EC's 'own resources' was not to Britain's advantage as it effectively penalized countries with extensive trading links outside the EC and those that had efficient agricultural sectors. Goods entering the EC from non-member states encounter the EC's Common External Tariff, which then becomes

part of the Community's 'own resources'. Having substantial trading links with non-EC countries, notably those in the Commonwealth, Britain was disadvantaged from the start by this measure. Britain's relatively efficient agricultural sector meant that much benefit was not secured from the main financial activity of the EC, the Common Agricultural Policy and its support system for (particularly French) farmers.

Negotiations on British accession began in June 1970 under the Conservative Prime Minister, Edward Heath. In July 1971 a White Paper was published. It noted some of the disadvantages of membership as follows:

- 1 It was estimated that food prices would go up by 15 per cent over a six-year period because the CAP contained a system of Community preference which would mean that Britain could no longer shop around on cheaper world food markets.
- 2 Increased food prices would contribute to a 3 per cent increase in the cost of living over a six-year period.
- 3 British contributions to the EC budget would amount to £300 million a year, making Britain the second largest contributor behind West Germany. British contributions would be high because it had extensive external trading links.

Although Heath was pursuing a policy developed by his Conservative and Labour predecessors who had come to the conclusion that EC membership was necessary if Britain was not to risk economic and political isolation, he was more than merely a pragmatic European. Indeed, Heath was a wholehearted advocate of British membership and remained a convinced Euro-enthusiast throughout his political career. In this he stands apart from many of his Eurosceptic opponents who started out as supporters of British membership of the EC before becoming vociferous critics.

Edward Heath's political outlook was shaped by formative experiences in his youth when he travelled extensively in Europe and saw the rise of Nazism at first hand, even being present at the Nuremberg rally in 1938 (Heath, 1998). Heath's maiden speech as an MP in 1951 had extolled the merits of the ECSC and advocated British membership. Heath remained a stalwart defender of the EU and a vigorous opponent of the Eurosceptics even after the tide within the Conservative Party had turned strongly against him in the 1990s. On pragmatic grounds, too, Heath was convinced of the merits of British accession. Even though there were some

points of contention and some areas where EC and British priorities did not fit, he thought that Britain had little option but to enter the EC and try to shape it from within.

Geoffrey Rippon led the British negotiating team. The application was co-ordinated through the Cabinet Office in an attempt to prevent Whitehall rivalries and tensions scuppering the application. Since the first accession application in 1961, the pace of European integration had quickened considerably. By the early 1970s there were 13,000 typewritten pages of Community legislation covering key areas of EC activity such as the Common Agricultural Policy and the common market (by 2003 there were some 80,000 pages). The leading official negotiator, Sir Con O'Neill, summed up some of the frustrations of the negotiating team when he wrote in 1972 Foreign Office report that: 'None of its policies were essential to us. Many of them were objectionable.' But they had to be accepted if accession was to occur or, as O'Neill also put it, 'swallow the lot, and swallow it now' (cited in H. Young, 1999: 227). That said, the UK did secure some adjustments to EC rules that favoured Commonwealth trading partners for a five-year transition period.

Aside from the negotiation details, there was another crucial element to British accession: the support of French President, Georges Pompidou. Heath (1998: 367–70) had already established a good relationship with Pompidou. The British–French summit meeting, 19–20 May 1971, was central to UK accession. Pompidou supported UK accession for a variety of reasons. It would allow him to distinguish himself from de Gaulle (Pompidou did not share de Gaulle's distrust of the 'Anglo-Saxons'). Another French rejection of British membership could have irreparably damaged UK–French relations. Finally, when compared to the Labour leader, Harold Wilson, there was little doubt that Heath 'meant it' when he sought full membership and that he would not be distracted by the Commonwealth or USA. In the Salon des Fêtes of the Elysée Palace where de Gaulle had vetoed UK accession in 1963, Pompidou (standing alongside Heath) declared that:

Many people believed that Great Britain was not and did not wish to become European, and that Britain wanted to enter the Community only so as to destroy it or divert it from its objectives ... Well ladies and gentlemen, you see before you tonight two men who are convinced of the contrary. (cited in Heath, 1998: 372)

This gave firm impetus to the negotiations, which then required Parliamentary approval. This was secured on 28 October 1971 when

MPs voted by 356 to 244 in favour of accession to the Community, but the Conservative government relied on support from 69 Labour MPs who defied a three line whip to support accession. The House of Lords endorsed membership even more overwhelmingly by 451 votes to 58. The Treaty of Accession was signed in Brussels on 22 January 1972.

British accession occurred just as the economies of Western Europe were ending their long post-war period of economic growth. Britain could hardly have chosen a less propitious moment to dip a tentative toe into the waters of supranational economic and political integration. Oil price increases soon helped to plunge the British and European economies into recession.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the attitudes of British governments towards European economic and political integration in the period from the end of the Second World War, the commencement of the Cold War and the onset of supranational economic and political integration, initially through the ECSC and then in the form of the EEC. Across the political spectrum and at the highest official level, there was scepticism about the European project initiated by the French and Germans. The chapter also sought to identify the policy preferences that underlay these attitudes, the capacity to attain these objectives and the ways in which preferences and objectives changed over time. It was shown that during the 1950s in neither commercial nor diplomatic terms was there a deeply held view at the highest political level that European economic and political integration was in the UK's interests. The UK was prepared to sponsor integration, but was not itself prepared to participate in the common structures of a supranational community. This was founded on a view that Britain's commercial interests did not lie exclusively with this European grouping and that a route to recovery of great power status could be found through the Commonwealth and the special relationship with the USA. By the 1960s it had become clear that the context within which these preferences were exercised was changing: the Commonwealth ideal and the special relationship had both been dented, the UK economy was growing at a slower rate than the EC countries, and European integration was proving to be a success. Taken together, these indicators of relative decline instigated some form of national identity crisis. Britain had won the war, but seemed to be losing the peace. But rather than being seen as a route to reclaimed influence,

European integration was seen by many as amounting to recognition of Britain's diminished place in the world. Any conversion to Europe was unlikely to be heartfelt.

These indicators of relative British decline cannot be ignored. The re-evaluation of British relations with the EU prompted a decision in the early 1960s to abandon the experiment in intergovernmental free trade centred on EFTA and for Britain to throw in its lot with the EC. The capacity to attain this objective was seriously undermined by the opposition of de Gaulle, because in his view Britain did not 'mean it' and would steer the EC in the direction of US interests. The change of government in France opened the door to UK membership, as too did Edward Heath's genuine and wholehearted desire for British membership.

These developments also have a broader long-term significance. First, as historical institutionalists point out, initial policy choices can have long-term effects because they establish a path for policy developments from which it can become more difficult to deviate over time. UK governments faced problems with European integration during the 1950s and 1960s because when push came to shove they did not *believe* in the European project to the extent that the member states did. When it did arrive, UK engagement was based on a pragmatic and instrumental view of European integration that remained strongly influenced by preferences for Atlanticism, intergovernmentalism and global free trade. The British political elite were also economical with the truth when it came to divulging to the British people the nature of the organization that Britain was joining. The EC was often portrayed as a common market devoted to trade objectives. The political implications had been clear since the 1950s, but were played down in the UK. This was unlikely to provide fertile ground for acceptance of more ambitious integration plans in the future.

A second point that builds on the historical legacy of these choices made during the 1950s and 1960s is that strong elements of continuity can be detected in Britain's relations with the EU. The maintenance of close ties with the USA, support for a vision of Europe that focuses on the central role of member states, and a preference for free trade and open markets all provide a link between British attitudes in the 1950s and aspects of New Labour's approach in the first decade of the twenty-first century. The next chapter develops these themes by analysing events since Britain joined the club in 1973 and the patterns of continuity and change that have been evident.