

France's second rejection of British EEC Membership

*Extract from press statement by French President Charles de Gaulle
Paris, 27 November 1967*

. . . It is therefore that the idea of linking the British Isles to the economic Community formed by the six continental States arouses hopes everywhere that are quite justified ideally, but what counts is to know whether that can be done today without tearing apart, without breaking, what exists. Now, it happens that Great Britain, with truly extraordinary insistence and haste - certain reasons on which recent monetary events perhaps cast some light - had proposed the opening, without delay, of negotiations with a view to her entry into the Common Market. At the same time, Britain stated that she accepted without restrictions all the provisions that rule the Community of the Six, which seemed somewhat to contradict the request for negotiations; for why would one negotiate on clauses that one would have entirely accepted in advance? Actually, we are witnessing here the fifth act of a play during which Britain has taken up very different and apparently inconsistent attitudes towards the Common Market.

The first act had been London's refusal to participate in drafting the Rome Treaty, which, it was thought across the Channel, would never come to anything. The second act brought out Britain's deep-seated hostility towards the European construction, once that construction started to take shape. And I still hear the summons which in Paris, as early as June 1958, my friend Macmillan - then Prime Minister - addressed to me, when he compared the Common Market to the continental blockade and threatened to declare it at least a tariff war.

The third act was the negotiations conducted in Brussels by Mr Heathz for a year and a half, negotiations designed to make the Community bow to Britain's conditions and halted when France made her partners note that the issue was not that, but precisely the opposite.³ The fourth act, at the start of Mr. Wilson's Government, was marked by London's lack of interest in the Common Market, the maintenance around Great Britain of the six other European States forming the free trade area, and a great effort exerted to strengthen the Commonwealth's internal ties. And now the fifth act is being played, for which Great Britain, this time, has declared her candidacy, and, in order for it to be adopted, has set out on the path of all the promises and all the pressures imaginable.

To tell the truth, this attitude is rather easy to explain. The British people doubtless discern more and more dearly that in the great movement that is sweeping the world, in the face of the enormous power of the United States, the growing power of the Soviet Union, the reborn power of the continental states, the new power of China, and taking into account the increasingly centrifugal orientations that are dawning in the Commonwealth, the structure and customs of its activity, and even its national personality, are henceforth at stake. And, moreover, the great economic, financial, monetary and social difficulties with which Britain is at grips make her aware of it day after day. Hence, to her very depths, she tries to seek a framework, be it European, that would help her to save, to safeguard her own substance, that would permit her still to play a leading role and that would alleviate a part of her burden.

And this could, in principle, only be beneficial to her, and could over the short term only be satisfactory to Europe. But on condition that the British people, like those with whom they wish to join, wish and know how to compel themselves to make the fundamental changes necessary for it to be established in its own equilibrium; for it is a modification, a radical transformation of Great Britain that is necessary to enable her to join the continental States. . . It is true that, notwithstanding the impossibility of England entering the Common Market as it exists today, one might want to sacrifice the latter to an agreement with the former.

Theoretically, indeed, the economic system currently practised by the Six is not necessarily the only one which could make Europe work. One could imagine, for example, a free trade area extending to the West of our continent. One could also imagine a multilateral treaty like the one that will result from the Kennedy round.⁴ . . . In both cases, however, we would have to abolish the Community first and break up its institutions. And that, I say, is certainly not what France wishes. . . .

Certainly, those who, like me, have proved by their acts the exceptional esteem, attachment and respect that they hold for Britain, firmly desire to see her one day decide on and accomplish the immense effort that would transform her. Indeed, in order to facilitate things for her, France is quite ready to enter into some arrangement that, under the name of association, or under another name, would right away foster trade between the continental States on the one hand and the British, Scandinavians and Irish on the other. Indeed, it is not in Paris that one fails to recognise the psychological evolution that seems to be taking shape among our friends across the Channel, or that one does not fully appreciate the merit of certain steps that they have already taken, and others that they plan to take, toward re-establishing their balance within and their independence without. But for the British Isles really to be able to moor fast to the continent, a very vast and very far-reaching transformation is still required. Everything depends, therefore, not at all on negotiations - which would be for the Six to march in confusion sounding the knell of their Community - but rather on the determination and action of the great British people, which would make it one of the pillars of a European Europe.