# INTO EUROPE?

**RESOLVED, That this House supports the decision of Her Majesty's Government to make formal application under Article 237 of the Treaty of Rome in order to initiate negotiations 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; and further accepts the undertaking of Her Majesty's Government that no agreement affecting these special interests or involving British sovereignty will be entered into until it has been approved by this House after full consultation with other Commonwealth countries, by whatever procedure they may generally agree.**

*—by 313 votes to 5, the Liberals voting for the Motion and the Official Labour Opposition abstaining, August 3 after a two-day Debate.*

THE Prime Minister, Mr. Harold Macmillan, moving the motion, said that the problems involved in the future of our relations with Europe were among the most difficult and most important that the nation had ever had to face. The moment of decision, however, had not yet come. The House was being asked to support the Government's proposal to start negotiations and when those were completed, the House would have to pass judgment. He outlined the various steps taken in Europe since the War before turning to the European Economic Community (E.E.C.) Its most striking feature was the reconciliation of France and Germany. That was on the moral side. On the political side the E.E.C. countries had made remarkable economic progress which was due in part to the Community having developed a dynamic of its own. Above all it was an idea which had gripped men's minds.

When E.E.C. was being discussed, most people felt that it would be dangerous to split Europe in that way, and a great effort was made for two years to form a Free Trade Area upon an industrial basis, excluding agriculture, thus allowing almost all European countries to take part. The negotiation finally broke down and some of the countries outside the Six formed the European Free Trade Association (E.F.T.A.). One of its declared objects was to work for wider trading arrangements in Western Europe. This division in Europe, although superficially commercial in character, undoubtedly detracted from the political strength and unity of Western Europe. We had a duty to seek some means of resolving the causes of potential division.

This country had a long tradition of isolation. There was a certain suspicion of foreigners. A further division between us and Continental Europe was the wholly different development of our legal administrative and, to some extent, political systems. We were basically united by our religious faith, but even there great divisions had grown up. But whenever the world had been in danger of tyrants or aggression, Britain had abandoned isolationism although when the immediate danger was removed, we had sometimes tried to return to an insular policy. Who doubted that we had to face a struggle over more than one generation if the forces of Communistic expansion were to be contained?

What would happen if one of the countries with which we might be associated in Europe fell into political difficulties or even went Communist? The effects would be grave whether or not we were members of the Common Market. We should not escape by seeking in isolation a security which our geographical position no longer afforded. Surely it would be better to play our role to the full and use our influence for the free development of the life and thought of Europe. It would be very dangerous if the United Kingdom were to join an inward-looking, isolationist movement. There might be some people in Europe who believed the continent could lead a rich, fruitful and prosperous life almost cut off from contact with the rest of the world but they were not among the leading men or the governments of Europe. If there were little Europeans, was it not the duty of this country, with its world wide ties to lend its weight to the majority of Europeans who saw the true perspective of events?

Some argued with deep sincerity that our closer association with Europe would injure the Commonwealth. "*Let us examine the Commonwealth position. We make no binding decisions at the Commonwealth*

*Prime Minister's meetings. We follow no agreed foreign policy. We have no agreed defence policy. Some members of the Commonwealth are in the various defensive pacts of the free world, and some are unaligned. Yet, for all this diversity, the Commonwealth, although not strictly a political unity, has real life and unity. It is something precious and unique.*" Britain in isolation would be of little value to her Commonwealth partners. Her Commonwealth and her European interests were not conflicting: basically, they must be complementary. It was vital not to destroy the influence of the Commonwealth in the political field or to do anything that would damage it economically.

The system of free entry and preferences, under the Ottawa agreements, had been a great advantage to all the partners although over recent years their impact had been reduced. But there had been important changes in the last 30 years. British agriculture had been revived and now supplied our country with two-thirds of its temperate foodstuffs and with one-half of all its foodstuffs. Commonwealth countries had also developed a wider diversity of manufactured goods, partly for sale at home and partly for export. This changing pattern of trade had presented certain difficulties in some quarters and they would have to be dealt with whether or not we entered the Common Market.

Our E.F.T.A. partners wanted to end the economic division of Western Europe. They considered that our decision provided an opportunity to find an appropriate solution for them and thus promote the solidarity of Europe. Until then E.F.T.A. would remain in being.

## DEARER FOOD, RICHER FARMERS

On Agriculture, the Prime Minister said it was the fixed decision of the nation that we should have a prosperous, stable and efficient agricultural industry, organised to provide a good life for those who lived and worked in the countryside. Our system of agricultural support was basically different from the methods employed on the Continent and which were likely to give the pattern of the common agricultural policy when that was decided. Ultimately we might have to shift from the system where much of the farmers' support came from the Exchequer to one in which the market itself provided a fair return to the producer. With changing world conditions we were faced with the possibility of changes anyway. But they could be made only gradually. *"We are determined to seek such arrangements as will adequately protect the vital interests of our agriculture but in this we shall not be in opposition to the Governments, still less of the peoples, of the Six countries nor to the declared aims of the Community respecting agriculture. In our country those engaged in agriculture represent an important — I would even say vital—part, but still a numerically small part of our population. In many European countries they are a very large part of the population, and it is in their interests as well as ours to make sure that agriculture is prosperous."*

The Common agricultural policy was in process of being worked out by the Six, and by engaging in discussions we should be able to shape it. The Government would stand by its pledge to maintain the 1957 Agriculture Act for the lifetime of this Parliament.

## MARKET FOR MASS PRODUCERS

Turning to the needs of British industry, the Prime Minister said that the development of the E.E.C. with the mass market it offered, had spurred European industrialists to competitiveness and efficiency. Whether or not we joined we should have to face severe competition from very efficient industries throughout Western Europe. *"The protective tariffs set up before the war have given us some shelter from this competition in the home market. Many people feel that we have perhaps had too much shelter. However that may be, in the long run an island placed as ours is, where our need to export to other people which will always be greater than their need to export to us, cannot maintain the high standards of life that we want for our people in an isolated protective system . . . With some modern industries, of which the petro-chemical and plastic industries are good examples the economic scale of production and the capital expenditure involved are so large that the industries can be established and developed economically only with a mass market. It is also true that advanced industrial techniques, such as automation production lines which can bring great savings in unit costs, are economic only with really large-scale production."* The weight of opinion among British industrialists was that the balance of advantage for them lay in joining a unit comparable in size with the United States or Soviet Russia.

The Six were only just beginning to "harmonise" their social policies—such things as movements of population, equal pay, etc. If we joined at a formative stage we should be able to offer our own ideas on these matters. It was quite unreal to suppose that we could be compelled suddenly to accept a flood of cheap labour, or to alter the basis of our social security overnight.

It must be remembered that the E.E.C. was an economic community, not a defence alliance, or a foreign policy community, or a cultural community. *"It is an economic community, and the region where collective decisions are taken is related to the sphere covered by the Treaty, economic tariffs, markets and all the rest."*

Every Treaty limited a nation's freedom of action to some extent but he did not see any signs of the members of the Community losing their national identity because they had delegated a measure of their sover-

eignty. There were some forces in Europe which would like a genuine federalist system but Europe was too old, too diverse in tradition, language and history to turn itself into a sort of United States. The federalist movement was not favoured by the leading Governments of Europe. Certainly not by the French Government. The alternative concept, the only practical one, would be a confederation or commonwealth — what General de Gaulle had called *Europe des patries*— which would retain the great traditions and the pride of the individual nations while working together in clearly defined spheres for their common interest. That concept seemed more in tune with the national traditions of European countries. It was one with which we could associate willingly and wholeheartedly. There was nothing in the Treaty of Rome which committed members to any kind of federalist solution, nor could such a system be imposed on member countries. There was nothing on the constitutional side which we need fear and which could not be satisfactorily resolved.

### CONSEQUENCES OF FAILURE

He had always said frankly to the House that he thought the failure of these negotiations would be a tragedy. *"If I am asked whether the prospects are now improved, I can only repeat that I am more hopeful than before. The very deterioration of the situation in Europe must tend to increase the forces of unity."* He felt sure that European countries realised that there were special problems affecting our position. Special arrangements had been made for France's overseas interests and there were special protocols for Italy, Holland and Germany, which were all the subject of negotiation and debate. We must hope that the Six would regard the special arrangements which we required as negotiable in principle. In that case negotiations could begin. Necessarily they would be protracted, detailed and technical. As well as matters of principle, a large number of separate commodities had to be dealt with and agreement reached on them. No one could be sure that the negotiations would succeed. We had much to gain from membership and much to contribute. A great responsibility lay on the Six as well as on ourselves. If the present rift in Europe should continue and perhaps deepen then the consequences would be grave. There would then be a canker gnawing at the very core of Western Alliance.

The Prime Minister concluded with these words: *"I therefore ask the House to give Ministers the authority —not to sign a treaty—but to find out on what honourable basis such a treaty could be put forward for the decision of the House."*

# Opposition Leader Sits On The Fence

MR. HUGH GAITSKELL, Labour Opposition Leader, moved an Amendment noting the Government's decision to initiate negotiations, regretting that it would do so from a position of grave weakness, and declaring that Great Britain should enter the E.E.C. only if the House gave its approval and if the conditions negotiated were generally acceptable to a Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference and accorded with our obligations and pledges to other members of the E.F.T.A. There were those who saw the problem of whether or not we should enter the Common Market as a clear cut and simple one. They had no doubts. Some were passionately in favour and others were equally passionately against, unconditionally in both instances. The pictures they presented of what would happen if we followed the one course or the other were so different as to appear to be related to something totally different. Both extreme points of view had their adherents in the House, but the large majority of M.P.s in both parties felt that these views were greatly influenced by emotional attitudes and suspected that a more careful analysis would show that it was much more a matter of balance. For instance, the great expansion that had taken place in the Common Market countries was due to other factors beside the Common Market itself, such as in the case of France, the devaluation of the franc, and in Germany, the emigration from the east. The political consequences of joining were not as dangerous or profound as was sometimes suggested. Those who took the intermediate position said that before we could reach a decision, the conditions must be known and for that reason the Opposition would not oppose the Government's Motion if their Amendment was defeated.

### SEARCHING QUESTIONS

It was hard to see why the decision to open formal negotiations had been hailed as historic and decisive. There had been protracted negotiations of the Free Trade Area and those between E.F.T.A. and the E.E.C. and the informal, official negotiations which had taken place for at least six months between France, Germany and ourselves. Did the Prime Minister stand by the statement he made four and half years ago that we must remain free to continue to grant preference to imports from the Commonwealth? That would severely limit the possibility of the negotiation. Did Mr. Thorneycroft still stand by the statement he made in November, 1956, that we could not enter into a customs union because that would mean that we should have to put up tariffs where none existed today against a whole range of Commonwealth goods?