

EEC — a heavy burden

WHATEVER may have happened in the 1975 Referendum, relatively few British people in any political party feel the slightest enthusiasm for the Common Market today.

Those who do feel any enthusiasm tend to belong to special categories: some farmers, bureaucrats and lawyers who have managed to mount the gravy-train, plus a diminishing band of people who always have felt a strong cultural affinity with Europe.

"The average Briton" — as Anne Daltrop writes in her book — "remains unconvinced of any pressing need to cross the Channel other than for a fortnight's annual holiday in the sun".

By contrast, a great many continental Europeans really do feel a strong sense of "European-ness", quite apart from any national feeling they may entertain.

The tradition goes back to the Roman Empire. In the Middle Ages, Pope and Emperor alike claimed authority over all Europeans, as successor to the Romans. Well into the 20th Century, the Roman eagle was the badge of Russia and Austria. "Tsar" and "Kaiser" are both corruptions of "Caesar".

In the immediate aftermath of 1945, people came to see (surprise, surprise!) that "if goods cannot cross international frontiers, armies will". With encouragement from the United States, Europeans began to edge towards economic union. In 1957-58, they formed the E.E.C., with boundaries coinciding almost exactly with those of the empire over which Charlemagne had ruled eleven and a half centuries earlier.

THE HISTORY and structure of the E.E.C. form the subject of Anne Daltrop's book.

Unfortunately, the book suffers from one of the worst-designed dust-covers I have seen for a long time, and there are a few small slips about the organisations which battled against one another in the British Referendum campaign of 1975. But in general, the book is lucid and well-written, and an excellent source of factual information about matters on which few people are adequately informed.

Yet, in a sense, it is a depressing work.

A quite fantastic amount of thought, as well as honest and far-sighted

idealism, has gone into the Common Market. We do not — and cannot — know how large a part the E.E.C. has played in healing that accursed rivalry between France and Germany which has cost incalculable numbers of human lives; but there is something to be said for the view that its part has been considerable.

So does the E.E.C. rank as what the authors of "1066 and All That" called "a Good Thing"? As with most putative Good Things, that depends on the angle from which you examine it.

From Britain's point of view the E.E.C. is, to say the least, a most dubious asset; and there are several fundamental objections to the whole thing.

BOOK REVIEW

By Roy Douglas

Anne Daltrop
Politics and the European Community
London: Longman, £6.50

IN THE first place, membership carries a requirement to impose common tariffs on goods from the rest of the world. Most of Britain's trade was conducted with non-Europeans. In both world wars, Britain managed perfectly well with practically no European trade, but the submarine campaigns against imports from outside Europe posed a threat to her very survival.

Before she joined the E.E.C., Britain was a relatively low-tariff country. She has now been obliged to impose new tariffs which choke the most vital part of external trade.

Do we wonder that British unemployment is now the worst of all major nations in the world?

The effect has been particularly bad in connection with food prices and their general effect on living costs. The cheap-food British economy was joined to the dear-food economies of the E.E.C.

Nor is that all.



● Anne Daltrop



● Roy Douglas

As Anne Daltrop tells us, 40 per cent of the Community budget in 1979 came from the Common External Tariff, and a large further proportion on foodstuff levies imposed on imports from outsiders. This policy has done little or no harm to historically autarkic countries like France, but has had a terrible effect on Britain.

Indeed, it has cut against Britain in almost every direction. The aim of the C.A.P. (Common Agricultural Policy) is to improve the efficiency of the agriculture of member-states. British agriculture was relatively efficient before we joined. Thus, the British consumer now finds himself paying taxes on his food in order to subsidise foreign farmers to enable them to compete more effectively with British farmers.

The whole thing is charged with the domestic politics of member-states who have uneconomically large peasantries.

This book provides some useful figures. "At the beginning of the 1980s almost three-quarters of the Community's budget was being used for farm support, to buy, store or dispose of food surpluses grown by farmers who made up less than eight per cent of the Community's work force." Again, in Britain "in 1976 . . . butter was 220 per cent higher than on the world market, wheat 124 per cent and beef 158 per cent."

FINALLY, the E.E.C. is profoundly undemocratic in its whole conception. Its mainspring is the Commission, whose members — once appointed — are, for practical purposes, irremovable.

The so-called "European Parliament" has no control over revenue raising: about the only thing it can do, short of requiring the resignation of the Commission *en bloc*, is to reject the Community budget.

Thus the noble conception of European union collapses in a miasma of internal politics.

Whatever may have happened between Germany and France, the people of Britain have become deeply soured towards the continent as a whole, while the entire structure threatens to evolve into a protectionist bloc which will run into deep antagonism with the United States and the Soviet Union alike.

Not a bright prospect!