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COMMON MARKET

The Realistic Alternative

by PETER TRACEY

Is There Any Choice? Britain Must Join. Europe
by Sir Edward Beddington-Behrens. Penguin
books Ltd. 3s. 6d.

THE THEME of this book is that Britain has no choice but to join the Common Market, but the author fails completely to substantiate his claim.

On the political level, the argument is that because the world is dominated by two super-powers, the USA and the USSR, only a united Europe can compete with them. In theory Britain has three choices: to form an economic unit with the Commonwealth, with the USA or with Europe. Because the first two are not feasible it leaves only the third.

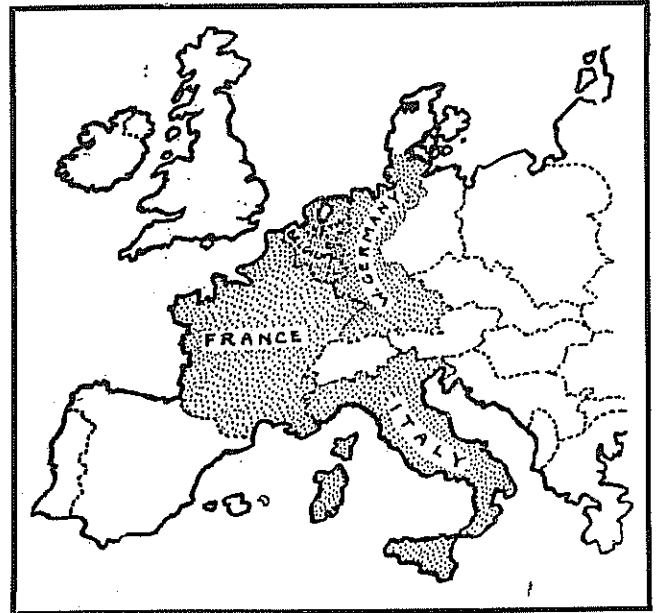
On the economic level, Sir Edward complains that while trade within each of the EFTA and EEC groups is increasing, trade between them is not. Yet what explanation of this can there be other than the high external tariff of the Common Market itself?

EFTA is not, and never can be, a self sufficient group, says Sir Edward. Of course not; it is not meant to be. Free trade is the antithesis of self sufficiency. The aim of the Common Market is to be self sufficient, and this is the essential difference between the two groups. EFTA is free trade in outlook; the Common Market, protectionist.

Sir Edward is not sound on economics. It could be true, as he says, that free trade between "rich" and "poor" countries benefits the former more than it does the latter, but the poor countries would still be more prosperous than they would be under protection, and it is certainly not true that the underdeveloped countries would be condemned forever to be the suppliers of food and raw materials to the industrialised nations.

Sir Edward's case rests on the "protection of infant industries" fallacy. But prosperity can never be achieved by protection. Trade is a two-way business. It benefits both sides. To interfere with trade harms both parties.

Today our social problems are as urgent as ever and are baffling the politicians. State paternalism is no substitute for social justice, and the welfare state alleviation of poverty has not removed its deep causes. George's classic work could give the serious student a welcome guide through the maze of present day political expediency, to a clear conception of an irrefutable truth.



Time and again the author reveals that the basic principles underlying the Common Market are protection and state planning. These principles inspired the setting up of the High Authority of the Coal and Steel Community in 1951, and of the Commission of the Common Market in 1958. "... a Community in which the coal and steel industries of Europe would be pooled, and in which decisions would be taken by a supranational High Authority." "... the gradual transfer of more and more power to the Commission, so that it assumes greater responsibility for the conduct of day-to-day affairs which affect all our lives." In other words, an interstate bureaucracy.

There are chapters devoted to the City, to agriculture, to defence, social conditions and aid to developing countries, and at the end of the book Sir Edward comes back to "the myth of the alternatives."

However, there is one alternative that he does not consider—does not even mention—and this is the most important one of all—unilateral free trade. By continuing on its present protectionist course without joining the Common Market, Britain may well become an "off-shore island, isolated in an age of super-powers," but under a policy of free trade this could not possibly happen.

The whole argument of the book is protectionist. Britain does not need protection. Britain does not need the Common Market. Britain needs a policy of free trade.

he had come to see the futility of his life's work, on his re-reading of Henry George. Similar statements were made, strangely enough, by Lansbury on his retirement from the Leadership of the Labour Party and by Campbell Stephen, the scholar of the Clyde Group. Bernard Shaw, in 1933, described how as a young man he had heard George speak in London, and the tremendous change this made in his whole outlook.