

Why Britain Is Different

By Amitai Etzioni

MANY AMERICAN observers see the new application of Britain for membership in the European Economic Community (EEC) as a morality play. The good guy is knocking at the gate of a castle. He is an underdog—blackballed once and rather weak. Inside lives the bad guy, who wants to run the castle all by himself despite the fact that the other five residents are anxious to open the gate.

From a sociological perspective, however, the situation seems quite different. It is more like an elephant trying to enter a hut: He may enter, but there may well be little left of the hut if he does. For sociologically the British are quite different from the Common Market's European members and their presence could undermine its shaky structure.

The United Kingdom has a Protestant puritanical tradition; the Six have strong Catholic Latin elements. Britain has a proud and long democratic tradition; in one of the two main EEC countries—West Germany—democracy is newly acquired, and in the other—France—it is semi-suspended. Unlike any of the Six, Britain is ruled by a Labor party. While the general tenor of

the Six' domestic politics is considerably to the right of the United Kingdom's, there are sizeable Communist parties in France and Italy but not in Britain.

Then, too, as a result of historical and cultural ties, alliance in two world wars and affinity of viewpoints, the United Kingdom has a "special relationship" with the United States which the Europeans do not share. British citizens I have interviewed expressed considerable hostility toward the Continent. Despite the fact that only a score of miles separates him from Europe, the average Englishman feels much closer to the United States.

Britain, it may be objected, has recently declared it will forego its special relationship with the U.S. But there is little evidence to substantiate this. Britain supports U.S. policy in Vietnam, the Middle East, the Kennedy Round, the UN, Africa, and on most other issues. More important, the foundation of the special relationship is such that no governmental decision can sever it, any more than the U.S. can "decide" to drop the British elements in its heritage.

It is precisely the school of political analysis that sees policymaking as a "state-craft" with the elected captains free to turn the state-ship, that causes confusion on

this issue. Just as Washington cannot revive NATO at will, Britain cannot drop its cultural, historical and emotional ties to the U.S. De Gaulle is successful mainly to the extent that he correctly understands and builds on such sociological forces.

If the United Kingdom joined the EEC, it would be pulling in a different direction from most of the other members—not merely de Gaulle's France. Most Common Market members will probably seek to continue their protectionistic policies; Britain would favor lower external tariffs. Cartels play a central role in the unification of Europe, where labor unions are weak; labor-led Britain would be likely to favor anti-cartel measures and stronger unions. France since 1958, and now West Germany, seek to follow a foreign policy more independent of the United States; the United Kingdom would be "our man" in Europe.

Disagreement on any specific issue could be worked out, but British attitudes are substantially different from the Europeans' on a wide variety of matters, including many basic ones. Since divergencies within the EEC are already barely containable and have led to a number of stalemates, their magnification could block the Community's future development. Moreover, once Brit-

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ain was accepted, it would be difficult to exclude several other countries, especially the Scandinavian ones, whose presence would be a further strain.

It will be argued that many Europeans, irked by de Gaulle's anti-Americanism, prefer Britain's position and consider it an added reason for including the United Kingdom in the EEC. The "Atlantic"-oriented Europeans, though, tend to be those who have accepted President Kennedy's notion of an alliance between two equal partners, which in turn presupposes a strong and united Europe. As long as these Europeans feel that Britain would strengthen a united Europe, they will favor its membership, and they may even succeed in tipping the scales against de Gaulle. But they will not be able to neutralize the disintegrative effects of Britain's membership. The issue, in short, is what the EEC would be like if Britain were permitted to join.

Another potential problem is that of leadership within the Community. In this age of democracy, nations participating in international bodies like to pass as equals. Yet the EEC has never been an equal partnership of six nations; its political base was and is a Franco-German alliance. Thus the EEC flourished as long as de Gaulle and Konrad Adenauer were both in power. The two leaders got along well, and *Der Alte* had his own reservations about the British and President Kennedy. When Ludwig Erhard became Premier in 1963, all this was reversed and the Common Market's growth was markedly slowed.

Following Kurt Kiesinger's recent assumption of power, Bonn-Paris relations warmed somewhat and the EEC tempo picked up again. Kiesinger's feelings toward France, Britain and the United States fall somewhere between those of Adenauer and Erhard. If the United Kingdom were to enter the EEC, the struggle over the Community's

leadership would reopen and escalate. Assuming other factors did not enter the picture, as they do, it still must be recognized that the chances of harmony among three leading countries are much smaller than between two.

Is such harmony essential? Is a consensus of all members—or even most—on political, ideological and social issues necessary to a trade alliance? The answer to these questions, at the present time at least, is Yes.

The reason for this is that the EEC is entering a phase where it will either achieve further unity or regress. The Six have almost completely removed trade barriers but have only begun to unify their economic policies, and an imbalance of this kind cannot last. Well aware of these facts, the EEC is now launching a series of efforts aimed at unification of fiscal, monetary and other aspects of economic policies. These have political, ideological and social implications that cannot be ignored, and that would almost surely decrease consensus at a time when much more of it is needed if the United Kingdom were injected into the scene.

WHETHER BRITAIN actually will benefit from joining the European Community is also an open question. Some trade gains seem obvious, but other trade will be lost—namely with Britain's associates in the Commonwealth and members of the Outer Seven not expected to join the EEC (especially Portugal, Sweden, and perhaps Austria). Moreover, Britain's trade with EEC countries has risen significantly since 1958, *without* joining. Under the just-completed Kennedy Round, it surely will continue to increase, again without becoming a member. But the broader economic gains depend on the EEC's becoming more than a tariff discount house, an involvement British membership would hinder.

Most London commentators cor-

rectly view the main potential benefits of membership for Britain as political. Typically, Labor MP John Mackintosh wrote in the May 11 issue of the British publication *New Society*: "For the people who favor entry to the Common Market the main point is political: it would constitute a definite break with 200 years of British history, an acceptance that we are no longer a major power with special police duties in the Far East and Africa, an appreciation that our future depends on our own competitive skills as a European power."

But if my analysis is correct, Britain—which needs to redefine its identity and world role—will return from its European sojourn more frustrated and still more behind the times. The ambition to be a "European power"—not merely a member of a community—is one main factor why Britain is unlikely to be even a member, and it is precisely the "power" self-image that it will have to shed to become fully reconciled to the post-imperial world.

If Europe is to be led by an unfriendly France, a cynic may ask, would it not be in the interest of the West to have Europe less united? If a united Six would not support the United States, might we not benefit from being able occasionally to play them against each other? A hyper-cynic might add that such considerations explain why the U.S. State Department has been more active in promoting Britain's previous application to membership in the EEC than Britain itself. But one need not worry.

Some of the most powerful historical and sociological forces are at work here: nationalism, religious and cultural diversities, economic interests, conflicting conceptions of regional security. There is relatively little the State Department, Harold Wilson or even de Gaulle can do about these forces. And I dare predict that unless Britain stays out of the EEC, there will be no United States of Europe in our lifetime.