

MATERIALS FOR THE STUDY OF THE WORK AND THOUGHT
OF ARNOLD J. TOYNBEE

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Arnold J. Toynbee, *Key to the European Super State. The Commonwealth and the Common Market. Will the United Kingdom's relationship with the Commonwealth suffer when Britain enters the Common Market? Historian Arnold Toynbee concludes that both the EEC and the Commonwealth are assets which the world cannot afford to lose*, in «The Times», October 12, 1971, p. 12.

The article was a review of *Britain, the Commonwealth, and Europe*, «The Round Table. The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs», Special Issue, LXI, 243 (October 1971).

BRITAIN, THE COMMONWEALTH, AND EUROPE

by Arnold J. Toynbee,

In a special number of «The Round Table» published today the implications for the Commonwealth of Britain's entry into the EEC are discussed by a team of distinguished authorities from Commonwealth countries and the Six, as well as from Britain. This symposium of economic, political, and cultural studies brings out the fact that Britain's entry into EEC is a matter of world-wide concern.

Britain is, indeed, distinguished, among the countries of the present-day world, by the number and the variety of her international connexions, and, above all, by the extent of their geographical range. This is partly due to Britain's present role in the life of the world, but it is also partly a legacy from the past. During the half-century 1815-65 Britain was not only a super-power; she was *the* super-power. She was the hub of an embryonic world-order. Her "Black Country" was "the workshop of the world"; the City of London financed the world's business; the British Navy commanded and policed the world's seas. Britain's extraordinary monopoly of financial and naval power was bound to be ephemeral.

The century ending in 1914 saw the climax of Britain's overseas expansion. But, as Professor Max Beloff points out in his article on *The European Course of British History*, the whole of this phase of British history has been short by comparison with Britain's permanent connexion with continental Europe. After Joan of Arc had cured the English of their ambition to conquer a continental Empire, Henry VII shrewdly turned England's face seaward. John Cabot's voyages inaugurated Britain's overseas era. But Britain's association with the Continent is as old as Britain's own history; and this multiple association – ethnic, cultural, religious, political, military – has not been severed, and could not have been, by England's renunciation, in the modern age, of attempts to make continental military conquests. Britain has always been part of Europe.

England's prudent response to a disillusioning experience did not deter continental powers from trying to conquer Europe; and, on each occasion, Britain could not safeguard her own political independence without intervening militarily on the side of the would-be conqueror's continental victims. Till 1914, Britain, by herself, was strong enough to tip the military balance.

Europe has therefore remained politically disunited ever since the collapse of the Roman Empire in the West in the fifth century AD. Europe's post-Roman political history has been dramatically different from China's; for China has been a political unity for most of the time since 221 BC. But, since the latest attempt at the unification of Europe and the world by conquest was frustrated in 1945, European history has taken a new turn that has no precedent. For the first time, the major states of continental Western Europe have entered into a voluntary association, starting at the economic level but recognizing that, under modern conditions, effective economic unification requires some measure of political unification too.

For Britain to try to thwart the voluntary union of her continental neighbours would have been both morally and militarily unthinkable. But a union of continental European countries by consent faces Britain with the question that would have arisen for her if the Continent had been united by conquest. Is it possible for Britain, even though she has the Commonwealth at her back, to stay outside a continental European union? When continental European countries have united voluntarily, can Britain afford to hold aloof from this voluntary community?

But the Commonwealth? This is a community of countries, once united under British rule, that are now linked with Britain, and with each other, voluntarily. The Commonwealth, like EEC, is a new departure in the field of international relations. Here, too, brutal power-politics have been replaced by a more human relationship. A "family feeling" is the spirit of the Commonwealth, and this new kind of relation between countries has become doubly precious since the adoption into the Commonwealth of peoples, formerly under British rule, that are non-European in race and in their ancestral culture.

The "family relationship" of the members of the Commonwealth is, of course, imperfect. Nevertheless, the Commonwealth does make two contributions, that the EEC cannot make

to the unification of mankind. The Commonwealth is world-wide, not merely regional, and it links together peoples of different races and cultures. At a time when the overcoming of mankind's disunity is a necessary condition for his survival, the Commonwealth and EEC are two assets that the world cannot afford to lose.

For Britain herself, however, these are assets of different kinds. The Commonwealth's value for her is primarily ethical, while the EEC's value for Britain is primarily economic. The Commonwealth – being, as it is, the successor of the former British political empire – is not, and could not have been, an adequate field for the economic operations beyond her own shores without which Britain cannot live. Draw a map of Britain's economic empire – that is her overseas trade and capital investments – in the mid-nineteenth century. This map will differ radically from the map of the British political empire at the same date.

Britain was admitting the decline of her economic empire when, in 1932, she at last agreed to try to make this coincide with her political empire and Commonwealth. Till then, Britain had insisted that her range of economic activity must be impartially world-wide, without preference for her political associates and subjects. Today, the map of the Commonwealth does not correspond to the map of either Britain's or the other members' economic associations. Canada's chief trading partner is the United States; Australia's is coming to be Japan; and the East African members of the Commonwealth have been ahead of Britain in associating themselves economically with EEC.

Several contributors point out that, on the economic plane, Britain's entry into EEC will confirm, not divert, current world-wide economic realignments that seem inevitable in any case. But Britain, the Commonwealth and Europe have no economic future if mankind does not achieve at least the minimum degree of political unification that is now needed for ensuring mankind's survival.

Both the Commonwealth and EEC can help the world to attain this indispensable political objective. These two novel forms of association between states are not incompatible with each other economically, and, politically, both are indispensable for the member states and for all the world's other countries.

The view that Britain-in-Europe and Britain-in-the-Commonwealth need not, and will not, be incompatible with each other is expressed by many of «The Round Table»'s contributors,

from Europe and the Commonwealth alike. If the gulf between races widens, the value of the Commonwealth's "wobbly bridge" across it will be appreciated increasingly, and the effort to preserve it will not be relaxed. The EEC may have a gulf of a different kind to cross – the gulf between an association of governments and a federal union of peoples. In «The Round Table», Mr. [Richard] Crossman forecasts that, in the EEC, Britain will take a Gaullist stance on this issue, and in his article – *A Personal History* – he shows some personal concern for the preservation of Britain's distinctive national identity and institutions. But he expects to see the EEC turn into the "super-state" he deplors. This is, he says, a development that is demanded by the logic of history; and his expectation is convincing in the light of the history of other political unions and in view of the intimacy of the relations between politics and economics in the present age.