

'A new test for the EEC' from Handelsblatt (30 November 1967)

Caption: On 30 November 1967, the German daily newspaper Handelsblatt criticises the stance adopted by France in opposition to the accession of the United Kingdom to the European Economic Community (EEC).

Source: Handelsblatt. Deutsche Wirtschaftszeitung. 30.11.1967. Düsseldorf: Verlagsgruppe Handelsblatt GmbH. "Neue Zerreißprobe für die EWG", auteur:Herchenröder, Karl-Heinrich.

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A new test for the EEC

by Karl Heinrich Herchenröder

General de Gaulle's curt rejection of the British wish to join the EEC at an early juncture comes as no surprise. Any attentive observer of the French President's policy in recent times could only have expected this new definitive veto. This goes too for the Federal Government in Bonn, which, where British accession is concerned, can now no longer seek to occupy the middle ground between Paris and London. The time for appeasement and for illusions about a possible willingness to compromise on the part of the General at the Elysée Palace is over. It is now time to take sides.

This is certainly no easy task for Federal Chancellor Kiesinger and his Government, for the Federal Republic, as well as the other four EEC partners who continue to advocate EEC enlargement through the accession of Great Britain, Ireland and Denmark, now face a dilemma. The Federal Republic's plight is particularly difficult, for not only are the EEC's existence and future development at stake, but also the Franco-German Friendship Treaty, though this has, admittedly, through its one-sided interpretation by Paris, brought us more trouble than joy.

But what can be done to get out of the dilemma into which the General has plunged the EEC and his Community partners through his policy of obstruction and his now overt bid for leadership in Europe? There are not many alternatives: for the sake of the British and that of an enlarged Community, a goal which should be kept in view regardless, a break with de Gaulle and the collapse of the EEC must be avoided. There seems to be no option but grudgingly to postpone the membership negotiations with Britain and concentrate, for the time being, on coming through the fresh crisis provoked by the General in cooperation among the Six. This does not, however, have to mean leaving the French in any doubt as to what France's EEC partners think about the General's dangerous policy, one that does not at all correspond to the role that Europe could play in the world's power constellation following Community enlargement.

De Gaulle must be made to realise that his stubbornness and his illusions about France's role in Europe and the world can only isolate him even more. It can only be hoped that more enlightened circles in the French population, recognising the advantages of closer cooperation encompassing the free countries of Europe that do not yet belong to the EEC, will also be forthcoming in their criticism of their President's behaviour. Although this is unlikely greatly to impress the General, as we know him, it will nevertheless be a good thing for him to learn how small a band of supporters he can call on in Europe.

De Gaulle's harsh veto has obviously resulted in a particularly precarious situation for the Wilson Government. Not least because Wilson and his Foreign Minister, George Brown, although they should have known better, have severely restricted their flexibility as regards their policy on Europe by persisting in their wish to achieve full EEC membership at an early date. And the British generally will get nowhere if they continue to push, as Wilson began by doing, their membership application. They have to find a more flexible approach, now that it has become clear that the door to full EEC membership will remain firmly closed to them as long as General de Gaulle remains in power in France. There is little else they can do but take up the idea thrown their way by de Gaulle of a possible association between Great Britain and the EEC. It must be difficult for a country as important as Great Britain still is to have to change course and pursue a substantially more modest aim in Europe. The British Government would, however, do well to swallow this bitter pill. They should take the General at his word. That is the only way to find out if de Gaulle's hint at a possible association meant more than the conclusion of some special kind of trade agreement between the EEC and Great Britain. Association can have many meanings, ranging from a loose arrangement to near-membership. Why then not try a gradual process, as recently proposed in the European Parliament?