British Industry and European Integration 1961–73: From First Application to Final Membership

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The single market program in Europe developed in the late 1980s largely as a way of overcoming Eurosclerosis by stimulating growth and improved competitiveness by means of competition and larger markets [Emerson, 1988]. It was quickly recognized that the program presented a unique opportunity to assess business strategy because it offered both opportunities and threats to firms, and that the success of the program was heavily dependent on the response of business to this changed environment [Nerb, 1988; Mayes, 1991; Mayes and Hart, 1994]. Much the same argument can be made about Britain's entry into the EEC from its first application in 1961 to its final entry in 1973. Analysis of British industry's response to the possibility of this marked change in its working environment should be informative. This is particularly the case given the recent emphasis on the anti-competitive nature of Britain's post-war settlement as an explanation of Britain's post-war relative decline [Broadberry and Crafts, 1996; Broadberry, 1997]. This paper consists of four parts: a consideration of the degree of protection afforded to British industry; the attitude of British industry to increased competition; other factors affecting British industry's attitude to joining the EEC; and whether earlier entry would have offered a cold shower of competition to British industry.

The Level of Protection

It is widely accepted that British industry was heavily protected from foreign competition in the early post-war decades [Foreman-Peck, 1991, p. 159; Grant, 1995, p. 82; Morgan, 1978, p. 516]. It is usual to argue that from the late 1950s this protection began to disappear through the impact of GATT negotiation rounds, the establishment of the European Free Trade Area (EFTA), and a generally more liberal approach to commercial policy [Foreman-Peck, 1991, p. 160]. However, Broadberry has recently argued that, despite this liberalization, "EEC entry in 1973 produced a severe competitive shock" and "represents a major change in the business environment" [Broadberry, 1997,

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p. 293 and p. 292]. Prior to the 1970s, he argues, British industry remained protected and avoided head-to-head competition. To support this argument Broadberry presents comparative data of the ratio of import duties to the value of imports, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: *Tariff rates in the UK, U.S., and Germany 1950-1980 (ratio of duties to total imports)*

	UK	USA	Germany
1945	38.2%	9.3%	31.3%*
1950	31.2	6.0	5.4
1960	30.2	7.4	6.5
1970	34.3	6.5	2.6
1980	12.7	3.1	1.3

*1948

Source: Broadberry [1997], pp. 139-141

The comparison is extremely striking: not only was the ratio markedly higher for the UK but there was little significant decline until the 1970s. As Broadberry admits, this is a simple measure, covering all traded goods and all types of duties and can be a misleading guide to the extent of protection of manufacturing [Broadberry, 1997, pp. 141-2]. He also notes Lindert's view that the exclusion of duties on oil can make a big difference post-1945 to the ratio of duties to imports in non-oil producing countries. As Table 2 illustrates, duties on oil were an increasingly important source of British customs revenue, but until the 1970s tobacco was by far the most important source of revenue.

Table 2: *Main items in net receipts of British customs duties 1938/39-1970/71* (%)

	1938/39	1945/46	1950/51	1955/56	1960/61	1965/66	1970/71
Tobacco	37	73	67	58	56	46	45
Hydro-carbon oils	26	11	15	27	27	36	54
Protective duties[1]	20	4	8	8	11	8	10

Source: *Reports of Commissioners of HM Customs and Excise* (various years)

Although "protective duties," as defined by H.M. Customs and Excise, were the third largest source of revenue, it is still clear that the simple ratio of total duties to total imports offers no guidance to the level of protection of manufactures; it is positively misleading. From 1967 to 1980 H.M. Customs and Excise did, however, publish figures of the ratio of protective duties to

[1] Protective duties as defined by Customs and Excise. Prior to 1958 this covers the Import Duties Act, 1932, the key industries duties, the Ottawa duties (excluding wine and dried fruits), beef and veal, silk and artificial silk, and dried or preserved fruit. After 1958 it covers items under the Import Duties Act, 1958, which pulled the existing duties together under one piece of legislation. It does not cover the 1964-66 temporary charge on imports. Inclusion of this item for 1965, its highest year of revenue collection, would change the percentage for protective duties for that year to 16%.

total imports and to dutiable imports, broken down into SITC categories. This data is given in Tables 3 and 4. The data still need to be treated with care and cannot be used in a comparative way. Nevertheless, it does support the traditional picture of gradual liberalization and exposure of British industry to possible import competition across the full range of industrial goods. There was no clear break from the past following Britain's entry into the EEC in 1973, as suggested by Broadberry.

Table 3: *Ratio of protective duties to total imports by SITC, 1966-1979*

	Chemicals (SITC 5)	Semi-manufactures (SITC 6)	Machinery and vehicles (SITC 7)	Other finished goods (SITC 8)	Total imports
1966	4.5	3.3	9.3	9.3	3.2
1967	4.8	3.2	9.0	8.58	3.3
1968	4.3	2.6	6.8	6.9	2.8
1969	4.1	2.4	6.8	6.4	2.8
1970	4.1	2.5	6.8	6.1	2.8
1971	4.2	2.4	6.3	5.7	2.8
1972	4.4	2.8	6.3	6.2	3.0
1973	4.0	2.3	5.2	5.9	2.6
1974	3.5	2.3	4.5	5.9	2.2
1975	2.8	2.1	3.7	5.9	2.1
1976	2.5	2.0	2.9	5.7	2.0
1977	2.0	1.6	2.6	5.1	1.9
1978	1.3	1.2	2.4	4.0	1.8
1979	1.3	1.5	2.0	4.6	1.8

Source: *Reports of Commissioners of HM Customs and Excise* (various years)

Table 4: *Ratio of protective duties to total dutiable imports by SITC, 1966-1979*

	Chemicals (SITC 5)	Semi-manufactures (SITC 6)	Machinery and vehicles (SITC 7)	Other finished goods (SITC 8)	Total imports
1966	13.1	11.8	16.3	19.5	12.2
1967	13.7	13.8	16.4	21.2	13.6
1968	12.2	12.4	13.9	18.2	12.4
1969	11.5	12.0	12.2	16.0	11.5
1970	11.0	11.6	10.9	13.4	10.7
1971	10.6	8.9	10.6	9.9	9.1
1972	10.5	8.7	9.5	10.0	9.0
1973	9.5	7.7	8.6	9.6	8.2
1974	7.7	7.4	7.6	9.9	7.5
1975	6.8	6.9	6.3	9.6	7.0
1976	5.3	5.5	4.9	8.7	5.9
1977	6.4	6.4	6.0	9.8	7.1
1978	10.1	8.5	10.1	11.5	10.1

1979	10.2	10.0	8.5	12.9	10.1

Source: *Reports of Commissioners of HM Customs and Excise* (various years)

Broadberry presents his material as part of a wider explanation of Britain's comparative productivity performance in the twentieth century. Having discovered that particularly poor performance was confined to the period 1950-79, he then sets out his explanation of this poor performance. Crucial in this respect was the particular nature of Britain's post-war settlement, which maintained the inter-war cushioning of capital and labor when reform of industrial relations and effective competition policy were required to improve productivity performance [Broadberry and Crafts, 1996]. "The anti-competitive culture of much of British industry at this time favored protection and Imperial Preference to freer trade, and the British government obliged British business in its desire to avoid confrontation" [Broadberry, 1997, p. 153]. Thus business, as well as government, was at fault for Britain's poor performance.

There are plenty of examples from businessmen and politicians confirming Broadberry's argument [McKinlay et al., 1995]. However, from the mid-1950s, at least, there were growing demands in Britain for increased international competition, for example, a Free Trade Area covering OEEC countries. In the early 1960s the Conservative government viewed increased competition as a key factor in proposing membership of the EEC. Reginald Maudling, the President of the Board of Trade, told the House of Commons:

> I think that the great effect of going into a wider European market will be that the efficient firms will prosper and the inefficient will go down. That, surely, is precisely what we must see in this country if our economy is really to expand and our growth is to be more rapid [*H.C. Debates*, 1961].

Such views were repeated by Conservative ministers when they returned to power in 1970 [Lord, 1993, pp. 23 and 102].

These sentiments were also supported by many businessmen [Conservative Central Office, 1962].[2] It is common to present British industry, particularly its peak-level organizations, as one of the more positive and active forces in favor of British membership in the European Economic Community (EEC) [Camps, 1964; Lord, 1993]. In 1956 the FBI urged the government to take the Messina discussions seriously and played an active role in attempts to establish a Free Trade Area [McKinlay et al., 1995]. When this failed it played a key role in the formation of EFTA and supported negotiations for membership on each of the three occasions when Britain applied to join the EEC, in 1961, in 1967, now as the CBI, and, finally, in 1970 [FBI, 1961; CBI, Vol. 1, 1966; CBI, 1970]. Reflecting uncertainty amongst its membership, the 1961 statement was conditional and highlighted necessary safeguards. However, by 1967 support for membership of the EEC in British business no longer required the same

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[2] Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick (MRC) MSS 200/F/3/S2/213, G.A.N. Hirst and G. Le Mare, FBI Grand Council, 12 July 1961.

safeguards [CBI, 1967; Kitzinger, 1968, pp. 168-70; Shone, 1967, p. 52]. Spokesmen for certain sectors opposed entry. Sir John Hunter, one of the most outspoken opponents of membership in the late 1960s, came from the shipbuilding industry, a sector not likely to benefit [Kitzinger, 1973, p. 261; Hunter, 1971].[3] However, a CBI sample survey of companies emphasized the wide degree of support for entry: of the 865 replies, only 15% saw a marked loss from the abolition of protection against EEC imports and 89% believed entry should be negotiated as soon as possible [Kitzinger, 1968, pp. 168-70]. Small firms (less than 200 employees) were less keen than larger ones but support still reached over 80%.

The CBI carried out another survey in 1970, on reactions to its report *Britain in Europe*. This covered all trade associations, all CBI Regional Councils, its Smaller Firms Council, and seven special regional conferences.[4] While there were reservations from some of those consulted, relating to the terms of entry, only 16 speakers at the conferences and 3 trade associations were opposed to membership. A year later the Director-General of the CBI wrote to members asking for their views on membership.[5] Of the 1065 replies only 55 were perceived as being opposed to entry and 35 more as neutral: 975 were in favor.[6]

One needs to be careful not to take these survey results at face value. The FBI/CBI leadership were consistently more pro-European than the wider membership [McKinlay et al., 1995; Kitzinger, 1973, p. 259]. Indeed, they saw education of their members on this topic as one of their key leadership roles [Kipping, 1972, p. 157]. Its leaders openly liaised with government over publicity campaigns in favor of membership.[7] Informally, the CBI also helped the Conservative Party in its pro-entry campaign, although it was felt necessary to be discreet "since there were some sections of our membership whom might object if we overtly assumed a proselytizing role."[8] Propaganda also took the form of publications aimed at those in industry with least knowledge and most doubts about entry: in 1972 it published the booklet *Small Firms and the Common Market* [CBI, 1972]. Around this time the CBI also sponsored an "Impact Europe" train to travel the country with experts and briefing documents.

The leaders of the CBI were willing to put a positive gloss on industry's attitudes towards European integration. The seven 1970 regional conferences had disappointing levels of attendance and it was noted internally that many speeches expressed uncertainty and worry.[9] In addition, regional councils

[3] MRC MSS200/C/1/1/C, C.2.70, 17 Dec 1969.

[4] MRC MSS200/C/1/2/O, O.32.70, 26 May 1970.

[5] MRC MSS200/C/3/IA/2/90, members' replies to Director-General's letter of 6 Aug 1971.

[6] MRC MSS200/C/1/1/C, C.57.71, 15 Sept 1971.

[7] MRC MSS200/C/1/2/C, C.61.67.

[8] MRC MSS200/C/3/IA/1/8, G.C. Mason to Miss Neville-Rolfe, 12 Aug 1970.

[9] MRC MSS200/C/1/2/O, O.41.70, 28 May 1970.

seemed less positive about entry than they had been in 1966.[10] Nevertheless, concerns about entry were inevitable given the range of opinion on the topic. While the CBI may have put a gloss on British industry's attitudes towards European integration, throughout this period the clear majority of industrial opinion did seem to favor membership of the EEC. Given this, it is difficult to characterize British industry from 1961 as being particularly protectionist in its outlook. Even before then there was a willingness to face European competition in a Free Trade Area.

Moreover, it would appear that there has been a tendency to focus excessively on the impact of the trade dimension to Britain's membership of the EEC. Following the Kennedy Round, tariff differences between the EEC and Britain were much reduced [OECD, 1972, p. 162]. In 1970 the CBI estimated that the effect on trade in industrial goods from entry to the EEC would be an increase in Britain's import bill in the range 0.225-1.94% and a 0.038-0.15% increase in exports [Young, 1973, p. 112]. Given this, the CBI felt happy to urge the government to negotiate the shortest possible transition period for the removal of tariffs on industrial goods [Young, 1973, p. 104]. While there was concern about the removal of non-tariff barriers, and certain sectors still had much higher tariff protection, the case for and against entry went beyond trade issues. As the CBI's *Britain in Europe* expressed it:

> We have already demonstrated that although the removal of tariffs noticeably stimulates trade, tariffs are not necessarily the determining factor in competitiveness; we must therefore look for other factors. The greater increase in intra-EEC trade (i.e. in an area of economic integration which has gone beyond the simple concept of free trade) than in intra-EFTA trade (i.e. a free trade area), supports this argument. What economic integration really involves is nowhere clearly defined; however it undoubtedly comprises both "negative" integration (that part of economic integration that consists of the removal of discrimination between economic agents of member countries) and "positive" integration (the formation and application of coordinated and common policies in order to fulfill economic and welfare objectives other than the removal of discrimination). In our view industry can fully develop the markets of Europe only by working towards both negative and positive integration [CBI, 1970, p. 5].

This view was not limited to the leadership of the CBI. Trade associations perceived the most important benefit of membership was the likelihood of a "common industrial environment... The potential benefit was considerable if such factors as taxation, standards, public purchasing, safety

[10] MRC MSS200/C/1/2/R, Regional newsletter no. 15, London and SE Regional Council meeting, 22 July 1969.

requirements and company law were harmonised."[11] The Bow Group of the Conservative Party agreed: "the removal of tariffs is no longer of such importance...as full integration" [Bow Group, 1970].

Accordingly, British business was also interested in the cost of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), the free movement of capital, the introduction of value added taxation (VAT), the possibility of economic and monetary union, and the EEC's regional and industrial policies. Some of these were seen as important and beneficial elements of entry, while others were viewed as costs. In all cases there was uncertainty about the form each would take and hence the environment in which British industry would operate as a member of the EEC. On the negative side there was the size of Britain's contribution to the CAP, which would increase the cost of living, possibly setting off a new wage round, could raise the burden of taxation, and put the balance of payments under further strain, with the resulting danger of the government having to impose deflationary policies [CBI, 1970, p. 21, p. 23, pp. 28-9].[12]

Free movement of capital was, in contrast, seen as a key advantage of membership as it would allow the rationalization of production across the community and the establishment of "European owner and controlled companies free from exclusive national associations."[13] Other aspects also offered potential advantages. The introduction of VAT was not particularly favored because of its administrative cost, but it did offer two benefits. First, it would bring to an end the alteration of Purchase Tax for demand management purposes.[14] Secondly, it offered the opportunity of achieving the CBI's objective of shifting the tax burden away from direct taxation to one on consumption.[15]

Once the government committed itself to introducing VAT, whether it entered the EEC or not, the uncertainty over the issue disappeared. However, many other issues remained uncertain, making it difficult to judge the impact of entry. One example in this respect was the issue of economic and monetary union. In their 1969 summit, EEC member states accepted the objective of monetary union and the following year the Werner report set out proposals to bring about monetary union by 1980. This was a radical development and the CBI was deeply interested in its implications. While the general idea was seen to offer potential benefits it was not felt that the timetable was feasible, nor was the likely approach to achieving monetary union supported.[16] Until economies' performance was similar, use of the exchange rate to correct disequlibria was still necessary. In addition, such proposals were seen to require a much more significant EEC regional policy.[17]

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[11] MRC MSS200/C/1/2/O, O.32.70, 26 May 1970.

[12] MRC MSS200/C/1/2/E, E.472.69, July/Aug 1969, pp. 6-13.

[13] MRC MSS200/C/1/2/O, O.55.70, undated, and MSS200/C/3/IA/1/8, Speech by Campbell Adamson to BDI, 30 June 1970.

[14] MRC MSS200/C/1/1/C, C.74.70, 19 Nov 1970.

[15] Ibid. and MRC MSS200/C/1/2/C, C.68.70, Nov 1970.

[16] MRC MSS200/C/1/2/E, E.180.70, April/May 1970.

[17] MRC MSS200/C/1/1/C, C.50.71, 15 July 1971.

It is clear, therefore, that during Britain's third application for membership of the EEC, the CBI and its members were concerned with a wide range of issues about entry to the EEC. These went well beyond the removal of tariff barriers. To some extent, this reflected the reduction of tariff barriers which had preceded the negotiations but it is also true that aspects relating to entry other than tariffs were given prominence by British business representatives.[18] This point is also true of Britain's two failed applications for entry. The CBI's three volume *Britain and Europe* illustrates this [CBI, Vols. 1 and 2, 1966, and 1967]. This major exercise was undertaken by the CBI's Europe Steering Committee and was published prior to agreement on the Kennedy Round of trade negotiations. The removal of barriers to trade, allowing British industry access to a larger market, and the stimulus of competition were seen as the most important considerations, but other aspects were considered closely. Indeed, one reason put forward for joining the EEC as quickly as possible was that the EEC's policies remained unformed, but "any further substantial progress on major policy issues before Britain's entry could complicate the situation and call for re-examination" [CBI, Vol. 1, 1966, p. 3]. The first, and longest, paper in the second volume of supporting papers was on tariffs and the common commercial policy, but there were also papers on: agriculture, the free movement of workers, vocational training and the European Social Fund, equal pay, harmonization of social security, energy, coal, iron and steel, transport, liberalization of capital movements, taxation, restrictive practices and monopolies, and the monetary implications of EEC membership.

This point is also valid with regard to Britain's first application and resulting negotiations in 1961-63. Tariffs were again the prime issue but other questions were also important. The FBI's 1961 statement *British Industry and Europe* referred specifically to restrictive practices and the harmonization of social policy [FBI, 1961, p. 3]. The first of these is especially relevant here given Broadberry's argument. Article 85 of the Treaty of Rome dealt with restrictive practices. In 1962 this was followed by Regulation 17, which set out the basis on which the article was to be applied across the member states. Both, particularly the latter, stimulated great interest in British business.[19] Such was the level of enquiries about the implications of Regulation 17 that the FBI organized a conference and published a guide, *Restrictive Trade Practices and the European Common Market* [FBI, 1962].

On one level this does seem to support Broadberry's argument: there were so many enquiries because so many British companies were concerned whether their own restrictive practices would be prohibited. Nevertheless, it is important not to take this argument too far for three reasons. First, one of the main reasons for the interest in Regulation 17 and Article 85 was because of the

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[18] MRC MSS200/C/1/2/C, C.21A.68, March 1968.

[19] MRC MSS200/F/3/O2/2/9, D/3712A, Jan 1958; and Guildhall Library Archive, Association of British Chambers of Commerce, Ms 14487/6, Overseas Committee meeting, 4 April 1962.

uncertainty about its meaning, how rigorously it was to be applied, and the sort of agreements covered [FBI, 1961, p. 3; Edwards, 1967, p. 288]. In practice, during the 1960s the Commission adopted a softer approach to cartels than was later the case and was also slow to develop policy [Harding, 1993, pp. 99-100; Edwards, 1967, pp. 299-306]. Accordingly, by 1970 the CBI did not see the application to British industry of Article 85 as a problem.[20] Secondly, another aspect of British industry's concern was legislative equity with their competitors. While it remained unclear how EEC legislation would be applied, national legislation varied across Europe. Again, this illustrated a desire to combine but also reflected a belief that restrictions elsewhere in Europe were believed to be far more lenient in their legislative basis or in their application.[21] A number of countries had no restrictive practices legislation. In others, national governments, like the Dutch governments, appear to have encouraged cartels, and even in Germany, the introduction of legislation was long delayed and then not always effective [Brusse, 1997, p. 206; Voigt, 1962]. German business was also helped by significant export subsidies [Glismann and Weiss, 1980].

This leads to the third, and most substantive, point. It is clear that British industry was happy to use restrictive practices, in the form of cartels, market sharing, and pricing agreements in this period [Mercer, 1995; Morelli, 1997]. However, it is a much more debatable point that the situation in Britain was any worse than elsewhere on the Continent. By the closing date for registration with the Commission under Regulation 17, 920 multilateral agreements had been filed and 34,500 bilateral agreements [Goyder, 1988, p. 46]. Despite this large number of registrations, estimates of the level of non-registration vary from 50-95% [Edwards, 1967, pp. 292-3]. Recent research by Wendy Asbeek Brusse and Richard Griffiths, building on the work by Edwards, has found that international cartels were re-established in Europe after the World War II on a far more extensive basis than often thought [Brusse, 1997; Brusse and Griffiths, 1997; Edwards, 1964, 1967]. Given this it seems hard to see British practice as any worse than that elsewhere on the continent. It also becomes less certain that earlier entry would definitely have provided a cold shower of competition across all sectors, through which British economic performance would have been improved. Indeed, while it is common to accept that import competition imposes a major restraint on domestic firms' price-cost margins, Jacquemin and Sapir found that in 1983 intra-EC imports seemed to exert no disciplinary effect on these margins [Jacquemin and Sapir, 1991]. Moreover, Brusse and Griffiths take the argument a stage further by questioning the widely accepted link between competition and growth, by making the point that the continuation of cartels in postwar Europe coincided with unprecedented rates of growth. In their eyes cartels may well have provided a better and more certain framework for business decision-making than would have occurred under open competition [Brusse and Griffiths, 1997, p. 109].

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[20] MRC MSS200/C/1/2/O, O.55.70, undated.

[21] MRC MSS200/F/3/S2/21/6, E.49A.62, undated.

Conclusion

This paper has shown that British industry was not as heavily protected during the 1960s as suggested by Broadberry. Although it is very difficult to characterize British business opinion on European integration in any simple way, it would appear that it was broadly in favor of membership of the EEC and, in that sense, willing to see the removal of protection against continental competitors. Nevertheless, the issue of tariffs was only one aspect of British businesses' consideration of EEC entry. Membership meant more than simply the removal of tariff barriers. Entry into the EEC was perceived by British industry as a major change in its working environment, but this reflected alteration to the wider institutional framework in which business operated.

As noted at the start, business strategy cannot be ignored when considering the impact of integration on economic performance. However, because the roots of the theory of economic integration lie in trade theory, there has been a tendency to focus on the tariff aspects of European integration. To judge business strategy and responses to integration solely on this basis has been shown to be partial. British business approached European integration with a much wider and more encompassing perspective. Given the current emphasis on the importance of institutions and institutional arrangements, such a conclusion should not be surprising.

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