Chapter Sixty-Nine

EMPIRE TO EUROPE

In 1945 Britain was one of the 'Big Three', together with Russia and the United States, and had a thousand warships, a huge air force, and bases and troops scattered around the globe. Maintaining that global power and those troops depended on the country's wealth, a quarter of which had gone in the war, and on its future economic performance. The exercise of authority ultimately depends on economic power and the graph for that shows one long downward slide. In 1953 Britain still had 8.6% of the world's manufacturing production, only slightly less than in 1939. By the close of the 1950s the world's other economies were beginning to move up the league table. West Germany passed Britain in the 1960s, France and Japan in the 1970s. By 1980 Britain only held 4% of world manufacture and figured as sixth in the world's league of manufacturing nations. Although that decline was arrested for a time in the eighties, by the close of that decade it had moved one further step downwards to seventh place below Italy.

With that catastrophic backdrop there was no way that an Empire could ever be sustained. By 1945 the idea of an Empire, even if re-labelled Commonwealth, was seen as wrong, as a hangover from a vanished Imperial age. The granting of independence to the many countries which had once formed the British Empire was always presented as a moral gesture concealing the fact that British withdrawal was a hard economic necessity. The country could simply no longer afford its Empire. However, in sharp contrast to the internal political history of Britain, the handling of decline abroad was done with great skill, avoiding both extensive human suffering and national humiliation. In the case of the dissolution of the Empire consensus was seen to work in the best possible way. Gradually a set pattern emerged, a pattern which always began in London with an initiative to grant independence and ended with a royal visit, the ceremonial hauling-down of the Union Jack, and the handing over of power to some kind of democratic system based on Parliament. The fact that Westminster was unexportable to places like Africa was glossed over. And by the time that any political system which had been set up on departure collapsed, the British had long gone.

Even before the war India, 'the jewel in the crown', had been promised independence. The difficulty was to withdraw without a bloody confrontation between the Hindu Congress party and the Moslem League. In 1947 the British announced that they would withdraw on 1 June 1948. That announcement forced the issue of partition between what was to become Moslem Pakistan and Hindu India. By the time the last viceroy, Lord Mountbatten, arrived, the structure of government was already in a state of dissolution. Mountbatten had no choice other than to pull back the independence day to 15 August 1947. Although they attempted to draw the partition boundaries it was already a hopeless task. The two states were created but only after a million people had been killed fleeing from one side to the other. Despite that, and the fact that India became a republic two years later, India together with both Pakistan and Ceylon, remained proud to be members of the Commonwealth.

In 1948 Burma became independent and opted not to join the Commonwealth. The same year the British also withdrew from Palestine. That was to be far more complicated. In 1917 Britain had declared that Palestine should become a national home for the Jewish people, in spite of the fact that it was occupied by Arabs. During the 1930s, due to the Nazi persecutions, the immigration of Jews to Palestine escalated so that by 1939 they formed 29% of the population. After the war Britain realised that a continuation of this open-door policy would alienate the Arabs and vitiate the supply of oil to the West. Restriction was therefore imposed, but the pressure from the United States to lift this was instant. Meanwhile, open conflict involving Jews, Arabs and occupying British forces erupted and in 1947 the problem was referred to the United Nations, which declared that Palestine should be partitioned and a state of Israel created. The British refused to implement the decision and withdrew when their mandate expired in May 1948. They left behind what was to be a major problem in the Middle East.

Those tensions were accentuated by the rise of Arab nationalism which was also to affect the British occupation of Sudan, Egypt and the Suez Canal Zone. In 1954 Britain withdrew from the Sudan and agreed also to withdraw from Egypt. The Canal was still vital to British interests as the route to India and Australia and also as the passage for oil imports. In the middle of the 1950s the Empire still seemed formidable, occupying large areas of Africa and the Far East, as well as bases in the Near East. Then in July 1956 the new Egyptian nationalist leader, Colonel Nasser, suddenly nationalised the Suez Canal which was owned by a French company. There was huge outrage both in France and Britain who together demanded that the Canal be internationalised. Egypt refused, and at that point the decision was taken to regain it by force. The strategy devised for that operation was to remain as a lasting shame, for

Israel was persuaded to attack Egypt, giving Britain and France the excuse to intervene to prevent further conflict. In that way the moral order of international law was used to camouflage naked aggression.

On 20 October Israel attacked Egypt according to plan. Britain and France called on both sides to withdraw while their troops occupied the Canal. Egypt refused and on 5 November paratroopers were dropped, followed the day after by the arrival of the fleet from Malta. Port Said was taken and the troops set off on a hundred-mile trek to Suez. Then suddenly Britain and France caved in to a ceasefire demanded by the United Nations Security Council. It was all over.

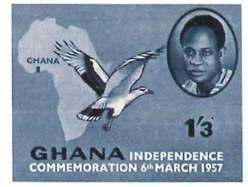
But the issue was far more complex and humiliating for Britain than even the surface events indicated. From the outset the United States had been against the use of force. At home the Labour Party and many Conservative MPs were also appalled at an action which was redolent of the age of Lord Palmerston. But it was American power which in fact determined the British withdrawal, for the attack had put British gold reserves under intense pressure. The oil supply was also seen to be under threat as the move had offended the Arab countries. The only other source for both money and oil was the United States, who were opposed to the action.

A last imperial gesture. British troops dig in along the banks of the Suez Canal in 1956. World opinion, and much of that at home, was to force withdrawal.

In one devastating denouement Britain was seen no more to be a world power. Suez was an act of gross miscalculation, for it established in the eyes of the world that Britain no longer had the resources to mount an overseas action if the United States disapproved. The economic resources to sustain an Imperial role had gone and the government stood universally condemned. It was a huge turning point. Members of the Commonwealth were henceforth not to be susceptible to British guidance. It alienated the Arab states in the Middle east, turned Nasser into a world figure, and allowed Russia to extend its influence into Egypt. It also imposed a strain on British relations with the United States. The French, co-partners in the enterprise, regarded the British with withering contempt. Even after such a major disaster it is astonishing that successive governments continued to behave as though Britain still had world status. It had gone.

Nationalism was not only sweeping through the Middle East, its tide was engulfing Africa. So fast was the political and social change there that the British withdrawal, conceived initially as a protracted one, had to be accelerated. Nor was Britain alone in making an exit for other European countries were also pulling out of Africa. In many instances it was either get out, or be drawn into an expensive armed conflict which Britain could certainly not afford. So one by one the countries of the Empire were granted independence in carefully stage-managed ceremonies, making Britain seem magnanimous in the hand over. In this way a number of wholly politically created countries emerged which often fell apart shortly after, due to tribal rivalries. Real problems over withdrawal were only to occur in countries where there were significant numbers of white settlers.

The evacuation began in West Africa with Ghana in 1957, followed by Nigeria in 1960, Sierra Leone in 1961, and Gambia in 1965. East Central Africa presented far greater problems. Kenya was devolved along tribal lines in 1963 but it was complicated by a white minority and the problem of how to set up an independent multi-racial state in which an African majority in the assembly had the political power, while much of the economic power was still held by a relatively small wealthy white minority. Tanzania became independent in 1964,



Stamps commemorating independence by three former colonies: Uganda, 1962, Ghana, 1957 and Nigeria, 1960. All remained members of the Commonwealth.

Harold Macmillan as Prime Minister touring Africa in 1960 when he made his famous 'wind of change' speech. Here he is welcomed to eastern Nigeria, a country which was granted its independence the same year.

Uganda in 1962, Zambia and Malawi in 1954. The real problem was Southern Rhodesia, later to be called Zimbabwe, which had a dominant white population to which Britain could not be seen to hand over power. That was to take twenty years to resolve. In 1965 the Rhodesian Prime Minister, Ian Smith, issued a Unilateral Declaration of Independence. Britain could only respond with ineffective economic sanctions. It was not to be until the close of the 1970s that the situation was cleared up and a system whereby to guarantee black majority rule was worked out. In 1980, at long last, the British were able to withdraw gracefully from their last African outpost.

By 1964, the year in which Harold Wilson came to power, the Empire had gone. Although British governments still laboured under the delusion that the country had a world role, its only power base henceforth was to be its possession of a nuclear deterrent. Already, by the close of the 1950s, that was seen as a cheap means of maintaining some kind of global status. Conventional defence began to be radically cut by successive governments. In May 1957 the first British hydrogen bomb was exploded. There was, however, a fatal weakness to this scenario for delivery systems for atomic weapons were ruinously expensive and Britain could not compete with either Russia or the United States. In 1960 'Blue Streak' was cancelled and the American 'Skybolt' missiles (ALBM) were purchased. Two years later Americans

cancelled the bombers, leaving Britain devoid of a delivery system for its nuclear weapons. Macmillan, the Prime Minister at the time, persuaded the American president to sell Britain their new Polaris submarine missile. The truth of the matter was that the technological change in the nature of warfare was so enormous that the economy could no longer afford it.

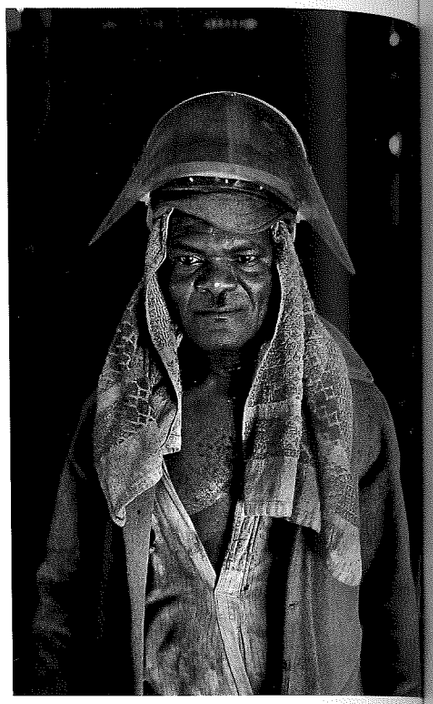
That became even clearer as the sixties advanced. In 1965 the Labour government cancelled the projected TSR2 low-level bombers deciding to buy instead the American FB111A. But that order too was cancelled. More defence cuts followed in 1967, the same year in which British troops were withdrawn from Malaya and Aden, with Singapore to follow in 1971. During the 1970s, in terms of defence, Britain was an American dependency which certainly did not help the country's negotiations with the European Community. Nor did that change under Mrs Thatcher when Britain became the base for the deployment of ninety-six US Cruise missiles aimed at Russia. The country's defences were strengthened in 1979 by the purchase of the Trident missile from the Americans, an enhanced nuclear delivery system which would maintain Britain's nuclear status into the twenty-first century.

In this context the Falklands war surfaces almost as an aberration. The Falkland Islands are eight thousand miles south of Britain off the coast of Argentina where some eighteen-hundred settlers of British descent live. For years the Foreign Office had sought to reach an agreement with Argentina whereby to hand the islands over. Then in 1982 the ruling Argentinian military junta invaded the Falklands. Mrs Thatcher refused to compromise, securing support not only from the United States but also from the European Economic Community. The United Nations also condemned Argentina's act of aggression. A British task force sailed, with air cover but no air warning systems, but luck held. At a cost of £1,500 million the islands were retaken and national honour and international law were seen to be upheld. Not only that, but the will of the British people had been met.

Virtually all that is now left of the Empire are a few scattered outposts like the Falklands, Gibraltar and Hong Kong. The latter, however, after complex negotiations, is to revert to China in 1997 when the colony's lease expires. The ghost of the Empire lives on in the Commonwealth, which had shown some effectiveness in 1961 when it expelled South Africa for its policy of racial discrimination, apartheid, but otherwise remains a disparate group of states, from democracies to one-party régimes whose role seems progressively more and more opaque. Nonetheless, the Empire left its mark even if only in the form of the English language circling the globe. Ties of affection between the mother country and Canada, Australia and New Zealand still exist although as time passes the links binding even these become ever more vestigial,

and republican movements surface.

Historians have not reached any agreement as to what the British Empire represented. Was much of it acquired as a cosmetic to the onset of decline at home? Did it embody captive markets for British goods? It had been built up over the centuries by unscrupulous adventurers and was used as a dumping-ground for the wayward. It had been brutal and exploitative and it had embodied unashamed racial superiority. There is no doubt that Britain owed much of her success in both world wars to the fact that the troops of the Empire could be called upon. One million African soldiers and labourers fought in the First, while well over half a million Indians, Australians and Canadians were killed or severely wounded in the Second. These men had fought for democracy and freedom and yet must have wondered why it had not been granted to them at home. At least in the end it was, and the British departure was a graceful one. It left Britain with a major problem, one which was pin-pointed in 1962 by a former American Secretary of State, Dean Acheson, when he remarked that 'Britain had lost an Empire and not yet found a role'. Whether that role was to be in Europe was to be the question to occupy the minds of the British government and people for the closing decades of the century.



Immigration changed the make-up of the workforce from the middle of the 1950s onwards. A worker at Bilston steel works, Birmingham, 1982.

Europe presented the British with a continuing problem. The psychological adjustment it was to demand still remains unresolved almost half-a-century on. Britain cast itself in 1945 as a major power on a level with Russia and the USA. To admit anything else was to come to terms with a very hard reality, that the country was a middle-ranking European state divided from the mainland by the Channel. That was a concept difficult to swallow. For five centuries Britain had only involved itself in Europe to defeat any power which threatened to dominate it. After achieving that objective it had then always retreated behind its watery frontiers. What happened after 1945 was progressively to make that stance more and more untenable. There were those who accepted it as inevitable and who embraced the European ideal but there were also those who rejected it, looking for any way forward whereby they might avert what they regarded as the demise of a proud nation state.

In 1945 the Potsdam Conference of the 'Big Three' saw Russia extend her grip across Eastern Central Europe by creating a series of police states to act as buffers between it and the West. No one could guess whether Stalin had ambitions or not to move further in that direction. The new political geography of Europe was summed up by Churchill in a speech he made in 1946: 'From Stettin in the Baltic . . . to Trieste in the Adriatic an iron curtain has descended across the continent.' With large Communist parties in both Italy and France and a shattered economy the West was more than vulnerable. Ernest Bevin, who was Attlee's tough Foreign Secretary, realised that its survival depended on America not retreating into isolation but maintaining her commitment to what remained of free Europe. Britain could certainly no longer play such a role. In 1947 its troops were withdrawn from Greece and Turkey. In response to Russia's consolidation of its massive power block the American president, Truman, announced his doctrine that free peoples should not be subjugated by minorities or outside pressure.

In June 1947 the Marshall Plan followed, whereby the United States extended aid for the economic recovery of Europe; thanks to it the capitalist economies of the West revived and thrived. Again with Russia in mind Britain and France, two years before, had already drawn together with Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg in the Treaty of Brussels, pledging mutual and collective military aid against any aggressor. That fear of what Russia might do was heightened when Russia blockaded Berlin which had been divided between the victors but which was in the Russian zone. An air-lift of supplies from the West was set in motion and it was made clear that any interference with it would bring war. As America had the monopoly of atomic weapons, that did not occur.

In 1949 Bevin's hopes reached fulfilment in the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), in which America and the states of Western Europe joined in a defensive alliance which was to bring peace for four decades. On the Continent the idea of a united Europe began to take off, and in May the Council of Europe was formed. Significantly, the British did not attend. Britain also refused to join a European defence force, agreeing instead and at huge expense to maintain four divisions within Europe, a permanent drain on the country's foreign exchange. Then, in 1950, the French and Germans came together to establish the European Coal and Steel Community. Although the British were invited they declined, trying instead to obstruct its creation.

This decision to stand apart not only meant that the focus of the new Europe was to be Paris and Bonn but also, when eventually Britain did gain admittance, that the country was joining an association to whose shaping and development it had made

no contribution. In 1955 an Action Committee for a United States of Europe was formed. Britain this time was represented, albeit in only a minor way and declining to go any further. Six major European states, however, went on to consult as to how they could form a Common Market. Macmillan, then Prime Minister, witheringly referred to one of their meetings as some 'archeological excavation'.

In 1957 the Treaty of Rome established the European Economic Community (EEC). After a transitional period there was to be a free movement of people, services and capital between France, West Germany, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg. There would be no tariffs against each other and a single uniform tariff against the imports of all other countries. A Social Fund was set up to cope with any adjustments that might arise. All of this was totally unacceptable to the British government as it was regarded as being prejudicial to Commonwealth imports, the main source of Britain's cheap food. The new Community's Common Agricultural Policy would mean that the existing way of supporting farmers would change from being one of subsidies to one of customs duties and, as a consequence, the price of food would rise.

In response the British set up a rival organisation, the European Free Trade Association (EFTA), which included Austria, Denmark, Sweden and Portugal, with the aim of establishing a free trade area among its members in a decade. Naturally it looked to the EEC as a market, but it refused to join. The Treaty of Rome had stated that any European state could apply for membership and by 1961 Harold Macmillan decided that perhaps Britain should, after all, join, providing both EFTA and the Commonwealth interest were safeguarded. Alas, that was not to be so easy, for in January 1963 the French president, General de Gaulle, vetoed British entry. In the eyes of the French, Britain was a satellite of the United States and that was incompatible with being a member of the EEC.

With the ever-sliding state of the British economy a market of 250 million people could no longer be sniffed at, so that Harold Wilson now applied for entry in 1967. British entry was once again vetoed by de Gaulle. By then the EEC was beginning to be looked upon longingly as the means whereby the British economy might be rejuvenated. Its appalling state was given by de Gaulle as the main reason for rejection. By 1970 de Gaulle had gone, and a committed European, Edward Heath, was now the British Prime Minister. He applied a third time, and it was thanks largely to his skilled diplomacy that the French were persuaded to accede. The decision to enter Europe was the subject of a free vote in the Commons and the bill was passed in July 1972, the country officially entering the EEC on 1 January 1973.

The negotiations had been extremely complex allowing for a transitional period

for adjustments. But the irony was that Britain joined the EEC the year when the consequences of the oil crisis were forcing Europe into recession. In fact the EEC was no quick panacea. It, together with the oil crisis, only made the underlying weakness of the British economy even more glaring. The majority of the Labour Party had always been against joining, and when returned to power in 1974, Labour held a referendum as to whether the country should opt out. In a unique event in the country's democratic history 67.2% of the two-thirds of the population who voted were in favour of staying in. But that decision needed to be reflected in the actions of an enthusiastic pro-European government which Labour was not. It opposed any moves towards federalism, fought against monetary union, and disliked the new elections of British representatives to the European Parliament.

Those attitudes were shared by the Conservative Mrs Thatcher. When she came to power she found the country committed to large financial contributions to the Economic Community when Britain was, in fact, poorer than six out of the nine Community members. In 1984 she won a battle about Britain's contribution and the payments were reduced by half. Two years later

Edward Heath watches votes being counted at Earl's Court after the referendum on Britain's entry into the Common Market in 1975.

came the Single European Act adopted by the Community in which its Parliament in Brussels was to have sovereign power on a wide range of issues. The idea that sovereignty was divisible was unknown to the British constitution and foretold future battles. Another was to be over the European Exchange Rate Mechanism whereby no single currency dominated the market and an agreement bound each member state to keep the exchange value of its currency from moving too far above the lowest-valued, or below the highest-valued, currencies at any time. Each sovereign state retained the right to make a fundamental change to its exchange rate of the existing value where appropriate. Although Mrs Thatcher wanted Britain to stay out of this arrangement her Chancellor wanted the country to enter and in October 1990, a month before Mrs Thatcher's fall, that happened. The results were to be such that it was not long before Britain was forced to withdraw.

The debate about Britain and Europe is still current. On the one side there are those who view the Community (now formally called the European Union) as the final erosion not only of Britain's sovereignty but its links with the countries of her former Empire. Both political parties have ebbed and flowed in their attitude to it and indeed been split in their own ranks. Labour began by regarding the EEC as a den of capitalism while the Conservatives saw it as an agent for promoting socialism by the back door. There were many who embraced the new European ideal seeing Britain as having the possibility of playing a major role in a visionary endeavour, albeit one which would demand a major political, social and cultural adjustment from the people.

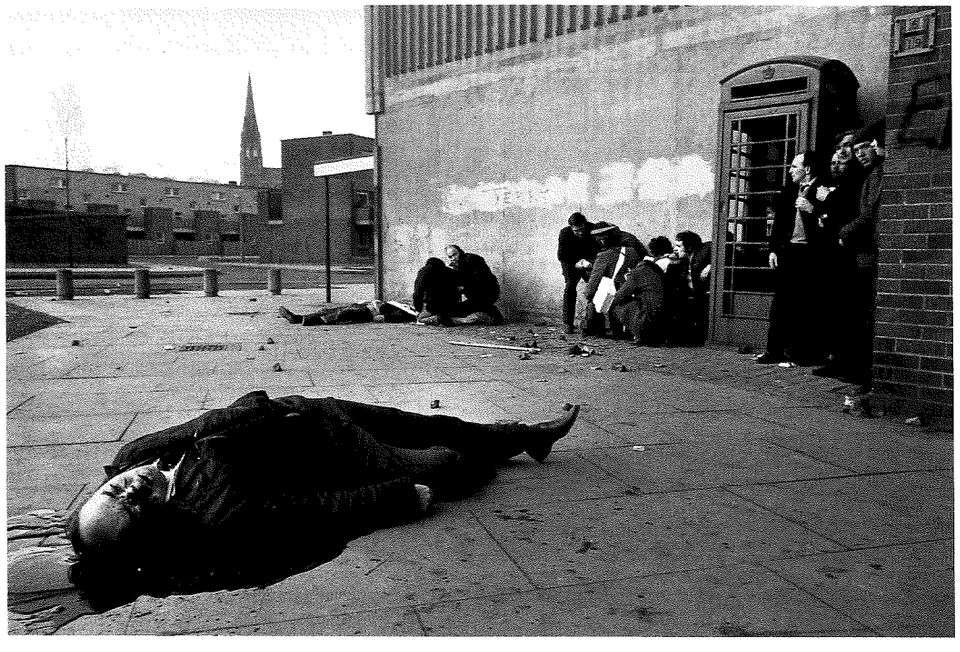
And who were those people? If the Empire had gone and Europe was viewed as a necessary evil, Britain itself was undergoing internal pressures which were pulling it apart. And that tendency to fragment was not the consequence of the substantial post-war immigrant community which failed to integrate as their predecessors had done, but rather the resurfacing of ancient historic identities. After the middle of the 1950s the relationships of the component parts of Britain were never again to be so tranquil. In 1967 the Scottish National Party won a seat in the Commons reflecting an increasing desire north of the border for an independent Scottish voice to be heard. In 1974 eleven National Party MPs were elected. During the same period in Wales Plaid Cymru gained ground, and in 1966 an MP was elected. In Wales the concern was different being one rather for the survival of a cultural identity expressed in the Welsh language. But both movements gained strength in the 1970s, particularly after 1973 when both Edinburgh and Cardiff could see advantages in having direct links with the administrative capital of the EEC in Brussels. The English began to realise what they had long forgotten, that they were members of an artificial nation which

they had forged. During the late 1970s devolution bills to establish regional assemblies were introduced and a referendum was held in 1979 as to whether they should be implemented. There was no massive endorsement but the sentiment remains. If devolution had proceeded, it would have meant not only the dismemberment of the island but also left England devoid of its own assembly. In England, too, regional identities like those in the north or south-west were beginning to have their own strong voices.

Eclipsing all of this by far was the problem of Northern Ireland. In 1949 the Irish Free State became the Republic of Ireland. Northern Ireland remained part of Britain. Indeed that event was to make sharper the line of division between north and south and there was a commitment by government that severance between Britain and Northern Ireland could only take place with the agreement of the Parliament in Stormont. Northern Ireland was a province, in which two-thirds of the population were Ulster Protestants or Unionists and a third Catholics. The latter were inevitably reduced to the status of being an underclass for the Unionists worked the system in their favour through plural voting, gerrymandered constituencies, and discrimination in local government, housing and social benefits. The Catholics naturally had no alternative but to look south to Dublin.

It was hoped economic prosperity would solve the problem but, in spite of efforts to bring in middle class Catholics during the sixties, that did not happen. Then in 1965 the civil rights movement reached Northern Ireland from America, and two years later the Civil Rights Association was formed, beginning a long series of non-violent demonstrations to draw attention to the plight of Catholics. In 1968 a march at Londonderry was banned leading to a violent confrontation with the police which was seen on every television screen. The movement then took off so strongly that the following year the Northern Ireland Prime Minister lost the election and Britain was forced to send in troops to protect the Catholic minority. That year the Irish Republican Army, the IRA, split, one half adhering to the peaceful non-violent approach of the civil rights movement and the other half committed to defending the Catholic minority against the British troops, viewed by them as an army of repressive occupation. The result was an acceleration of polarisation. Catholics and Protestants moved house, forming ghettoes, and there followed more and more assaults and skirmishes.

A Prevention of Incitement to Hatred Act was passed in 1970 but to little effect and the next year the first British soldier was killed. Protestant paramilitary groups then sprang up in response to the IRA and internment of suspected terrorists was introduced, which only further alienated the Catholic community. Then, on 30



Bloody Sunday, 30 January 1972, when British troops opened fire on a civil rights march through Derry, killing fourteen unarmed men.

January 1972, British soldiers killed thirteen people during a demonstration in Londonderry. 'Bloody Sunday' was a turning point. Two months later devolved government at Stormont ceased and direct rule from Westminster began. Attempts to restore some form of devolved government only ended in failure and as the seventies advanced the IRA believed that if they took their activities to the mainland of Britain it would lead in the end to the troop evacuation of Northern Ireland. Successive governments struggled to find a solution to a situation where clashes of belief and ideology were of a kind which belonged to the seventeenth, rather than the late twentieth, century. In 1973 the Sunningdale Agreement produced a new scheme to re-establish devolved government but with some involvement by the south by way of a Council of Ireland. The idea of even co-operating with the south produced strikes. The terror the IRA brought to the mainland only emphasised the need to find a solution and in 1981 Mrs Thatcher launched the Anglo-Irish Inter-Government Council. Once again there were plans for a new Northern Ireland assembly and elections actually took place, but produced only candidates from the two extremes, Sinn Féin and the Democratic Unionists. The scheme proved a non-starter.

If anything, the situation only deteriorated in the eighties. In 1984 the IRA bombed the Tory Party conference hotel in Brighton, coming perilously close to murdering the Prime Minister, Mrs Thatcher. This led to an angry government response, which included gagging the IRA and Sinn Féin in the media. But both the British and the Irish Republican governments recognised that each had a role to play in whatever settlement was eventually reached. They were faced, however, with a people who had not only been polarised but brutalised by twenty years of hate, fear, suspicion, and terrible violence. No one in 1990 was any nearer a solution.

By that date Britain was number seven, and the least important of the western economies. The decline in the economy had been the key factor in the country's reduction to the level of a middle-ranking European state. What is surprising is how long, and with what reluctance even now, that fact has taken to sink in. As late as 1964 Harold Wilson could still say: 'We cannot afford to relinquish our world role', when it had already vanished. Britain has returned in a sense to where she was in 1603, but is far less independent, for the country is now a satellite of two empires, the American and the European. The former is reflected in a countryside dotted with US bases and the latter in membership of a group of European states whose headquarters is in Brussels. The EC is the lineal descendent of earlier European empires, the Roman, medieval Christendom, or the Habsburg Empire. England in the middle ages had itself presided over such a continental domain, but from the sixteenth century onwards it looked firmly westwards. In the Act of Uniformity of 1534 England had cut itself off from the Universal Church, an assertion of Imperial status which came to an end with accession to the Treaty of Rome in 1972. History had come full circle and Britain has to learn to look eastwards again, for the commercial markets upon which the future depends are those of medieval England. It had been an era of lost opportunities for Britain could have taken the lead in Europe after 1945, but chose not to. It was an age dominated by the uncertainties of what was called the Cold War, waged across the Iron Curtain and dividing east from west. What that curtain ensured was that the centre of gravity of the new Europe had been in the west. When the Iron Curtain crumbled in 1989 it signalled a profound geographical shift. The heart of Europe became a newly-united Germany with the former eastern bloc countries now wishing to become members of the European Community. The old enemy Russia internally disintegrated. That shift has pushed Britain onto the geographical margins. It has also made the country of far less importance to American strategy. With the disappearance of the Iron Curtain the old parameters have gone and Britain looks across the Channel at a Europe which resembles that before 1939, bringing with it troubles long thought buried.