

Jean Monnet

MEMOIRS

Introduction by George W. Ball

*Translated from the French by
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CONTENTS

	<i>page</i>
Introduction by George W. Ball	11
Part One: The Failure of Force	
Chapter 1: 1940 – UNITY IN PERIL	17
I The limits of co-operation	17
II One parliament, one army	21
III Bordeaux: the last attempt	30
Chapter 2: CHILDHOOD AT COGNAC	36
I Small town, wide world	36
II Distant travels	43
III 1914: Viviani says 'Try'	48
Chapter 3: 1914–1918: WORKING TOGETHER	53
I The inter-Allied executives	53
II The submarine blockade	59
III Pooling transport	64
IV Organized peace	71
Chapter 4: THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS	78
I Hopes take shape	78
II 'In the light of the general interest'	82
III Silesia and the Saar: the common interest	85
IV Austria: collective action	92
V Peace based on equality	95
Chapter 5: FROM COGNAC TO POLAND, FROM CALIFORNIA TO CHINA	99
I Back to Cognac	99
II The zloty and the leu	102
III Banking in San Francisco	107
IV Investing in China	109
Chapter 6: ARMS FOR THE ALLIANCE (1938–1940)	116
I Mission to Roosevelt	116
II The Franco-British Council	124

III Roosevelt: aircraft for Europe	131
IV The last attempt	137
V Continue the struggle	141
Chapter 7: THE VICTORY PROGRAM (Washington 1940-1943)	150
I On the side of freedom	150
II The arsenal of democracy	158
III Overwhelming superiority	169
Chapter 8: FRENCHMEN UNITE (Algiers 1943)	178
I A political mission	178
II Republican legality	185
III De Gaulle and Giraud	195
IV The French Committee of National Liberation	201
Part Two: A Time for Unity	
Chapter 9: PEACE (1945)	215
I The Provisional Government	215
II The shape of the peace	221
Chapter 10: THE MODERNIZATION OF FRANCE (1946)	232
I A method	232
II Continued efforts	249
Chapter 11: EUROPE IN THE DARK (1947-1949)	264
I The Marshall Plan	264
II National limits	271
III No reply from London	277
IV Germany moves	282
Chapter 12: A BOLD, CONSTRUCTIVE ACT (1949-1950)	288
I Deadlock	288
II Solution	298
Chapter 13: THE SCHUMAN PLAN CONFERENCE (1950)	318
I Invention	318
II Construction	327
Chapter 14: TWO TREATIES (1951)	336
I Defence: a single army	336
II The economy: common rules	350
Chapter 15: THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY AT WORK (1952-1955)	372
I Pioneers in coal and steel	372
II A great test and a new beginning	393

Chapter 16: THE ACTION COMMITTEE FOR THE UNITED STATES OF EUROPE (1955-1975)	405
I A new political force	405
II Euratom and the Common Market	417
Chapter 17: POLITICAL UNION (1960-1962)	431
I Towards confederation	431
II The Committee takes its stand	441
Chapter 18: GREAT BRITAIN AND THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY (1961-1963)	447
I Europe needs Britain	447
II The first veto	457
Chapter 19: EUROPE AND THE UNITED STATES (1962-1964)	462
I Partnership	462
II Crises and their aftermath	473
Chapter 20: A TIME FOR PATIENCE (1964-1972)	478
I Stagnation	478
II The context changes	489
Chapter 21: THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL (1972-1975)	501
I To the springs of power	501
II The beginnings of a European authority	510
III The roots of the European Community	515
Appendix	525
Index	526

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and for contributing that clear-headed understanding and
long perseverance without which no achievement is possible.

‘We are not forming coalitions between States,
but union among people.’

INTRODUCTION

On Thanksgiving Day last year, I dined with Jean and Sylvia Monnet in their thatched-roof house at Houjarray, a few kilometers from Paris. In the course of our dinner – which, as a gesture to an old friend and to America, included a turkey complete with cranberries and chestnut dressing – Monnet told me, with that quiet conviction which gives exceptional force to whatever he says: ‘George, you should stop diffusing your energies. You should select a single, great objective and concentrate on it until it is accomplished. You may have to make short-term tactical detours, but you must never lose sight of your central goal, even when the road ahead seems hopelessly blocked.’

That sage counsel had formed the *leitmotiv* of many conversations during the years that I worked closely with Monnet, yet even more persuasive than his words was the testimony of his own career. Men of genius sometimes validate clichés that have lost their credence, and Monnet’s life graphically illustrates the old saying that a deeply committed man can move mountains. Yet to do so he must, like Monnet, possess indefatigable energy, an uncommon measure of both resilience and resourcefulness and the willingness to forego all personal gain or glory in the single-minded pursuit of a transcendent purpose.

Jean Monnet’s transcendent purpose was to transform Europe and he has quite literally succeeded. Not only has he been the architect of the European Economic Community but also its master builder. Yet what gives him the greatest satisfaction is that Europeans now regard that Community as an uncompleted structure, that they take for granted what has already been accomplished – substantial economic integration and practices of co-operation that twenty years ago would have seemed visionary. Today most Europeans would find it difficult to imagine Europe without the Community. Only very rarely do transient conflicts of will or policy recall even faintly the chaotic, divided Europe of quarreling nations that marred the period between the wars and led to ultimate catastrophe. To Monnet all that is proof of the soundness of one of his more controversial hypotheses that, while men and women cannot change human nature, they can, by establishing new rules and institutions to which human beings must adjust, create

new habits of thought and action that can profoundly affect economic and political attitudes and behavior.

But, though Monnet's career for the first thirty years was in a sense prelude to the building of a new Europe, even had he disappeared before either the Treaties of Paris or Rome, he would still have left a formidable record of achievement. Over more than a half-century he quietly influenced major decisions of his country and its allies by the persuasive power of his logic and insights, invariably in support of certain principles. The major theme of this book is the evolution and realization of those principles.

Monnet's central conviction is that men and women of different nations can achieve almost any objective if they combine their resources and energies and avoid frustrating one another's efforts by pursuing narrow national ends. Though the idea is too obvious for philosophical challenge, Monnet has found by his years of experience that its application is by no means easy or simple.

Related to that idea – perhaps flowing from it – is the belief that the nation-state survives in the Twentieth Century as an anachronism quite inadequate to define the boundaries of modern political and economic action. Although, within limits, Governments can develop common policies and approaches through co-operation, if they are fully to meet the expanding requirements of the present day, the smaller nations must create more comprehensive units. Within a federal or confederal structure common action need no longer depend on the caprice of Governments, each subject to its own domestic pressures and national ambitions; rather people will be able to work and act together for a common purpose, to speak with a single voice and act with a single will. European problems are incapable of solution within the present structure of competing sovereignties, so they must change the conditions that create the problems – or, in other words, change the structure – and, thus, transform the problems themselves.

However sound these substantive convictions may be, they would have had little impact on the course of history had Monnet not been the master of highly individualistic techniques for translating ideas into institutions. In Monnet's view, there is never a lack of opportunity for action. But to seize those opportunities, one must be equipped with a strong conviction derived from careful reflection; then, when the critical moment arrives, one can act without hesitation. It was because of his well-formed convictions that, even though he had neither taste nor flair for the conventional procedures of politics and little talent for oratory or public presentation, Monnet could brilliantly utilize a wide

repertory of persuasive devices, all based on the optimistic conviction that most men will respond to logic if it is patiently and forcefully brought to their attention. In his subtle but effective operations he was well served by an almost infallible instinct for detecting the *lois* of real, as contrasted with apparent, power. Thus, in dealing with Governments, he never confined his operations to official channels, recognizing that often the most effective way to induce official action was to persuade key individuals outside of government to carry the burden of persuading the political leaders empowered to take that action. That this required him to reiterate the same arguments again and again did not deter him, nor did he even hesitate, as he points out in this book, to use the same terminology repeatedly to get his points across, since that terminology had been carefully devised and could not be bettered by improvisation. One technique of analysis and persuasion he regularly employed was to prepare a *bilan*, a balance sheet of needs and resources; only in that way could he compel less imaginative men to view a problem as a whole.

Monnet understood instinctively the supreme importance of timing, recognizing that, at moments of crisis, political leaders could be induced to make far braver decisions than they would ever consider in conditions of less stress. As a negotiator, he was without equal, in part because he applied to even the most marginal exchange excruciating efforts to achieve the right phrase, the precise nuance, so that, as I came to expect in working with him, even the simplest letter might have to be redrafted fourteen or fifteen times. Beyond that, he held to the fixed principle that, in every effective negotiation there had to be a crisis.

Many intellectuals have failed to grasp Monnet's instinctive talent for penetrating to the heart of problems while leaving technical elaboration and philosophical shadings to specialists. But, though some were put off by his apparent simplicity and that single-mindedness which led him to ignore those philosophical rabbits he so frequently flushed, the most perceptive felt his elemental strength and were willing to work interminable hours with an almost *kamikaze* loyalty.

If I were to try to reduce the essence of Jean Monnet to a single phrase, I would say that he is preeminently a modern man who has perceived a major dilemma of our complex times – the discord between our technology, on the one hand, with its rapid pace of advance and its requirements of scale and scope, and, on the other, our institutional arrangements which are so slow to change and so often parochial in character. Yet to call Monnet a modern man does not mean that he is

INTRODUCTION

unaware or disdainful of the past. Though admittedly no scholar, his insight has told him that history is not static, not the constant replaying of old themes, but a flow of events which, if man is to survive, must be so channeled as to meet the needs of an evolving age. He has, therefore, never been tempted into the unhappy error – induced by an atavistic longing for a world that never was – of seeking to recapture the past. Instead he has pursued the more relevant purpose of bending men's efforts toward a nobler future.

It is because Jean Monnet so clearly perceives the nature of the great tidal forces now at work that he is sturdily immune to disappointments. I was with him on more than one occasion when the progress of a new design seemed irrevocably halted by the abrupt intrusion of obsolete – yet fiercely held – ideas that echoed a distant and earlier age. Invariably – and sometimes almost alone – Jean Monnet remained undismayed. 'What has happened, has happened,' he would say with a Gallic shrug, 'but it does not affect anything fundamental. The important point is for us not to be deflected, not to lose momentum. We must find a way to go forward.'

It is because of this apparent imperturbability that Monnet is known – to the admiration of his friends and the exasperation of his opponents – as an incorrigible optimist. Yet his optimism does not stem from any Panglossian idea that all is for the best in the best of all possible worlds, but rather from a belief in the logic of events and the essential rationality of man – a dauntless faith in the ineluctable direction of deeply moving forces. Optimism to Jean Monnet is the only serviceable hypothesis for a practical man or woman with a passionate desire to get things done.

Since the beginning of time many men have tried to alter the structure of world power. When their ambitions have been selfish and hegemonic, they have usually failed. When they have sought to realize their dreams by force, whatever success they have achieved has been transient and illusory. But there have also been those rare men whose visions were ample and generous, whose goal was no less than the good of mankind, and who have relied not on force but persuasion – the energy latent in an indomitable idea – to accomplish their objectives. Sometimes those men have wrought miracles.

This book is a chronicle of the miracles of Jean Monnet.

George W. Ball

Part One

THE FAILURE OF FORCE

Chapter 1

1940 - UNITY IN PERIL

I

The limits of co-operation

The morning of May 10, 1940, was fine all over Europe. The heat and sunshine had taken us by surprise. We had feared this moment for which the Germans had been waiting: for several weeks, armies and peoples had been watching anxiously for the bright skies that would favour attacks by the Luftwaffe and the Panzer divisions. In London, where I was then living, I was called at dawn by Alexandre Parodi*: the Germans had invaded Belgium and the Netherlands. I went to my office in Richmond Terrace, walking as usual across St James's Park. On the way I met General Sir Hastings Ismay†, some of whose people worked in the same building. 'What do you say to that?', I asked him. 'It's exactly what we were hoping for,' he replied.

It was then that I remembered a strange conversation with Edouard Daladier a few weeks before. I had told the French Premier that in my view, if the Germans took the offensive, they would attack where the Maginot Line stopped, just on the Belgian frontier. 'That's what the generals tell me,' he said thoughtfully: 'It's what they're counting on.' I found this strategy incomprehensible at the time, and no one since then has been able to explain to me why our reserves were stationed hundreds of miles away from the point where the Germans were likely to break through. As it turned out, Belgium proved no trap for the German army: within a few days, the Germans broke the line at Sedan.

Leaving General Ismay to his illusions, I went up to my office, the headquarters of the 'Anglo-French Co-ordinating Committee'. There

* A former member of the *Conseil d'Etat*, Permanent Under-Secretary at the French Ministry of Labour, and later Minister of Labour himself.

† Secretary to the Imperial Defence Council.

we had collected economic data to measure the strength and weakness of the Allies against the German Reich. It gave us a first glimpse of what lay ahead: a long and uncertain total war in which organization and willpower, helped by time and space, would determine the final military outcome.

The Committee had been at work since November 1939. I had been made Chairman by a joint decision of the French and British Governments. The methods of work and the objectives which I had proposed to the two Premiers, Daladier and Neville Chamberlain, and which they had accepted, were not very different from those of the Allied Executive Committees to which I had devoted my efforts in the 1914-18 war. Seeing the same needs now, I had once again followed the same course - with, incidentally, some of the same people, who had remained my friends. What was needed was to bring together and unite all the strength of the free world, to resist and crush the onslaught of totalitarianism. No one disagreed; but this common-sense idea was simply not being applied.

It is astonishing how little the word 'alliance', which people find so reassuring, really means in practice if all it implies is the traditional machinery of co-operation. I had learned this by long experience in World War I, whose military outcome had hung in the balance so long as the Allies had fought side by side instead of forming a single organized force. It had taken two years of persistent effort, and the deadly threat of unlimited submarine warfare, before we could combine our resources and pool our shipping. The decision to do so, which ensured the Allies' economic superiority and the security of their supplies, in the end proved as decisive as men's heroism in battle. It was simply less widely known. This time, our Governments were easier to convince, because the concept of 'total war' imposed by the enemy had become familiar. But it was still a national concept. Total war at the level of the Alliance seemed to have no meaning, and certainly little hope of being achieved. In each of our countries the civil and military war machine was preparing, as best it could, to wage its own war. The two Governments were acting separately, and public opinion in Britain and France was reacting in two different ways to the same threat. Now, that threat was very great and very close.

I had long been convinced that the only way to win this war, like the first war, was to pool the two countries' material resources and productive potential. But it was growing more and more obvious that unity must be on a different scale from the start. On March 28, 1940, France and Britain had both undertaken not to negotiate for a separate

armistice, and to act together in postwar reconstruction. But what underlying basis could there be for such solidarity? What tangible form could be given to a unity of purpose strong enough to resist the ordeals to come? The more limited machinery for co-ordination and co-operation that we were setting up was proving too slow. It had taken no less than four months to get from our national administrations a simple balance-sheet of our potential air-power - which was the only way of persuading the United States to increase their output of aero-engines. I was all the more anxious, that morning of May 10, 1940, as I watched the mists dispersing from the London sky. At that very moment, I learned later, the air-raid sirens were sounding over Paris.

The patient work of co-ordination that we were doing in our Committees would bear fruit when the Allies had recovered the initiative. Today, the enemy was calling the tune and seeking immediate victory. Against the psychological advantage of surprise, coupled with superior armed might, had we enough strength and willpower to resist? In those spring days of 1940, history was advancing with the speed of the Panzer divisions: we could stem it only by a bold stroke that would seize the imagination and sweep aside the material and psychological obstacles that were delaying joint action by the Allies.

My friends on the Anglo-French Committee were very well placed to realize the impasse. Chief among them was Sir Arthur Salter, who had worked with me on the Allied Combined Boards between 1916 and 1918, and who had seen their achievements dissipated at the end of the war. He was anxious that our present work should lead to institutions that would give it both legitimacy and permanence. In political circles, some voices were calling for closer unity, and editorials in the *London Times* lent their weight to some ambitious proposals whose equivalent it would have been difficult to find at that time in France, no doubt because the danger was less clearly seen and less willingly acknowledged. I discussed these ideas with the then Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain. In general terms he was receptive to them. There was broad agreement on the principle of a union which might go as far as uniting our two peoples. But how to proceed - when to act: that remained vague; and I have to confess that I myself had no ready-made answers.

Events spurred our minds and opened the way to action. The first big battles, in the second half of May, showed how vulnerable the French army was. At the same time, they forced even the greatest

optimists to recognize the inadequacy of the British land forces. No less dangerous, we then realized, was the weakness of Allied morale. Evidently, the Alliance lacked roots. The need to make clear our war aims had been forgotten – whereas a common effort depends on common aims. Against the Nazi attempt at domination, free men had to know what they were fighting for. They were not yet fully alive to the mortal danger with which Hitler's will to hegemony threatened the world. Both nations, and even their individual citizens, still believed in their heart of hearts that they could escape and survive alone, by their own separate efforts.

At the beginning of June, the British withdrawal from Dunkirk put the Alliance to the test. It looked as if Hitler's plan to divide the Allies, militarily and psychologically, might be in the process of succeeding. I wrote to Winston Churchill, who had become Prime Minister on the fateful day of May 10:

If British strategists start thinking of ways in which Britain and the British Empire could defend themselves if France were knocked out of the fight; or if French statesmen start wondering whether they might be able to negotiate less onerous peace terms before the French armies are driven from their new lines of defence, and perhaps destroyed – then the Nazis will have attained their goal.

Nevertheless, the situation as we saw it still left us in hopes of an organized resistance. In a further personal letter to Churchill, on June 6, I proposed a merger of the two air forces, whose strength I had managed, not without difficulty, to have assessed in a continuing inventory.

‘The present balance-sheet,’ I wrote to the Prime Minister, ‘shows clearly that if the forces of our two countries are not treated as one, we shall see the Nazis gain mastery of the air in France, overpowering her, and then concentrating all their strength against the United Kingdom. The Allied aircraft now operating in France are outnumbered by several to one. But if we combine the two countries’ air forces, the ratio becomes about one to one-and-a-half; and with our proven superiority when evenly matched we should then have a chance of winning. In a word, victory or defeat may be determined by an immediate decision to use our respective aircraft and pilots in the present battle as a single force. If that in turn requires a unified command for our two air forces, then this problem should in my opinion be studied, and studied now.’