Chapter Five: Monnet and his limitations

By looking at the historical background to some of today's arguments we can get a much better idea of why a form of supranationalism is essential in a European context. At the same time this book is called *A Tale of Two Unions* because I believe that the attractions of supranationalism may finally resonate with an island nation that likes to think of itself as going alone. The claim is that this will happen because of its own growing concern about an internal fracture that nothing but a form of supranationalism will be able to prevent. That is the interconnection that makes this a tale of two unions rather than one.

To begin with, however, it is useful to examine the way in which Monnet came to the conclusions he did and how he sought to implement his ideas. It is a story that has often been told, so the chapter will limit itself to points that bear upon the main thesis of this book.

The little man from Cognac

Few disagree that Jean Monnet was the founding father of the EU system, but they often criticise his methods. Yet in his defence it could be argued that he operated in the best way he could, given the circumstances he found himself in.

Monnet was born in the small French town of Cognac, but it was a town whose provincial nature was offset by its role as the world capital of brandy. Cognac salesmen travelled the world to hawk their wares and Monnet's family belonged to that Cognac world. Even as a child he found himself part of the welcoming party for visitors from many different countries who stayed with his father, a brandy salesman, for want of hotel rooms in town. Hence despite being brought up in a provincial French town, Monnet was thrust into a cosmopolitan environment. His first experience of networking was with Cognac

salesmen who'd be invited to the family house and primed for information – not only strictly commercial information but also insights into the social and economic conditions of countries that represented actual or potential markets for the brandy business. This was where Monnet first discovered his talent for eliciting information and being persuasive in small groups.[1]

He enjoyed these meetings with travelling salesmen rather more than he enjoyed school, so it was unsurprising that he left school at 16. In this sense Monnet was the very opposite of a member of the élite. Instead of studying at university or seeking access to power through one of the *grandes écoles*, he decided to go to London in order to help his father's firm by learning English – an essential prerequisite for any brandy merchant – and the ways of business. At the still tender age of 18 he was sent to Canada with a trunk full of samples of the family brandy and instructions to spread the Monnet brand around the world. He seems to have been successful, securing a deal with the Hudson Bay Company in 1911 which made J G Monnet & Co. the sole supplier of brandy to its Canadian market.

Selling cognac for the family firm involved a lot of travelling, not only to English-speaking countries like the USA, UK and Canada but also to Scandinavia, Russia and Egypt. As the elder son, Jean Monnet would have been expected to take the firm over eventually. In any case, the Hudson Bay Company deal shows that he was entrusted with negotiating large contracts before he was out of his teens. Better a life of travel, responsibility and real decision-making than being trapped behind a desk in a school, however prestigious.

The prospects of a business career were altered significantly in 1914 when the First World War broke out. Monnet was exempted from military service because of nephritis but wanted to find another way of helping the allied cause. He believed that he could best do this by applying the skills he had already shown in negotiating business contracts to the task of promoting cooperation between nations in the war effort.

How would he get a chance to influence the war effort? His father pointed out that the government in Paris was not going to listen to someone like Jean. His son disagreed. The overall philosophy he lived by is made clear in his *Memoirs*:

---

1 See the biography of Monnet by Duchêne, François *Jean Monnet: First Statesman of Interdependence*, p. 29. See the chapter 'A Talent at Large' (pp. 27–63) for many of the points outlined in the next few paragraphs.

> First have an idea, then look for the man who can put it to work.[2]

It is a revealing description (couched in language which shows how a century ago the presumption was that only men could put an idea to work). It is precisely the opposite of the populist approach. The populist studies the ideas that are already in play and then presents himself or herself as the champion of the idea likely to do best. In effect it is demagoguery masquerading as democracy. But there was nothing of the demagogue in Monnet. He was not one of those who find out what the people want and then ride into power on their backs, promising to back 'their' cause against the establishment.

However, in another sense Monnet's approach is not so laudable. He does not talk about spreading his ideas through campaigning or forming a political movement. He simply talks about finding the right person to influence in the right way. He wasn't a populist, but less laudably there was nothing of the populariser in him. He would not try to mobilise popular discontent with the way the war was being fought or hold public meetings to encourage allied cooperation. Such an approach might not have been possible in wartime anyway, but in peacetime its absence became a disadvantage. Monnet's approach was to single out the people in authority whom he needed to persuade and then move in on them indirectly:

> …having identified the target for persuasion, he sought the acquaintance of the individual of lesser rank in his target's chain of command who actually prepared the initial drafts of documents that provided his boss with advice and new initiatives. He sometimes spent day after day with that lowly but tactically placed minion.[3]

His first 'tactically placed minion' was a family friend who enabled him to meet the French Prime Minister, René Viviani. This gave him a contact, but there was also the matter of timing. He had to make his pitch at the right moment. Timing was, after all, recognised as crucial by anyone in the business he came from. 'In Cognac they are good at waiting. It is the only way to make good brandy.'[4] He waited before seeing Viviani until shortly after the Battle of the Marne. The

---

2 Quoted in Sherrill Brown Wells, *Jean Monnet: Unconventional Statesman*, p. 10.

3 Bill, James A. *George Ball: Behind the Scenes of U.S. Foreign Policy*, p.107. It is also quoted in George Ball's foreword to Duchêne, François *Jean Monnet: First Statesman of Interdependence*, p.11.

4 See Duchêne, François *Jean Monnet: First Statesman of Interdependence*, p. 347.

conflict had 'settled into' trench warfare and was a moment when those optimistic 'it will all be over by Christmas' assumptions about a short war were giving way to a more realistic assessment. The war was more likely to be a long haul which would require proper organisation. Monnet was one of the few that recognised this and could present himself as someone who knew how to manage the long haul.

By the end of 1914 Monnet was back in London working for the French Civil Supplies Service with a key position in helping to co-ordinate allied supplies. Britain and France were supposed to be on the same side, but they were unused to working together. They competed for access to supplies, which soon became scarce and then the scarcity caused prices to rise. The result was that both countries ended up paying more for supplies than they needed to. As German submarine attacks mounted, co-ordination became not only essential to managing the long haul but to survival itself.

Yet even in such a desperate situation as this the British and the French in 1915 were still competing against each other to buy wheat on the Australian and Argentine markets.

Monnet's solution was to propose a Wheat Executive. It was hardly a mass organisation – just three officials who assessed what each country needed and what supplies were available, before allotting a share to each country and then ordering the supplies jointly. It had no power to act on its own – its recommendations required acceptance by the national governments. But the governments usually agreed with the Wheat Executive's proposals.[5] They recognised that such a system not only kept the wheat flowing but made it less expensive and saved shipping space at a time of severe shortages for the merchant marine. When wheat proved a success, the system was extended to other cereals and other countries joined the scheme.

The Wheat Executive influenced Monnet's later approach in creating the European Coal and Steel Community and the European Economic Community. There was the urgent need for nations to work together and yet it had clearly been difficult to make it happen. Even during wartime, and even when it was clearly in their economic interest to do so, the British and the French had shown themselves reluctant to cooperate.

After the First World War, Monnet attended the Paris Peace Conference and later became a top official (deputy secretary general) at the League of Nations, forerunner of the United Nations. His role in organising inter-allied in-

5 Duchêne, François *Jean Monnet: First Statesman of Interdependence*, p. 36.

stitutions during World War One made him seem naturally suited to an organisation trying to develop global cooperation. But Monnet did not stay with the League beyond 1922. He considered that it had a fatal weakness, generally recognised now but not so clear to many at the time.[6] It had no means of enforcing a decision over a national veto. If a single member state was opposed to doing something, it didn't happen. Monnet could already see that an intergovernmental organisation, essentially one that requires everyone to be willing to do something before anything is done, would be unable to deal with an increasingly unstable international situation. National vetoes were incompatible with effectiveness. This was vital to the later development of his thinking.

As the Second World War approached Monnet was one of the few who recognised the danger posed by Hitler and the need to organise resistance. Once again, as he had done during the earlier war, he threw himself into the organisation of supplies. He travelled to the United States in 1938 seeking to purchase military aircraft and meeting, among others, President Roosevelt. Once more the arts of persuasion were essential. America was in a more isolationist mood than its president and was unwilling to be 'tricked into' another war in Europe. The Neutrality Act of 1935 forbade sales of completed weapons to belligerents. Monnet argued that the act could be circumvented by moving aircraft parts across the American frontier to assemble planes in Canada (Montreal), where they would be fitted together by US engineers.[7] In the end, he only acquired a few hundred planes in this roundabout way, (it was a remarkable achievement to have acquired any), but at least it meant that US aircraft production was already developed when the country finally entered World War Two.

By the end of 1939, Britain and France were once again allies in war and once again Monnet was involved in trying to coordinate their war effort, continuing his previous work through promoting a joint approach by both countries to the US for aircraft. Back in the USA Monnet did not secure many supplies

6 Sherrill Brown Wells describes Monnet as 'especially frustrated by the League's fatal flaw: its inability to enforce a decision over a national veto'. See Wells, Sherrill Brown *Jean Monnet: Unconventional Statesman*, p. 19.

7 Duchêne, François *Jean Monnet: First Statesman of Interdependence*, p. 67. Monnet had written about the need to build up an aeronautical industry abroad out of the reach of enemy attack in early 1938, at a time when many others thought that peace with Germany was possible. See Duchêne, op. cit., p. 65.

for the UK, but what he did manage to do was stimulate American war production and prepare it for moving onto a war footing before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour suddenly propelled the country into the conflict. The famous economist John Maynard Keynes suggested that Monnet may have shortened the war by a year,[8] a claim that receives remarkably little attention now when Monnet is generally dismissed as the patron saint of eurocrats. Given that an extra year might have given the Nazis the chance to manufacture nuclear weapons, such an achievement is hardly slight.

Monnet made a huge contribution during these years. Yet the fundamental conviction which he maintained throughout this period was straightforward. Nation-states needed to cooperate during wartime against a common enemy; they also needed to cooperate in maintaining peace and resolving disputes after conflict was over. The question was how to ensure that they continued the cooperation forced on them during wartime into the time of rebuilding when they might be more likely to revert to their old antagonisms. The failure of the League of Nations between the two world wars had shown how wartime collaboration tended to melt away in a fog of good intentions once the conflict was over.

Towards the end of the Second World War Monnet was once again in the sort of position he had virtually made his own – as a manager of supplies – and was once again in place at just the right moment. France (now with a Provisional Government) had to find a way either of living without American help or of qualifying to receive it by having an economic programme in hand. Monnet had just such a programme. It was the right moment for the Monnet Plan.

Formally appointed the Planning Commissioner (*commissaire général au plan*) and granted a small staff directly responsible to the head of government but unattached to any ministry, Monnet had the freedom of manoeuvre he desired.[9] His Commission was another group of policy entrepreneurs – effectively a small group of dedicated people with an intense sense of loyalty to Monnet himself. It was the same way of working that he had always adopted and in many ways similar to the structure he was to advocate when building what was to become eventually the European Commission. He was not a member of the government, and he did not wish to seek parliamentary approval for the plan. He wanted to get on with the job. He was part of another group

8 Duchêne, François *Jean Monnet: First Statesman of Interdependence*, p. 93.

9 See 'Rebirth of France: The Monnet Plan 1945–1952', Chapter 5 of Duchêne, François *Jean Monnet: First Statesman of Interdependence*, pp. 147–180.

dedicated to maintaining the flow of supplies in an organised way – in this instance, not supplies to fuel a war effort but supplies to fuel post war recovery.

The strategy advanced by the Planning Commission was to prioritise investment over consumption. France must use foreign credit to buy equipment, not in order to fill the shops with consumer goods or even build more homes. This was a political decision, precisely the sort of issue that one might expect to be controversial. Yet the *Commissariat du Plan* believed that it was not a body resisting (or supporting) the prevailing political ideology. It was a body trying to push forward what it saw as an essential programme of modernisation while politicians of different persuasions rose to glory and then evaporated like soap bubbles.

In the circumstances, the politicians were happy to let it do its work while they pursued their internal wrangles. Monnet's experience of politics in the Fourth Republic encouraged him to see politicians as people who needed to be persuaded of the vital work he had to do and would then stand aside in order to let him get on with it.[10] That had been his approach from the very beginning, when he went to Viviani with a plan for improving wheat supplies. But that was when wartime governments were desperate for solutions to problems about which there was no disagreement – they were, after all, governments of national unity fighting a common enemy. After the war it might have been different, but the governments of the Fourth Republic lacked the stability to give any particular policy steer. However, in a more stable political environment politicians might reasonably argue that they were elected as representatives of the popular will, and officials must do their bidding as servants of the people. After all, a decision to prioritise investment in infrastructure rather than consumer spending (the gist of the Monnet Plan) was, as we have said, a profoundly political one. Monnet had dealt with wartime governments where everyone was united against a common enemy, or peacetime governments which were too weak and fragile to govern effectively at all. What he had not anticipated was the arrival of a strong peacetime government. De Gaulle, the most powerful European leader of the late twentieth century apart from Margaret Thatcher,

10 Wells, Sherrill Brown *Jean Monnet: Unconventional Statesman*, p. 107. She points out that 'as Head of the Planning Commission, Monnet was not a member of the government and, at his insistence, this first plan was never submitted to parliament for approval.' Monnet's staff of 'apolitical planners' were under his control and answerable to the Head of Government alone.

was to fill the gap in his knowledge. Duchêne comments as follows in his biography of Monnet in relation to the Fourth Republic in France (1946–58):

> The most famous of its (the Fourth Republic's) twenty-four premiers in twelve years was arguably Pierre Mendès-France, and the most powerful perhaps Guy Mollet. They held power for eight and sixteen months, respectively. Monnet the planner had the ear of government for at least seven years.[11]

De Gaulle, on the other hand, was to hold the presidency for more than a decade. During the period in which the European Coal and Steel Community was formed and the Treaties of Rome signed, France was going through leaders at the rate of two per year. To advance a particular cause, it seemed better to have nothing to do with the game of musical premiers and to exercise influence instead from the outside. De Gaulle, it has to be remembered, did not come to power in France until 1958, seven years after the Coal and Steel Community came into being and one year after the Treaties of Rome were signed.

In circumstances such as this, the policy entrepreneurs could achieve more than the political insider, though there would be a price to be paid after the successful implementation of their ideas. For though the policy entrepreneur might be able to persuade the political insider to adopt an idea, he or she has to give up the power to determine how the idea is presented and how it is defended against its critics. Will it be changed in the presentation? Will it be paraded in triumph before the electorate or smuggled in as an electoral hot potato? Will it be something to help put the world to rights or will it be a way out of a tricky situation for France? That was not something Monnet could have had any influence over.

The influencer and the campaigner

Monnet's experience of helping allied governments in wartime, supporting the work of the League of Nations and trying to influence France's recovery after the war brought home to him one essential point. If there was to be effective cooperation between nation-states, they would have to show a common willingness to be bound by decisions that they jointly reached. This was a radical

11 Duchêne, François *Jean Monnet: First Statesman of Interdependence,* p. 148.

– even a revolutionary – idea. But how would it ever be realised in practice? Nationalism might be a besetting sin, but national sovereignty was a sacred right.

The battle lines might have been clearer if Monnet had been an effective orator. He was not. His talents lay in persuading people in positions of power what they should do. Though totally uncharismatic as a public speaker, he apparently exercised an almost charismatic influence not only upon the members of his Planning Commission but upon those outside the Commission with whom he had to deal. Ball talked about their 'collective spiral cognition' and how in working with Monnet he was 'helping a wise man shape ideas like a sculptor with a knife'.[12] He then continued:

> My role was essential for Monnet himself was no writer…he evolved letters, papers, plans, proposals, memoranda of all kinds by bouncing ideas against another individual.

It is an intriguing description, as if Monnet won people over and then extracted every ounce of assistance they could supply, draining them of ideas like an intellectual Dracula driving his fangs into willing victims in the search for inspiration.

But there was a problem with this. As Ball points out later in his foreword to Duchêne's biography, 'he (Monnet) accomplished a profound redrawing of the economic map of Europe without ever holding elective office.'[13] In fact, he never even joined a political party. Duchêne writes as follows:

> His few platform appearances were models of histrionic incompetence. His voice failed to carry. His delivery stumbled. He had no instinct for projecting an aura in public.[14]

Nor was Monnet a writer. He wrote no textbook or even pamphlet in order to explain his ideas. Even where writing letters to people of influence was concerned, his preferred method was to talk things through with supporters and ask them to write a summary of the discussion.[15] They would then refine it together (often several times) before the letter finally went off.

---

12 Quoted in Sherrill Brown Wells, *Jean Monnet: Unconventional Statesman* p. 118.

13 Duchêne, op. cit., p. 11.

14 Duchêne, op. cit., p. 21.

15 Duchêne, op. cit., p. 13.

Not everyone who brings about change in society – academics, civil servants, diplomats, not to mention fashionable professionals like consultants – has to be elected in order to do so. In some ways Jean Monnet would have been perfect in the twenty-first century. He was a born networker or influencer. Nevertheless, Monnet's preferred way of working was essentially a top-down approach, where officials and political leaders were persuaded to improve their cooperation across different policy areas.

The crux of the matter was not that Monnet was undemocratic or an uncontrolled bureaucrat. The crux was that the lessons he learned from thirty years of very effective public service could not simply be imposed on strong governments with a clear electoral mandate. In this sense there was a democratic deficit in Monnet's approach, even if it was one that could be justified by the exigencies of wartime or the weaknesses of governments overseeing post war reconstruction. By 1958 that era was over in France. But it had been over in the UK for much longer, for more than a decade, ever since the Labour government was elected with a landslide majority in 1945.

The supranational option is adopted

The UK was not alone in its reluctance to give up inter-governmental arrangements. What has happened over the last 75 years in terms of relations between European states is misunderstood if it is simply seen as the UK *contra mundum*. If the UK, enthused by its going-it-alone wartime resistance, had a tendency towards nationalism, Monnet knew that in France there was a nationalistic spirit as strong as in the UK, one that sought to reassert the identity of a nation that had suffered (at least over much of its territory) occupation.

But he also knew that pressure was coming from the USA for European integration after World War Two, at least in the sense that there had to be a united front against the threat from the Soviet Union, just as there had to be a common policy for receiving Marshall Aid. That united front meant that West Germany would have to be brought into the equation – and for many in France bringing West Germany in was much more of a problem than operating independently of the UK.

This was the moment when the famous Schuman Plan was put forward by the French foreign minister. We can understand how it arose out of life experiences that would hardly have been matched across the Channel. Robert Schuman grew up in Lorraine, which was annexed by Bismarck after the Franco-

Prussian War in 1870. That meant he was a German citizen, conscripted into the German army in 1914 although declared unfit to serve. Then, after the redrawing of boundaries following the First World War, he became a French citizen. Such experiences were not unusual in a mainland of Europe where boundaries had proved fluid.[16] The sharing of sovereignty did not seem so revolutionary to someone who had grown used to sharing both territory and nationality.

Schuman grasped the importance of Monnet's idea. He made it clear that it was necessary to envisage something entirely new in international relations – something that hadn't been attempted between nation-states before. He explained this in the famous speech at the Salon d'Horloge of the French Foreign Ministry on 20th June 1950 quoted earlier:

> Never before has such a system that we advocate been tried out as a practical experiment. Never before have states delegated a fraction of their sovereignty jointly to an independent, supranational body. They have never even envisaged doing so.[17]

The Treaty of Westphalia was now three centuries old, and it had essentially established the principle of national sovereignty as the bedrock of international relations. The Treaty began as a way of ending the conflicts started by religious wars. But a principle which was intended to let states choose their own religion (effectively their own version of Christianity) could be expanded to let them have absolute control over anything that went on within their own borders. Treaties between states were desirable and indeed continued to be signed, but always on the understanding that they would never threaten this principle of national sovereignty.

Now Schuman was proposing to do something entirely different. He was going to break down the barriers to any binding legal arrangement above the level of the nation-state. The problem was that for all the emphasis in his speech at the Salon d'Horloge upon an experiment of historic dimensions in the way nations lived together, Schuman wasn't acting out of idealist zeal. He was acting because he saw Monnet's system as the only way out for France. It was the

16 Wells, Sherrill Brown *Jean Monnet: Unconventional Statesman*, p. 132.

17 Jean Monnet, *Memoirs*, translated from the French by Richard Mayne, p. 322. Note that this was said some six weeks after the famous declaration on May 9th (which led to May 9th being designated Europe Day). Schuman was spelling out the implications of his declaration at a conference of the six founders of the first supranational organisation, the European Coal and Steel Community.

only way in which to permit German economic recovery without losing a degree of control over German resurgence.[18] And German economic recovery was inevitable – why would America pour aid into West Germany with one hand and then limit its industrial development with the other? Necessity made Europeans of the French, just as necessity had made them accept the Monnet Plan for the modernisation of France. Managing German recovery was worth a dose of sovereignty-sharing to Schuman, as Paris had once been worth a mass to Henry IV. But those who do something because it is necessary are not always those best suited to defending its intrinsic merits or remaining passionately committed to it.

The fact that they were acting under constraint rather than from commitment was reflected in the hasty way in which the proposal was rushed through the French Cabinet. It was the day before a tripartite meeting of the British, French and U.S. foreign ministers, and when the three ministers met the UK foreign minister, Ernest Bevin, was not pleased that he hadn't been consulted on the decisions taken the day before. He accused the other two of plotting behind his back. The British ambassador of the time commented with some justice that the plan succeeded by 'shock tactics' which had prevented the plan being 'strangled at birth'.[19] Not only had Schuman avoided any public campaign to popularise his approach, he hadn't even tried to convince his own cabinet of its value!

Thus, the moment of triumph for Monnet came by having his plan adopted by a man who didn't even bother to argue its case with his cabinet colleagues, let alone the wider population. It was introduced to solve the intractable problem of constraining a Germany that the United States was determined to strengthen against Communist aggression. It was not introduced as a way of countering the curse of nationalism which had laid waste a continent over half a century, if not for half a millennium. Those sentiments were perhaps there, in Schuman as well as Monnet, but they never came to the fore. The revolution (which it certainly was) was a silent one, and they are always vulnerable to a backlash.

---

18 'By 1950 it was clear to many that West Germany had to be allowed to rebuild if it was to play a useful role in the western alliance, but this would best be done under the auspices of a supranational organisation that would tie West Germany into the wider process of European reconstruction.' McCormick, John *Understanding the European Union*, 5th Edition, p. 53.

19 Duchêne, op. cit., p. 201.

The flaws in the Monnet system

In its final form, the Coal and Steel Community contained (at Dutch insistence) a Council of Ministers, which would vote (without unanimity being required) on policies proposed by the High Authority. The High Authority thus had the right of initiative which has now become the prerogative of the European Commission in most policy areas. One can therefore see how even when the first sovereignty-sharing arrangements were put into place back in the 1950s, Monnet's traditional way of working was reflected in them. The High Authority, of which he was the first President, was like the *Commissariat du Plan*, a body of people who had ideas and then took them to those with influence – in this case the politicians who formed the Council of Ministers.[20] As President of the High Authority, Monnet was operating as he had when he managed to get his first appointment with René Viviani soon after the outbreak of the First World War. It was no different from the way he had taken ideas about the Monnet Plan and presented them on the shifting sands of political authority in the French Fourth Republic.

A Court of Justice was established in Luxembourg, since the enforcement of decisions made by the High Authority would require them to have the force of law in the individual member-states. There was one other institution that formed part of the make-up of the European Coal and Steel Community, a common assembly (made up of delegates from national parliaments) but it only met once a year – Duchêne compared it to the annual shareholders meeting of a firm.[21] This was the forerunner of the European Parliament in the present day, and arguably an essential feature ensuring that the Community had popular support. But characteristically, Monnet didn't recognise its importance. If one assumes a simple continuity between the assembly of the Coal and Steel Community, the later assembly of the European Economic Community and the eventual creation of a European Parliament, one can say that this body had no direct elections for the first thirty years of its existence (until 1979), since when it has steadily acquired more authority, initially as a body that had to be consulted and later one that had the power of 'co-decision' with the Council of Ministers in most policy areas, effectively granting it the power of veto over what

20 See Duchêne, François *Jean Monnet: First Statesman of Interdependence*, chapter 6: 'Europe's breakthrough', pp 181–225.

21 Duchêne, François *Jean Monnet: First Statesman of Interdependence*, p. 210.

was passed into European law. But that development took half a century, and there are still important ways in which it could be strengthened.

This provides some indication of the 'democratic deficit' in the EU inherited from Monnet. The European Parliament is clearly not the policy leader that many think it should be. It is still imbued with the spirit of the French Fourth Republic, where Jean Monnet sought the blessing of one prime minister after another for getting on with the business of implementing the right plan for rebuilding France. The result is that the EU loses out twice over. On the one hand, the right of initiative means that the Commission is attacked for the way that the unelected 'bureaucrats in Brussels' decide everything. On the other hand, since nothing proposed based on that right of initiative gets anywhere without the consent of both the Council and the Parliament, the Commission in reality decides nothing and frequently fails to get its way. The EU has developed a system in which it looks as if the 'eurocrats' decide everything when in fact they decide only one thing, namely what will be passed on for decision by others. But that alone is enough to undermine the whole idea of 450 million people sending 700 representatives to Strasbourg to implement their wishes.

If Monnet himself had recognised the importance of embedding a complicated institutional structure in the popular mind, what was to develop over the next fifty years might not have been so readily seen as an elitist invention. The sharing of sovereignty needed to be understood and recognised as a popular cause, a way of cementing the end of conflict and making peace among nations something viable in a way it had not proved to be over the last few centuries. An effective parliament would have helped to provide that support. But appealing to popular sentiment was not Monnet's way of working, while Robert Schuman, as we have seen, despite recognising the significance of Monnet's idea, had no desire to popularise it. So a nod was made to popular representation in the form of an assembly filled with delegates seconded from national parliaments, a provision likely to fill it with those whom national leaders wanted out of the way or who could be bought off with the prospect of savouring the delights (such as they were) of Brussels.

Conclusion

The European Coal and Steel Community was something new, creating institutions to which nation-states voluntarily ceded the power to make decisions that were binding upon them. Monnet's experience throughout the early part

of his life, from the time of his management of wheat supplies during the First World War and through a lifetime of successes and failures, had convinced him of one thing which is clearly expressed by his friend George Ball:

> Monnet had seen the failure of many well-intentioned efforts to achieve co-operation among governments, and those examples had convinced him that unless national governments were to transfer substantive power to some supranational institution, the result would be mere organized impotence. That had been the case with other international institutions formed.[22]

This willingness to be bound by the decisions of an institution which a group of nation-states voluntarily agreed to create is the key to supranationalism. It should have been launched with great fanfare to proclaim that this was the way to cement peace in a continent which had been devastated by war. In practice, it was the only way of getting France out of a hole, just as for Germany it was a way of helping to ensure, despite the steady disclosure of the awful things that had happened during the holocaust, that the country survived with even a limited control of its own affairs. No popular movement had grown up demanding that national governments share sovereignty as a way of curing their centuries-old antagonisms. Governments were pushed into the system as a way of dealing with the problems of the moment.

Monnet forced the Community into being by the brilliance of his networking and his persuasive skills with the movers and shakers. Yet it had flaws in its design which reflected the insufficient value he gave to gleaning popular support. At a time of weak political management, he succeeded in persuading enough politicians to bring the Coal and Steel Community into being. Its structure reflected the way of bringing about change he had always been used to. Create a High Authority of the great and the good taken from the different member states and let these 'little Monnets' persuade the politicians (in the Council of Ministers) to adopt their ideas. If they did, make sure you have put in place a legal body to enforce their decisions. If a 'national assembly' is thrown into the mix, let it be hand-chosen from national parliaments and play a role more of overseeing than initiating. Arguably that is the role of the European Parliament even today, despite its being elected by all EU voters and despite the fact that it has the power of co-decision, meaning that it can veto proposals for new legislation. It does not have the power to initiate legislation and therefore there is no sense of a Parliament being elected on a manifesto

22 Duchêne, op. cit., p. 10.

placed before the people and then drawing up legislation to implement what the electorate have voted for. This is perhaps the main reason why turn-out for European elections remains very low.

What was left out of the equation was a role for *the popular will as the agent of change*. The limited role of the Assembly, which struggled for a generation to become a directly elected Parliament and even then lacked and lacks significant powers, followed directly from this. The European Parliament plays a role more of keeping what is frequently referred to as the 'executive' (the Commission) in check rather than driving forward policies of its own, or rather the policies demanded by the voters in elections. As a later chapter tries to show, it is inconceivable that the present institutional structure of the European Union can continue like this, irrespective of UK withdrawal.[23] Even if one is deeply opposed to the decision by the UK to leave the European Union, one should not ignore the structural faults within that Union itself. Though this book will argue that in order to survive the British Union will have to adopt some of the institutional arrangements of its European counterpart, not least the sharing of sovereignty, one should not suppose that those European institutions can or should remain in their present form.

Monnet became something of a prophet without honour in his own country after de Gaulle rose to the presidency and even for a while afterwards. It was François Mitterand who as President of France moved Monnet's remains to the Pantheon in Paris. It has been suggested that this was partly because Monnet supported his bid to defeat de Gaulle in the presidential elections of 1965, but his admiration for Monnet surely goes beyond that. He genuinely saw the man from Cognac as providing a means to reign in the destructive consequences of unbridled nationalism. In a speech to the European Parliament in 1995, the year in which his fourteen years in the French presidency came to an end, he remarked that *Nationalisme? C'est la guerre.* (Nationalism means war). It was an appropriate remark for a decade when five wars in South-East Europe, not to mention the present conflict in Ukraine, caused tens of thousands of deaths and hundreds of thousands of exiles, showing that much of Europe was and is still capable of exploding into violent conflict. It is with Mitterrand's remark that Vernon Bogdanor concludes his recent work *Britain and Europe in a Troubled World*.[24]

23 See chapter 16, 'On embedding the Upward Cascade'.

24 Bogdanor, Vernon *Britain and Europe in a Troubled World*, p. 145.

None of this, however, alters the fact that Monnet paid far too little attention to the need for his ideas to win popular support. The same is true of those he persuaded to implement them. Just as Monnet underplayed the importance of the popular will as agent of change, so the politicians he influenced did little to explain to their electorates why it was such an important idea. The consequences of this were to haunt the Community for decades to come, just as they haunt it now. In particular, they were to affect the way in which the UK understood its membership of the European Economic Community and later the European Union. To this we now turn.