

Sicco Mansholt, On the threshold of a common agricultural policy

Caption: In January 1962, Sicco Mansholt, Vice-President of the European Commission with special responsibility for agricultural policy, welcomes the decision taken by the Council of Ministers to move directly to the second stage of the European Customs Union and to introduce a common agricultural policy (CAP).

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On the threshold of a common agricultural policy

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On 14 January 1962 the Council of Ministers decided to make a start with a common agricultural policy for a number of very important products. That in the ensuing weeks the political importance of this decision has been interpreted in many ways is not surprising, as its political consequences are far-reaching. First, it is now possible to move on to the second stage of the EEC Treaty, and secondly agriculture can now be included in the negotiations on British and Danish membership of the Community. The decision to move on to the second stage may be considered as an expression of the Member States' will to continue along the road they have so far followed with success. The British request for membership definitely confirms that the process of European integration is right. The Europe of the Six can never be an aim in itself, it must be a catalyst inducing other countries to take the political path to the unity of Europe. One might say: the greater our unity, the happier we shall be; for the greater our unity, the greater will be the power of the free West, and the greater its ability to preserve freedom and world peace.

I do not believe that there can be any objection to setting the Council's decision against this background.

When the EEC Council of Ministers meets to consider agricultural problems, the meetings frequently last well into the night. This is not to be wondered at, if we consider the present agricultural situation in the EEC countries. They all pursue a somewhat protectionist agricultural policy; this has been necessary in order not to aggravate the disequilibrium between production and consumption, and to prevent farm incomes from falling more and more behind incomes in the other sectors. These are problems which have become almost insoluble within the frontiers of a single state. It is therefore very important that the EEC Treaty considers agriculture to be an essential part of the overall economy, that the common market is to include agricultural produce, and that it has been agreed to institute a common agricultural system over a period of years. It is only in a wider setting than that of national frontiers that a solution can be found for the problems of agriculture.

It must be the aim of the common agricultural policy to stabilize markets, to ensure a fair income to the farming population and to ensure reasonable prices to the consumer. It is encouraging that the Council of Ministers has found sufficient political strength to begin with this common policy when the Community was only in its fifth year. It is even more encouraging that the Commission has been given so important a role to play in the implementation of this policy.

On 1 July 1962 there will be a marked change in the nature of our work. Instead of preparing a policy we shall have to implement it. We are moving from theory to action. In the coming months, the Commission will have to set up an effective machinery which can take daily decisions on — to quote only a few examples — the application or non-application of the safeguard clause, or the application of the levy system. It is clear that Brussels will become a centre of European agricultural market developments.

All this is not to say that we need not expect any difficulties in the implementation of the regulations. They are certain to arise. In the short preparatory period at our disposal there are many difficult problems to solve. However, one thing is certain: there is no going back. We have consciously burnt our national boats behind us in order jointly to steer a European course. The will is there, and the Commission intends during the coming months to take the necessary preparatory steps in close co-operation with the executive organs.

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