

'Battle over sugar between London and the Commonwealth' from the Corriere della Sera (3 June 1971)

Caption: On 3 June 1971, the Italian newspaper Corriere della Sera comments on the measures introduced to deal with the issue of Commonwealth sugar exports.

Source: Corriere della Sera. dir. de publ. OTTONE, Piero. 03.06.1971, n° 128; anno 96. Milano: Corriere della Sera. "Battaglia sullo zucchero fra Londra e il Commonwealth", auteur:Bartoli, Edgardo , p. 22.

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Problems arising from entry into the Common Market

Battle over sugar between London and the Commonwealth

From our correspondent

London, 2 June.

The representatives of 14 sugar-producing Commonwealth countries have come together today with Geoffrey Rippon, Minister of State at the Foreign Office, for a meeting behind closed doors, specially convened on the eve of Monday's negotiations in Brussels. A statement issued yesterday by these countries said that the provisional agreement on sugar imports concluded between Mr Rippon and the six Common Market countries was 'a long way from the guarantees necessary for the survival of our industries.' The British negotiator on Europe has today been the target of a concerted attack aimed at obtaining an assurance that Great Britain, before entering the Common Market, would demand that those guarantees be observed.

Mr Rippon is said to have replied that the terms that the Six had pledged to offer the sugar-producing Commonwealth countries were the best they could hope for, that the agreements currently linking them to Great Britain would remain unchanged until their scheduled expiry date (in 1974) and that they would be renewed automatically if no other agreement were signed in the meantime.

Mr Rippon apparently also said that, according to the arrangements arrived at in Brussels, the Commonwealth sugar countries had three choices: (1) an agreement similar to the one ensuring 18 former French and Italian colonies preferential trade agreements with the Common Market countries (in addition to financial aid); (2) a kind of associate membership of the Common Market similar to the one allowing Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania to export food products to the countries of the Community without customs charges or restrictions; (3) a standard trade agreement to be negotiated in due course.

The main point that Mr Rippon presumably insisted on was that valid and definite guarantees could be obtained only after Britain's entry into the Community. This morning's *Daily Telegraph* makes the same point, repeating what Mr Heath himself replied to Mr Wilson in the House of Commons, namely that whilst the agreements between Britain and the Commonwealth countries are to expire in 1974, those between France and her former colonies will expire in 1975, so that 'if, in 1974, France, as the main sugar beet producer, were to veto Commonwealth sugar, Britain could pay her back in her own coin the following year.'

The determination of the British Government has finally prevailed and the meeting will be adjourning tonight in an atmosphere of general optimism and satisfaction. It will continue tomorrow, but it already seems certain that the only real problem remaining as regards the Commonwealth is that of New Zealand products. It is a problem further inflated by the emotionalism of public opinion, for which the dreaded price increases for butter and meat are virtually construed as a punishment for the political adultery that Britain is about to commit with Europe.

Edgardo Bartoli