

Communiqué issued after the Conference of Commonwealth Prime Ministers (London, 19 September 1962)

Caption: On 19 September 1962, following their meeting in London, the prime ministers of the member countries of the Commonwealth issue a communiqué in which they reaffirm their fears concerning the accession of the United Kingdom to the European Communities.

Source: Western European Union Assembly-General Affairs Committee: A retrospective view of the political year in Europe 1962. March 1963. Paris: Western European Union Assembly-General Affairs Committee. "Communiqué issued after the Conference of Commonwealth Prime Ministers (London, 19 September 1962)", p. 83-86.

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[...]

"Many differences" on the Six

The primary object of this meeting was to review the progress made in the negotiations in Brussels about the conditions on which Britain might join the European Economic Community, and to examine the nature and prospects of safeguards for the trade of other Commonwealth countries. The greater part of the meeting has been devoted to the discussion of this complex question.

Although this discussion has disclosed many differences of viewpoint and many uncertainties, all the exchanges have been conducted in the frank and friendly atmosphere which characterises Commonwealth meetings. This has reaffirmed the common determination to strengthen the links between the countries of the Commonwealth.

Resolved to foster world trade

The Prime Ministers declared that, in all the countries of the Commonwealth, the constant objective of policy is to promote peace and economic progress throughout the world and thus to help to create conditions in which mankind can flourish in freedom, unfettered by poverty, ignorance or disease. In furtherance of this purpose all Commonwealth governments are resolved to do their utmost to foster the harmonious development and steady expansion of world trade.

Fluctuating prices problem

They note with concern that trade and industry in the developing countries, as well as in some of the more developed countries which are large producers of primary products for export, have been adversely affected by widely fluctuating commodity prices and a progressive worsening of the terms of trade. They see this as a problem which calls for progressive policies in relation to international trade and finance so that demand for the products of those countries can be sustained and increased, and larger and more dependable trade outlets assured to them.

Trade better even than aid

To meet the needs of the developing countries they will support policies designed to raise the living standards of the peoples of these countries and to help them to achieve the economic, social, and cultural progress to which they aspire. To this end they consider that improved opportunities and conditions for trade are even more important than financial aid. They recognise the need for the developing countries to have easier access to outside markets for the products of their industries as they become established and the desirability of this being reflected in the policies of the more developed countries.

Surplus for nations in need

To meet the needs of the producers of agricultural commodities, Commonwealth governments will support policies and initiatives designed to maintain and expand world trade in these commodities and to improve the organisation of the world market in a manner fair alike to producers and to consumers. They will support a fresh and vigorous approach to the negotiations of international commodity agreements to this end.

In any such approach principles of price, production and trade access would need to be applied, on a commodity by commodity basis, so as to encourage maximum consumption without overstimulating production and to offer to efficient producing countries adequate access and stable prices at a fair and reasonable level. They believe that, in the disposal of any surplus of agricultural products, opportunity

should be taken, to the fullest extent compatible with the legitimate interests of traditional suppliers, to meet the needs of those peoples of the world who are in want.

Readiness to expand world trade

The Prime Ministers expressed the readiness of their governments to join in comprehensive international efforts by all available means to expand world trade in both primary products and manufactures. They recognised the important contribution which the European Economic Community and other regional groups could make in such efforts.

They hoped that the general objectives set out above would be shared by the members of the European Economic Community. They also took note, in this connection, that legislation was at present before the United States Congress which could materially assist in this aim.

Negotiations with the Six

The Prime Ministers were informed of and considered the stage reached in Britain's negotiations with the European Economic Community, and discussed the arrangements which might be made to meet the special needs of other Commonwealth countries if Britain joined the Community.

Opportunities are reasonable

British Ministers set out the broad political and economic considerations which had led the British Government to initiate the negotiations in Brussels. They emphasised that, in the view of the British Government, Britain's accession to the Community on satisfactory terms would have the result of strengthening the position of Britain, of the Commonwealth, and of Europe.

They explained in detail the position so far reached in the negotiations in Brussels and emphasised the principal points among the many provisional arrangements which had been worked out. In the first place, an offer of association on advantageous economic terms was open to Commonwealth countries in Africa and the Caribbean and the majority of British dependent territories. Should certain of the countries not become associated, the provisional agreement reached in Brussels offered further discussion in the course of the negotiations with a view to the possible conclusion of other arrangements.

Secondly, the Community were prepared to negotiate as soon as possible trade agreements with India, Pakistan, and Ceylon which would have the declared objective of developing mutual trade to maintain and, as much as possible, to increase the level of their foreign currency receipts and in general facilitate the implementation of their development plans.

Thirdly, as regards temperate products, the enlarged Community would make, at the time of British accession, two important declarations. One would express their intention to initiate discussions on international commodity agreements for temperate foodstuffs on a world-wide basis. It would recognise the greatly increased responsibilities of the enlarged Community by reason of its predominant position among world importers.

The second declaration would relate to the price policy of the Community. While taking appropriate measures to raise the individual earnings of those engaged in agriculture in the Community, the Community would do its utmost to contribute to a harmonious development of world trade providing for a satisfactory level of trade between the Community and third countries, including Commonwealth countries. British Ministers considered that the policy which the enlarged Community intended to pursue would offer reasonable opportunities in its markets for exports of temperate agricultural products.

"Final decision is with Britain"

The representatives of other Commonwealth governments welcomed this opportunity for personal

consultation on this issue and for supplementing the exchanges of information and consultation which had already taken place between Ministers and officials.

They took note of the considerations which had influenced the British Government in deciding to accede to the European Economic Community if satisfactory terms could be secured. They recognised that, after full and continuing consultation with the other countries of the Commonwealth and in the light of the further negotiations to be held with the members of the Community, the responsibility for the final decision would rest with the British Government.

Preserving a strong Commonwealth

The representatives of the other Commonwealth countries freely acknowledged the strenuous efforts which the British Government have made to ensure on the part of the Six a full understanding of the safeguards required, if Britain's entry into the Common Market is not to be on such terms and conditions as to impair their vital interests.

They expressed their hope that the members of the European Economic Community will wish to preserve and encourage a strong and growing Commonwealth, in furtherance of their own ideals of an expanding and peaceful world order.

Where interests are not yet met

At the same time the representatives of various Commonwealth governments expressed anxieties about the possible effects of Britain's entry into the European Economic Community. They trusted that, should there be closer association between Britain and Europe, it would not be allowed, as it developed, to weaken the cohesion of the Commonwealth or its influence for peace and progress in the world. They drew attention to the difficulties to which these developments could give rise in relation to their trade both with Britain and with other countries. They explained the economic points of special concern to their respective countries and the extent to which their interests had not so far been met in the Brussels negotiations.

Safeguarding farm products

Some independent African countries considered that association with the Community under Part IV of the Treaty of Rome would not be acceptable to them. On the other hand the Government of Sierra Leone wished to consider further their attitude towards association, after consultation with other African territories which are not members of the Commonwealth. In the Caribbean, Trinidad and Tobago will be willing to accept association, and Jamaica will wish to consider their attitude further. The Prime Ministers were informed that the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland is willing to accept association; and they were also informed that, after appropriate consultations, it seemed likely that the majority of the British dependent territories eligible for association would wish to accept it.

The representatives of India, Pakistan, and Ceylon urged that, if Britain entered the Community, the trade agreements which the enlarged Community had offered to negotiate with their governments should be concluded as soon as possible and that, meanwhile, no change should be made in their existing trade arrangements with Britain. They expressed their apprehension that if the treatment of their products in the United Kingdom was altered before wider trading arrangements had been worked out for the enlarged Community, their foreign exchange earnings and investment in export industries would be adversely affected at a critical stage in the implementation of their development plans.

Importance was attached to the need for securing adequate safeguards to protect the essential interests of Commonwealth producers of temperate foodstuffs and other agricultural products, including tropical products, as well as certain raw materials for which zero tariffs had been requested. The importance for some Commonwealth countries of trade in a broad range of manufactured and processed goods was also emphasised.

The Prime Ministers took note that the negotiations in Brussels were incomplete and that a number of important questions had still to be negotiated. Only when the full terms were known would it be possible to form a final judgment.

Closest consultation promised

It was agreed that, when the negotiations were resumed, British Ministers would take full account of the views, both general and particular, which had been expressed on behalf of other Commonwealth governments at this meeting and would continue their efforts to safeguard essential Commonwealth interests.

The British Government undertook to continue to arrange for the closest consultation with other Commonwealth governments during the remainder of their negotiations with the European Economic Community.