

Letter from Sicco Mansholt to the European Confederation of Agriculture (29 April 1971)

Caption: On 29 April 1971, Sicco Mansholt, European Agriculture Commissioner, denounces the attitude of the officers of the European Confederation of Agriculture (ECA) as the crisis involving European farmers unfolds.

Source: Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis, Amsterdam. Sicco L. Mansholt (1945-1995). Milieu. Teksten van lezingen van J. Linthorst Homan. In manuscript en gedrukt. 1951-1953, 528.

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Letter from Sicco Mansholt to the CEA (European Confederation of Agriculture) (29 April 1971)

Mr President,

On 14 January last, you wrote to inform me that the board of the CEA had unanimously decided to invite me to give a speech on the state of agriculture in Europe in 1980 at the official opening of your annual conference in Santa Cruz, Tenerife. You expressed your hope that I would be able to accept this invitation. On 17 March, I responded favourably to your offer. On 6 April, you notified me that major national agricultural organisations — affiliated to the CEA — would not attend this general meeting if I were present (you asked me not to attend).

You should understand that this action has greatly surprised and deeply disappointed me, in particular since I have not been informed of the reasons why these organisations are adopting such a position. Must I put it down to the fact — which I was forced to note on the day of the terrible demonstration in Brussels — that the farmers were poorly informed about the problems and potential of the common agricultural policy and that, even in the information provided by the farmers' organisations, excessive consideration is still given to national interests? I suggest this on the basis of utterly concrete facts, in particular as regards the information issued in Belgium and Germany, which were not refuted objectively by the organisations concerned.

I consider it pitiful that people can be so unduly sensitive that they can no longer take even this criticism, whilst they have levelled very harsh accusations at the Commission and myself and reproached us very severely. This is all the more regrettable as we have finally succeeded, after many years' struggle, in persuading the Council of Ministers of the European Communities to adopt decisions which take broad account of the demands made by the organisations in relation to the prices for agricultural produce and because the endorsement of the bases for a Community social and structural policy in the interests of farmers has demonstrated, for the first time, a genuine spirit of Community solidarity in relation to the fate of the millions of farmers who have to live under extremely difficult circumstances, a solidarity which has taken the form of quite considerable financial assistance from the Community.

We are now making arrangements to enshrine these decisions in a chapter of Community legislation.

My commitment to the farmers and my firm conviction that the struggle to improve their lot goes on compel me to decline your request not to attend. I do not consider that the position of certain organisations, no matter how large they may be, justifies my non-attendance.

Therefore, it is for you to decide whether you will have served the farmers' cause by withdrawing the invitation that you issued to me to speak at your annual meeting in October.

Yours faithfully,

S. L. Mansholt