

Interview with Hans-August Lücker: reform of the agricultural sector (Bonn, 15 May 2006)

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[François Klein] In 1947, when you were Director of the Bavarian State Chamber of Agriculture, you wrote a memorandum on the application of the Marshall Plan in agriculture. What were the main problems facing Europe's agriculture at that time?

[Hans-August Lückner] The main problem was the need to transform agriculture from an archaic structure into an industry which used modern, entrepreneurial methods. And for the first time in Germany's history Ludwig Erhard, with whom I was already on good personal terms at that time — we were friends and did a lot of work together in a voluntary study group in Munich ... We worked with him on preparations for the 1948 currency reform, the change to a social market economy. And to me, as a young agriculture spokesman, this idea of a social market economy represented an opportunity to take this step, to change agriculture from its archaic, almost biblically old-fashioned structure into a modern industry. That was the main challenge for me.

And I was lucky. The President of my chamber of agriculture was a qualified theologian and economist and he understood this. He didn't think, work and enjoy life the way most farmers do. No, he understood where I was coming from and he backed me.

And it paid off. After 20 April 1948, when we had the currency reform and when Ludwig Erhard announced the social market economy ... I wrote a leader article in the agriculture journal. I wrote one every other week. I wrote a leader article endorsing Ludwig Erhard's social market economy on behalf of the agriculture sector. That, I said, was the way forward.

Then a powerful man in Bavaria — he was the speaker of the Bavarian state parliament, but also a member of my chamber's governing board — wanted me sacked on the spot for that article. What I had said was disgraceful. He favoured a controlled economy and I favoured a market economy, not an out-and-out free economy, but a social economy, as Ludwig Erhard said. That was our goal and we had spent two years discussing it. I knew Erhard and I knew what his plans were. I trusted him, we were friends. So that was the basic problem: how to transform agriculture from an archaic structure into a modern industry in which quantifiable economic parameters could be applied. That was my problem.