

'Should the Mansholt Plan be scrapped?', from Communauté européenne (February 1969)

Caption: In February 1969, the monthly publication Communauté européenne reviews criticism by the agricultural sector of the Mansholt Plan for reform of the common agricultural policy (CAP).

Source: Communauté européenne. Bulletin mensuel d'information. Février 1969. Paris: Service d'Information des Communautés Européennes. "Faut-il brûler le Plan Mansholt ? ", auteur:Riccardi, F.

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Should the Mansholt Plan be scrapped?

Sicco Mansholt is one of Europe's great dreamers. He belongs to that class of men, greatly mistrusted by the realists, which foresees, and plans for, the society of tomorrow. His vision of European agriculture in 1980 is more than just a plan to make agriculture more productive and to soak up surpluses. It aims to change in 10 years a way of life as well as the shape of our countryside: an area as big as Belgium to be returned to its original state of woods and forests; crops transformed; farm workers with free time at the weekends, holidays in the summer and a guaranteed pension, etc.

The realists are right when they say that such a transformation cannot take place in 10 years. It will take longer to change the countryside in a Europe where we pollute the air and the water, where rivers flood the land, too many trees are felled and chemical products pervade the air in springtime. The great show of solidarity, which is essential if we are to transform rural life and cope with all those who have to abandon it, will not come automatically in this selfish society. Should the 'Agriculture 1980' programme therefore be thrown out, or would it not be preferable to speed up its adoption and implementation?

Other than for a lack of realism, Mr Mansholt's ideas are criticised for the underlying threat to the traditional way of life in rural areas: the family-run farm, a time-honoured tradition, almost a civilisation. There is some sincerity in this nostalgia but, more especially, a whiff of demagoguery. The reply to these critics is that farmers can continue to produce as they did before if they want to live as they did before; but if they, too, want to enjoy progress, have a television set and a car, holidays and schools, they must agree to change their production methods.

They do not have a choice. They must realise that a system of family-run farms will always exclude farmers from the social progress represented by paid holidays, shorter working hours and free and compulsory schooling until the age of 16. The programme of the European Commission favours neither large holdings nor the collective ownership of land, but the voluntary formation of various types of cooperatives and producer groups. Mr Mansholt himself quoted a farmer's wife who, in the middle of a rowdy meeting in defence of the family-run farm, shouted: 'A happy family is more important than a family farm.'

The third major criticism of Mr Mansholt concerns the cost of his reform programme. But we must not forget the millions wasted now on producing useless, unsaleable crops and importing those that could easily be produced here if policies were changed.

At all events, it is not a dogmatic or rigid programme and no one thinks it can be adopted in its entirety and implemented within the stated time frame.

Any dream or vision if realised is spoilt a little, 'perché a rispondere la materia è sorda', because matter is deaf to respond, as Dante said.

We must avoid a revolt in the countryside.

It is essential to understand that the 'Agriculture 1980' programme is a vast political, economic and social operation. Its aim is to avoid the increasing polarisation of the population of Europe into two categories, one whose standard of living rises constantly, the other living in the country, alienated, growing bitter and resentful.

Mr Mansholt is calling for a show of solidarity from society as a whole to benefit the less well off. This will be vital if we are to avoid a 'revolt' fairly early on in the rural areas. The fact that his most enthusiastic support comes from the young farmers' associations ('it is vital for us to support the programme') and the unions of salaried farm workers, whilst the most bitter opposition comes from some large groupings, does nothing to discourage Mr Mansholt.

His main aim was to shock the public, to incite governments, parliaments, political parties and professional and trade union organisations to wake up and start talking about the real problems. Mr Mansholt had the

courage to tell small farmers the truth about their future, or rather their lack of a future, wrote Mr de Virieu in *Le Monde*; he reaps criticism and complaints from some but comes across to others as a visionary. ‘When you are right 24 hours before the common man, you are thought for 24 hours to lack common sense’ wrote Rivarol.

F. Riccardi