

'A death knell for farmers if we follow Mansholt's recipe?' from the Süddeutsche Zeitung (17 December 1968)

Caption: On 17 December 1968, the German daily newspaper Süddeutsche Zeitung analyses the issues at stake in the Mansholt Plan and highlights the importance of reforming the structures and farming methods used in the agricultural sector of Europe of the Six.

Source: Süddeutsche Zeitung. Münchner Neueste Nachrichten aus Politik, Kultur, Wirtschaft und Sport. Hrsg. Dürrmeier, Hans ; RHerAusgeber Proebst, Hermann. 17.12.1968, Nr. 302; 24. Jg. München: Süddeutscher Verlag. "Bauernsterben nach Mansholts Rezept ?", auteur:Thoma, Franz , p. 4.

Copyright: (c) Translation CVCE.EU by UNI.LU

All rights of reproduction, of public communication, of adaptation, of distribution or of dissemination via Internet, internal network or any other means are strictly reserved in all countries.

Consult the legal notice and the terms and conditions of use regarding this site.

URL:

http://www.cvce.eu/obj/a_death_knell_for_farmers_if_we_follow_mansholt_s_recipe_from_the_suddeutsche_zeitung_17_december_1968-en-4fd70b20-7719-4200-bfof-c66d20d9355f.html



Last updated: 06/07/2016

A death knell for farmers if we follow Mansholt's recipe?

by Franz Thoma

It is the end of the rural idyll. Not just since today when Sicco Mansholt, the Commissioner with special responsibility for European agricultural policy, submitted a plan to the EEC leaders which the Commission in Brussels as a whole had not the courage to call its own. Some are calling the plan brutal and are demanding the sack for the awkward man who is unnecessarily stirring up unrest among the rural population. In our opinion, however, Mr Mansholt is honest, and whoever blames him for the undeniable unrest cannot distinguish between cause and effect. The unrest was caused by those who had 'lulled agriculture into the utopian belief' that it could produce whatever and as much as it wanted and that things would still turn out all right.

Mr Mansholt and Hermann Höcherl, too, will have to cope with this unfortunate inheritance, although they did not provoke it. It is often overlooked, however, that both politicians are pursuing the same objectives because Mr Höcherl's programme, reintroduced around the middle of the year in a finally more logical form, has also led to a total U-turn in the former objectives of agricultural policy: in Bonn, as in Brussels, the slogan is now to have as *few* farmers as possible, not as many as possible. The only point omitted by Mr Höcherl's department, and this was held against him, was later taken up by Karl Schiller who directed the farmers' anger towards himself, although his method was less blatant than Mr Mansholt's current approach; to do the accounts quote figures for all to see.

But such a confrontation with realities has never been popular with the green camp, a fact already experienced by those professors of agriculture who, in 1962, predicted certain developments for 1970 that came true — although as early as 1967/68. Economic facts can, after all, not be eradicated with tractor demonstrations. What has conventional post-war agricultural policy ultimately achieved? The overproduction of foodstuffs that nobody buys — except the State with taxpayers' money!-Subsidised mechanisation, which often turns out to be a bad investment because the expensive machinery and tools that every farmer has in his barn *for his own use* are used only a few days every year. There are, of course, positive aspects, too. However, this agricultural policy on the whole is *not* the right way, and the farmers themselves know this much better than the civil servants are prepared to acknowledge. Not for nothing have ten million people already left the land and heirs to farm holdings taken up other professions in the knowledge that, as toiling landowners, they could never achieve anything.

It is certainly a good thing that Mr Mansholt exposes the problems rather than covering them up. Every Department Head in the Federal Ministry of Food is aware that, by 1980, millions more will be forced to leave agriculture, and a much higher percentage in Italy and France, with their unequally higher proportion of agricultural workers, than in the Federal Republic, and he is also aware that the consolidation of holdings into *viable* sizes is necessary and, moreover, already being undertaken. Only he, just like his Minister, does not say it as loudly and harshly. Bravo, Mr Mansholt!

We nevertheless do not fail to notice the shortcomings of his ideas. They lie, above all, in Mr Mansholt's optimal holding sizes. We absolutely detest Mr Mansholt's concept of a *voluntary kolkhoz*, whereby he would combine several farms into one agricultural enterprise — but that is hardly an objective argument. After all, is Mr Mansholt's idea not based on the concept, long considered outdated because of developments in the USA, that the size of the holding is the only credible viability criterion? What the EEC Commissioner wants to achieve with his agricultural factory can also be attained, if not even outdone, first of all through a *sharp specialisation* of the viable holdings, that is those with a minimum size of 20 ha, and then through intensive cooperation between these specialised farms. The productivity of this model is likely to be higher than that of the agricultural factory, because the independent farmer, whom we also prefer on sociological grounds, will probably work harder than his 'employed' counterpart.

Whichever way it turns out — customers no longer just fall into the farmer's lap, so that a reasonable structural policy will have to be complemented by a modern marketing policy, one not only geared towards advertising, but foremost towards the product. This will still not solve the market law according to which

production will grow faster than consumption — the exact opposite of the law of decreasing crop yield that had still been drummed into older generations and had been one of the ideological foundations of farming. Agriculture will therefore have to shrink. The discussion will have to centre on the *How*. Alternatives through structural policy, modern ground lease, pensions paid in return for giving up the land and so forth will accelerate the selection process — voluntary acceptance should be given preference over voluntary constraint. This process must not last forever, but neither can it be brought about overnight. What one should always bear in mind is that the farmers would not only be changing their profession, but also their way of life.