

'When the British come' from the Süddeutsche Zeitung

Caption: On 30 June 1970, negotiations open in Luxembourg between the Six and the four candidate countries. In its coverage of the event, German daily newspaper Süddeutsche Zeitung examines the impact of the United Kingdom's application to join the European Economic Community (EEC).

Source: Süddeutsche Zeitung. Münchner Neueste Nachrichten aus Politik, Kultur, Wirtschaft und Sport. Hrsg. Dürrmeier, Hans ; Herausgeber Proebst, Hermann. 29.06.1970, Nr. 154; 26. Jg. München: Süddeutscher Verlag GmbH. "Wenn die Briten kommen", auteur:Proebst, Hermann , p. 2.

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When the British come

by Hermann Proebst

In Luxembourg tomorrow, the Governments of the United Kingdom, Denmark, Norway and Ireland — countries having expressed a willingness to accede — make what may be termed their inaugural visit. The Six of the European Community will exchange friendly declarations of intent with them. A gala reception is also arranged for them, but no extravagant festivities can shorten the road leading to the first working meeting in Brussels via the negotiations beginning on 21 July. Membership is still a long way off.

Great Britain occupies a special place amongst the applicants on two grounds. Firstly, because it is not playing this role for the first time: it already has behind it the bitter experience of one failed attempt at accession. To risk it again despite that experience presupposes a high degree of patience and determination. Secondly, it cannot have been easy for Britain, having occupied something of a leading position among the EFTA states in their free-trade zone, to bet on a game, the outcome of which is still uncertain.

The doggedness with which British representatives are following in the footsteps of their first journey to Brussels is all the more surprising as their application is today, as before, based purely on government policy, which never could become popular. For instance, none of the main parties considered it advisable to put Europe on their banners in the recent hard-fought election campaign; Harold Wilson knew as well as Edward Heath that there were few votes to be won that way. To declare oneself 'European' has remained the fashion and badge of recognition of an exclusive circle; the masses have little recollection of this continent which is, geographically, not so very far away.

Hitherto, in an effort to show plainly and objectively all the terms for and consequences of accession so that they could never be subsequently accused of deception, various British governments seem not to have 'sold' their European policy in a very advantageous manner. At all events, the White Paper published by Wilson's Cabinet simply convinced those opponents of accession who had always warned against being bound too tightly to the Common Market — at the expense of the markets in the Commonwealth. Above all, it exposed fully all the deterrent effects of the barely comprehensible EEC system of agricultural funding. Even the German expert Hermann Höcherl described it as a 'monster' when he addressed the Anglo-German Conference in Cambridge. The question of the impenetrable agricultural market is reduced to the possibility of sharp price rises for the most important foods, which is what British housewives most fear.

The new Prime Minister, Edward Heath, must be seen as a veteran of European politics. He had led the negotiations in Brussels with great skill, as was acknowledged at the time by everyone. He has also experienced how Charles de Gaulle caused the door to be slammed in the face of the British and told them that they were 'not yet ready'. Whereas Wilson never made it quite clear where his conversion to a pro-European policy had taken place, as he had passionately rejected membership and even opposed it before, Heath has always stuck to it without wavering. The fact that he has chosen Anthony Barber to lead the delicate negotiations in Brussels, which he himself had attempted to resolve under Harold Macmillan, shows clearly how important it is to him this time, now that he is leading a Cabinet of 'Europeans', to reach the desired conclusion. Barber is not only the man that he trusts and himself a good European, but also, after his triumph as election campaign manager for the Conservative Party, he could have claimed any top cabinet position.

There is, then, ample evidence that the British have very serious intentions. Indeed, that has already been said from time to time. No doubt Wilson also knew what he was talking about when he said he wanted to mobilise the market and capital reserves of two hundred million Europeans in order to maintain Great Britain's technological performance in the intensified competition between America and the Soviet Union. At the moment, no one can say what stance he will take on Europe as Leader of the Opposition. It might also be the case that the government here will have to take passive resistance into consideration, which could be strengthened by some 20 Commons votes at the disposal of the Conservative anti-European, Europe, Enoch Powell. However, Heath and his friends bring to the debate a basic conviction that was rather alien to Wilson; they believe that it is absolutely necessary for Great Britain to be involved in Europe as it takes

shape, and to take *a leading role* as soon as possible, with and alongside France. Admittedly, this is currently just government policy, and no one can say whether and to what extent the British people will go along with it.