

Statement by the ICFTU on the association of the Overseas Countries and Territories with the Common Market (22 February 1957)

Caption: On 22 February 1957, the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) and its European regional organisation make a joint statement on the implications of the association of the Overseas Countries and Territories (OCTs) with the Common Market.

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ICFTU and ERO statement on the association of overseas territories with the common market (22 February 1957)

We have followed with great attention the discussions about the association of overseas territories with the planned European common market. As any linking of overseas territories with the common market would affect vital interests not only of European nations but also of African and other peoples, the international free trade union movement desires to present its views on this issue. We call attention to the statement on the common market which has been made by our European Regional Organisation on 30 January 1957. In that declaration the ERO emphasised that while the free trade unions have always favoured a maximum joint effort aimed at the economic and social development of overseas territories, they insist that the association of these territories with the common market shall not be visualized in such a way as to hamper their political evolution and the human aspirations of their populations.

We hold that any association of overseas territories with the common market shall be based on the principle of freely accepted cooperation on the part of all participating countries and territories. The time has passed when governments of metropolitan countries could come together and unilaterally decide the fate of dependent countries or lay down plans for founding "Eurafrica", without even asking African opinion.

With respect to Africa in particular, the ICFTU has time and again insisted that concerted international efforts be made for its economic and social development. We have likewise emphasized the necessity to create appropriate United Nations and ILO machinery for that Continent as essential for its development. These demands were strongly re-affirmed by the African Regional Conference (Accra, 14-19 January 1957) at which free trade unions from 21 African countries and territories were represented.

We realise that economic social development in overseas territories is likely to receive a noteworthy — though by no means sufficient — impetus through a widening of the market areas for their products and the joint financing of large-scale investment plans by European countries. Yet these objectives can find the support of the free trade unions only on condition that each stage of these plans will be prepared, decided upon, and carried out with the consent of and in cooperation with all the peoples of the territories concerned.

The ICFTU and the ERO appeal to the six governments who are now preparing the treaty on the common market to include provisions in that document to the effect that any measures intended to associate overseas territories with the common market shall be undertaken only with the consent and the cooperation of the peoples of the territories concerned. Regardless of the degree of self-government which these people have reached, they must be given the right, through appropriate channels, to express their views on all questions of concern to them.