

‘Backs to the wall’ from L’Humanité (2 July 1992)

Caption: On 2 July 1992, the French communist daily newspaper L’Humanité deplores the signing of an agreement on the rules of application for the reform of the common agricultural policy (CAP) by the Agriculture Ministers of the Twelve on 30 June 1992 in Luxembourg City, and echoes the popular protest being led by the farming community.

Source: L’Humanité. Organe Central du Parti Communiste Français. 02.07.1992. Paris.
http://www.humanite.fr/1992-07-02_Articles_-DOS-AU-MUR. "Dos au mur", auteur:Santon, Jean.

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Backs to the wall

As the farmers' demonstrations continued, the EEC Agriculture Ministers confirmed the decisions taken on 21 May

It took place on the very same day as thousands of farmers once more demonstrated in protest at the reform of the common agricultural policy (CAP) adopted by the Ministers for Agriculture of the Twelve, on 21 May in Brussels. On Tuesday, just as the farmers were putting up hundreds of roadblocks, surrounding *préfectures* and *sous-préfectures*, giving free access to motorways by opening toll gates or dumping manure in front of the seats of right-wing or Socialist Party representatives, in Luxembourg Louis Mermaz was signing the Rules of Application of the reform decided by the Twelve.

The Minister for Agriculture considered that he had obtained 'satisfaction'. On what? Satisfaction on having won for France — but only until 1995 — a margin of adjustment regarding a joint text which not only has not been called into question, but which has been described, with satisfaction, by the Portuguese Minister, Arlindo Cunha, as a 'historic step in the construction of a new agricultural policy'. He even added that the United States ought to congratulate the Twelve for these new decisions! A reform that will sacrifice more than a quarter of French farmers between now and 1997 by abandoning guaranteed prices and Community preference was thus confirmed.

Louis Mermaz gave an assurance that he had obtained some adjustments for producers of mixed herds (dairy and suckler cows), on management of premium rights for cattle and sheep breeders, and on regional production bonuses for cereal farmers and for breeders who 'use grass exclusively as animal feed'. Nothing substantial, therefore. If the Twelve once again managed to reach agreement on Tuesday night, it is for one simple reason. However insignificant the 'adjustment' to their reform may be, it is designed to 'defend' the EEC against more possible heavy blows delivered during the GATT negotiations that are still under way (negotiations aiming to liberalise world trade yet more, and in which the USA has made the resolution of the agricultural issue a real priority).

'We have reformed the CAP ... We have done more than was necessary. Now it is the turn of the United States.' These were the blunt words of the British Minister for Agriculture, John Gummer. More forthcoming than Louis Mermaz, he gave an assurance that 'no changes have been made to the text of the CAP reform'. This means: opening the frontiers to substitute products; a lowering of prices over three years by 29 % for cereal products and by 15 % for beef; compulsory set-aside for 15 % of cultivated land in order to obtain compensation; aid determined by surface area and not by quantity of produce ...

After having wanted to impose an even more drastic reform of the CAP, the European Commissioner for Agriculture, Ray MacSharry, announced in Luxembourg in a communiqué that he himself was going to 'ensure that the subsidies allocated to European farmers in order to maintain their incomes would not be called into question in the GATT negotiations'. The message is quite clear. Even the possible 'adjustments' to the ill-starred reform of the CAP will have to suffer humiliating examination by the GATT negotiators, whose allegiance, as everyone knows, is to American interests.

In France, the three committees responsible for the measures concerning 'national adjustments' to the CAP reform — committees created by the Prime Minister in concert with the leaders of the French National Federation of Farmers' Unions (FNSEA), the French Young Farmers' Movement (CNJA), Crédit Agricole and Mutualité Agricole — were due to present their verdict just before the end of July. This timetable has now been seriously upset. Firstly, because the proposals that the European Commission has just adopted are to be submitted to the next Agriculture Council on 13 and 14 July; and secondly, because Louis Mermaz has announced in person that the replies to the French questions may well be answered as late as 30 September, and then only in part.

Yesterday, thousands of farmers paralysed Amiens for five hours with a thousand tractors. Other demonstrators occupied the *Maison de l'Agriculture* in the Gard *département*. Hundreds of other farmers demonstrated in several *départements*, particularly in front of the *préfectures*, always with the active support

of the French Communist Party. In this way they showed once again that the farmers' protest movement, which the Government has so far refused to listen to — for reform of the CAP is an inevitable consequence of the Maastricht Agreement — cannot be ignored and repressed for much longer.

Jean Santon