

Script Ag Int 02, 4b: The Common Agricultural policy

Farmers' meetings aren't famous for stand-up comedy. But in 1980 there was one agricultural speech-maker* who knew the quickest way to raise a laugh: "I have to admit that even after a visit to their headquarters in Brussels very recently I don't really fully understand what the Common Agricultural policy is trying to achieve, how it is trying to achieve it, why it is trying to achieve it or even whether it meant to achieve what it has achieved."

The Duke of Edinburgh declines to go much further, royal foot-in-mouth disease* had afflicted him before. Yet he was hardly alone in his views. Many were realizing by the 80's that the European Community's Common Agricultural Policy had become a hugely expensive pass*. A world of endless subsidies, wasteful food mountains, widespread fraud, far removed from its original aims. Only the lucky farmers harvesting the subsidies found *their* admiration unbounded.

'I used to give advice to farmers and to say them "if you want to go down on your hands and knees every night, thank God for Common Agricultural Policy."

'Cecil Rhodes said at the end of the 19th century and I think I am paraphrasing*: 'To be born British is to come first in the lottery of life.' I would rephrase that and say: 'To have been an English farmer in the 1970's was to have come first in the lottery of economics.'

This is the story of a state-run bonanza for the farming few paid for by less fortunate tax-payers and consumers. It reveals the extraordinary ability of agriculture to achieve an almost mythical status in post-war Europe and from a British point of view it's a story of our failure to grasp that our economic history had made our farming very different from our continental neighbours'. Keen to become good Europeans, British leaders thought a common policy would work for all if oiled with a little political pleasantries* but they were up against a political peasantry* led by France and Germany. Farming for them was about the preservation at all costs of the farms and the food that rooted their civilization.

* *pass* dans le sens d' « impasse » ? ou *path* ?

* = the Duke of Edinburgh, mentioned in the 2nd §.

* *Put/stick one's foot in one's mouth*: "to say something that you regret; to say something stupid, insulting, or hurtful" → "*foot-in-mouth disease*" = "(facetious) the habit of making inappropriate, insensitive, or imprudent statements." (par allusion à "*foot-and-mouth disease*" = fièvre aphteuse)

* *I think I am paraphrasing* = *je pense que ma citation est juste (que je ne me trompe pas en le citant)*

* jeu de mots sur *pleasantries* / *peasantry*.