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**Britain, the Common Agricultural Policy and the Challenges of  
Membership in the European Community: A Political Balancing Act**

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# **Britain, the Common Agricultural Policy and the Challenges of Membership in the European Community: A Political Balancing Act**

When the United Kingdom joined the European Community (EC) in January 1973 it did not simply join a 'common market' for industrial goods, it joined a Community with a fully developed protectionist common agricultural policy (CAP). The policy encompassed up to ninety percent of the EC budget to which Britain was due to become a net contributor at the end of the transition period in 1979. This article will analyse Britain's tempestuous relationship with the CAP from the country's accession to the end of the Labour government in 1979. Following accession, the country's relationship with the EC became increasingly awkward as Labour leaders Harold Wilson and James Callaghan prioritised policies and favoured behaviour they deemed conducive to maintaining the unity of the Labour party. The perceived disadvantages of the CAP for Britain gave politicians additional justification for adopting a confrontational attitude towards the EC. The CAP, the article argues, can serve as a lens to shed light on the wider question of how Britain's leading politicians adapted to Community membership politically, tactically and psychologically.

Keywords: United Kingdom, Labour party, European Community, common agricultural policy, 1970s

## **1. Introduction**

The common agricultural policy (CAP) was at the centre, and even the cause of, some of the most difficult episodes of Britain's relationship with the European Community (EC): the renegotiation of the terms of membership in 1974/75 and the question of the British contribution to the EC budget in the early 1980s, not to mention both sets of accession negotiations, 1961-3 and 1970-1.<sup>1</sup> Britain's difficulties with the CAP – the Community's flagship policy in the 1960s and 1970s – have set the tone for the relationship between Britain and the rest of the Community, sealing Britain's reputation

as an 'awkward partner' in Europe.<sup>2</sup> However, with regard to the CAP Stephen George's dictum needs to be at least nuanced. When French President Charles de Gaulle's veto denied the United Kingdom entry into the Community in 1963, it had to wait another ten years before it was able to join the EC in January 1973. By then, 'the Six' had constructed a Community that worked for their interests, and this included a fully developed common agricultural policy. Due to its late arrival in the Community, Britain had not been able to contribute to the design of the agricultural policy, nor influence the crucial decision how the Community - and thus the CAP - would be financed, a decision that the other member states took in 1970. When joining, Britain had to accept the *acquis communautaire*, that is it had to subscribe to existing Community policies and rules. Britain's engagement with the CAP as a central Community policy can shed light on the country's difficult process of political, tactical and indeed psychological adaptation to EC membership.

The CAP became an obstacle to Britain's smooth transition and adaptation to EC membership also because the policy seemed to challenge deeply held British attitudes towards food prices and loyalty to traditional Commonwealth exporters of food. The UK traditionally imported large amounts of its foodstuff from overseas, usually at cheaper prices than those in the EC market. When Britain became a member of the EC, many of these preferential agricultural trade arrangements with the Commonwealth had to be phased out during the transition period. Maintaining access for New Zealand butter imports became one of the issues British agricultural ministers repeatedly battled over in Brussels. During the 1970s, spending on the CAP soared and at times reached ninety percent of the EC budget.<sup>3</sup> The Community's budget, its 'own resources', were financed through levies on agricultural imports and customs receipts on imports of industrial goods, as well as a one percent contribution drawn from a

member state's Value Added Tax (VAT). Britain, as a major importer of both industrial and agricultural products, would thus contribute more to the budget than most other member states, except West Germany.<sup>4</sup> As to receipts from the budget, the UK was set to receive comparatively little as it had a fairly small and efficient agricultural sector and was not due to receive much in terms of support for its farm sector. As other policies, such as Community regional or social policies, were still in their infancy and could not claim any significant share of the budget, at the end of the transition period in 1979 Britain was set to become a net contributor to the budget. Given that in the 1970s Britain was one of the poorer member states in the Community and was facing enormous economic challenges, it is not surprising that the CAP and the British contribution to the EC budget became bones of contention even before full financial contributions were due to be paid. The mounting domestic opposition to EC membership more generally, the struggle of adapting to the CAP and the failures to devise a clear strategy for reform of the policy and gain allies in the Community for such a reform did not bode well for Britain's future relations with and performance in the Community.

Britain's relationship with 'Europe' has been the subject of a number of books, often written by practitioners who, as civil servants or journalists, have been participants in or eyewitnesses of Britain's relationship with the EC.<sup>5</sup> Roy Denman's *Missed Chances* expressed the personal disappointment of a British civil servant in Brussels with, in his eyes, Britain's embarrassingly nationalistic and parochial dealings with the Community.<sup>6</sup> Historians' accounts of Britain's relations with the EC still focus mainly on the accession negotiations in 1961-3 and the second bid for membership of 1967,<sup>7</sup> with Stephen Wall's two volumes of the *Official History of Britain and the European Community* covering the 1960s and the period up to 1985 being the

exception.<sup>8</sup> In studies on the UK's relationship with the EC both the 1970s and the CAP are usually treated rather cursorily.<sup>9</sup> The policy makes brief appearances in analyses of the 1974/5 renegotiation and, later, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's battle for a rebate from British contributions to the EC budget. Hugo Young's *Blessed Plot*, for example, hardly mentions the CAP at all. George even claims that the issue of the CAP and its effect on food prices in Britain 'did not return to the level of political debate' following the renegotiation in 1974/5; nothing could be further from the truth as this article will show.<sup>10</sup>

The article uses the CAP as an example to highlight British governments' struggle of finding a role in the Community during the 1970s. It explores the difficulty of reconciling opposing UK and continental farm policy approaches, the domestic constraints facing UK politicians as well as behavioural patterns and political miscalculations that contributed to the limited success British governments had in reforming the CAP in its first decade of membership. The article argues that against the backdrop of a difficult political and economic climate and a British public that was increasingly hostile to EC membership, party-political considerations guided decision-making on the CAP in Brussels. While it would be interesting to explore how far the CAP contributed to shaping the domestic attitude of the public towards the EC, this question would exceed the scope of the article. However, the issue of public opinion is important: British politicians of both the Conservative and Labour parties assumed that the public cared deeply about food prices and the CAP's scandalous food mountains. Indeed, Saunders confirms that 'the politics of food had always had a special resonance in British politics.'<sup>11</sup> This assumption thus guided politicians' calculations in their interaction with the EC.<sup>12</sup>

The article will, first, briefly outline the different paths agricultural policy has taken in the UK and in continental Europe since the 19<sup>th</sup> century until UK accession to the EC in 1973. It will then analyse the Labour governments' attitude towards the CAP and EC membership more generally in 1974-79. This part focuses both on the half-hearted attempts by the British government to reform the CAP and how the policy, with its perceived effects on consumer prices and the British budget contribution, became a domestic policy and party political issue in the quarrel between pro- and anti-Marketeters. The third part of the article discusses the reasons for the failure of the British government to gain allies for CAP reform in the Community while the fourth part provides an outlook on the British government's rising concern over the UK's contribution to the EC budget, an issue that escalated in the early 1980s.

## **2. 'Dear Food' Versus 'Cheap Food': Two Paths of Agricultural Policy**

Since the 19th century, Britain's domestic agricultural policy has taken a very different path to that of most continental European countries. In continental Europe, agricultural protectionism had become the norm in the 1880s when Germany raised import duties for grain and livestock to limit cheap grain imports from the United States and Russia. From then on any attempt to revert to free trade in agricultural products was countered by a very powerful farmers' lobby (the *Junker* in Prussia). In addition to this, countries such as France and Germany developed and nurtured a mind-set that elevated agriculture and what was often called the 'rural way of life' to occupy a special status in society.<sup>13</sup> This 'special status' of the farmer was subsequently used to justify subsidies to the agricultural sector – first in the individual member states before 1957 and subsequently also within the European Economic Community (EEC). The concern of continental European governments for their agricultural community (and thus the farm

vote) was understandable considering that farming was still a fairly large economic sector: in 1959 fifteen percent of the German workforce were still employed in farming. In France it was twenty-seven and in Italy even thirty percent, though these numbers declined throughout the 1960s and 1970s. In Britain in 1960 merely five percent of the workforce were employed in the agricultural sector.<sup>14</sup>

The Treaty of Rome of 1957 establishing the EEC contained a suite of articles on the introduction of a common agricultural policy (Articles 38-47). The objectives of the policy were: to increase agricultural production by promoting technical progress; to ensure a fair standard of living for the agricultural community; to stabilise markets; to ensure stability of supplies and to ensure that supplies reach the consumers at reasonable prices. The treaty did not prescribe the shape or form of the future common agricultural policy. Why then did the six original member states opt for a substantial integration of their agricultural policies? There was strong interest among some member states, most of all France and the Netherlands, to create a common market for agricultural products to complement the one for industrial products. France's post-war economic recovery relied partly on modernising the agricultural sector and increasing exports of foodstuffs. The French government therefore expected the EEC to provide a reliable export market to soak up the country's agricultural surpluses. The German government on the other hand had been reluctant to endorse integration in the agricultural sector; it had a small and fairly inefficient agricultural sector, which it wanted to protect from EEC competition. Moreover, as an importer of foodstuffs a common market for agricultural products would lead to Germany absorbing surpluses from within the common market; German consumers would thus fund French and Dutch farmers.<sup>15</sup> Later on, this led to Britain's (erroneous) belief that the German government would be a natural ally for CAP and budgetary reform.



The diverging interests in the CAP resulted in lengthy and dramatic meetings of the EEC Council of Ministers during which the policy took shape throughout the 1960s.<sup>16</sup> The successful outcomes of these Council meetings were regularly hailed as important steps towards a united Europe. The CAP became the Community's flagship policy and was, alongside the common commercial policy, the first common policy that was fully operational. It established an integrated common market for agricultural products administered by the European Commission in Brussels. For the most important products, such as grain, dairy and beef, market organisations were set up and farmers were paid guaranteed minimum prices for their production. Farm prices were geared towards ensuring a fair income for farmers (Article 39, EEC treaty), so that price policy in reality became income policy and was seen as such by Europe's farm ministers.<sup>17</sup>

The CAP market was a protected market, shielded from competition from third countries. Prices on the world market were usually lower than those in the Community. Variable import levies thus increased the prices of food imports from third countries upon entering the Community. The difference between the original price of the commodity and the price following the imposition of the variable levy constituted an income for the Community. Exports from the Community to the world market were supported and farmers received the full price for the product with the Community making up the difference between the lower world market price and the higher internal Community price (export refunds). The compromises in the Council of Ministers meant that the policy had inbuilt flaws that would come to the fore later on. Generally the prices the EEC adopted were relatively high, as they tended to follow the country with the higher price level. In the case of the common price for grains, for example, low price countries such as France and the Netherlands had to compromise with high price countries such as Germany, resulting in the adoption of common grains prices above

world market prices.<sup>18</sup> Alongside technical advancements in machinery and fertilisers, higher agricultural prices incentivised production and this soon led to agricultural surpluses. These surpluses contributed to the high costs of the policy, as there was no cap imposed on the amount the Community would pay out. CAP spending was an obligatory item in the EEC budget. Still, the stakes for changing or reforming the CAP were high with most member states benefiting from the policy.<sup>19</sup>

Since the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Britain had embarked on an agricultural *Sonderweg* in Europe. First, the enclosure movement had resulted in large and unified farms with high productivity and a comparably small labour force; in 1900 a mere eight percent of the total active population was employed in agriculture. Second, the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846 had opened the path to a free trade system open to imports from overseas, reducing food prices and favouring consumers over farmers.<sup>20</sup> This had instilled in the British population the ideal of ‘cheap bread’. Only in the early 1930s, following the onset of the Great Depression, did the British government give in to protectionism when it imposed import duties on most agricultural products. This did not concern imports from the British Empire and Commonwealth, however, and as a result imports from Canada, New Zealand and Australia increased.<sup>21</sup> This trading relationship was maintained and deepened after the Second World War. It also became ideologically important to British governments and the public due to the support the Dominions had given to Britain in both the First and Second World Wars.

In 1947 the Agriculture Act introduced a deficiency payments scheme in the UK that paid farmers the difference between the lower market price and a guaranteed price.<sup>22</sup> This system allowed governments to combine a policy of cheap food and supplying the domestic market with imports from third countries with continuing support for British farmers. The system was not cheap as the market prices were

generally well below the guaranteed prices, but instead of the consumer footing the bill, as was the case with the CAP, it was the government, and thus the taxpayer, that paid producer subsidies through direct payments to farmers.

### ***The CAP and Britain's Entry into the Community***

The CAP presented several disadvantages for the UK. Firstly, with its in-built Community preference, the CAP threatened Britain's traditional Commonwealth trading preferences. Secondly, the UK would have to gradually change its own domestic farm support system and adapt to that of the CAP. Thirdly, the CAP, due to higher commodity prices, would result in an increase in food prices for British consumers and, finally, the UK's status as an importer of food meant that Britain would become a net contributor to the EC budget.<sup>23</sup>

Britain's first application to join the European Economic Community (EEC) was submitted in 1961. By then, parts of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF) (but not the National Farmers Union, NFU) had accepted the idea of adopting the CAP and using it to introduce a more protectionist system to nurture the development of the British agricultural sector, even if it was at the expense of Commonwealth imports. CAP protection would allow the UK to develop its own agricultural sector rather than continuing to be the 'dumping ground' for Commonwealth agricultural surpluses - though it was not acceptable to say this publicly. The spiralling costs of the deficiency payments system was another reason why the CAP, deemed to be cheaper for the Exchequer's purse, looked attractive. It was also found that most UK farmers would not be worse off under the CAP than under the deficiency payments system.<sup>24</sup> Rather, it was the likely increase in food prices for consumers and thus the end of 'cheap bread' that worried Prime Minister Harold

Macmillan's Conservative government. The government was keen to enter the Community rather sooner than later to be able to shape the CAP. It was precisely this quest to influence the CAP, however, which partly motivated the unilateral ending of the negotiations by French President de Gaulle in January 1963.<sup>25</sup>

After de Gaulle's resignation in April 1969, a Tory government under Prime Minister Edward Heath made another attempt at joining the Community in 1970. By then 'the Six were much less worried than they were in 1961 that the British would try to undermine the system they had so painfully and so recently put together'.<sup>26</sup> The passage of time had also seen a change in priorities in the UK: Maintaining a flow of food imports from the Commonwealth had become less important to the British public. The proportion of Commonwealth imports to Britain had dropped from thirty-nine to twenty-five percent. Only New Zealand dairy and Commonwealth sugar imports were still seen as high priority topics.<sup>27</sup> Even the NFU under its president Lord Henry Plumb was no longer hostile to membership and the CAP.<sup>28</sup>

Even with the CAP seemingly more acceptable, shortly before the start of accession negotiations the Community took a crucial decision on the financing of the Community, and thus the CAP, that would affect Britain greatly. As mentioned above, the EC budget would be financed through income from agricultural levies, customs duties on industrial goods imported from third countries and a one percent levy on the VAT raised in the member states.<sup>29</sup> Given that Britain relied on food imports and also imported many of its industrial products from overseas, this financial mechanism meant that Britain would become a net payer to the Community budget. Furthermore, with its small and comparably efficient farm sector, Britain was not set to benefit much from the CAP, the biggest item on the budget by far.

While all other member states welcomed the UK's entry, the French government still needed convincing. During high-level meetings, Prime Minister Heath and French President Pompidou discussed the most contentious issues in the negotiations: New Zealand butter and the budget. Pompidou was allegedly only prepared to compromise on one issue: New Zealand or the budget. Heath famously chose New Zealand butter and cheese imports over the British budget contribution to placate the British public where sympathy for New Zealand remained strong. Heath's reasoning was that the financial issue would only be felt some years down the line, at the end of the transition period, and that by then, surely, the CAP would have been reformed. On the British budget contribution, Heath merely obtained an assurance that should an unacceptable situation arise, the Community would address the issue and seek a solution.<sup>30</sup> The budget was thus an unexploded time bomb. Community mechanisms or alternative common policies that could potentially alleviate the problem were not sufficiently developed during the 1970s. While the UK government obtained assurances that the Community would create a regional policy, funded by a regional development fund, from which the UK would have benefited, this was not set up before 1975, with funds nowhere near as important as those flowing into the CAP.<sup>31</sup> The Treaty of Accession also included the Declarations on Hill Farming, an agreement to establish a hill-farming scheme helping farmers in disadvantaged areas along the lines of an already existing scheme in the UK.<sup>32</sup> The directive on less favoured areas indeed came into effect in 1975 but it did not make a lot of difference to the UK's receipts from the budget.

Instead, the gradual phasing in of the CAP was thought to have increased consumer prices by 13 percent by 1979 (though less than the 18-26 percent the 1970 White Paper had estimated).<sup>33</sup> In the context of the economic crisis of the 1970s and the deep transformations Western economies were undergoing in the period, leading to

structural unemployment and high inflation, it was not easy for the British government to convey how these sacrifices were outweighed by the advantages of Community membership. Instead, the CAP became a bone of contention between Britain and the Community as well as a domestic policy issue exploited by anti-Marketeters eager to show that EC membership did not benefit Britain's economy and its citizens.

### ***Coping with the CAP***

The Heath government understood that it was essential to accept the CAP to take Britain into the Community and then try to change the policy from within. However, for Heath and successor governments the stakes for CAP reform were higher than anticipated. A lack of allies in the Community as well as the inability of the British government to present a convincing alternative to the current CAP system meant that the strategy of 'join now and negotiate later' failed. Heath, and the Labour governments under Prime Ministers Wilson and Callaghan, underestimated the centrality of the policy for the Community as well as the entrenched interests in the policy in the Commission and most member states.<sup>34</sup> New members Ireland and Denmark, joining alongside Britain in 1973, could not be counted on to push for reform as they were set to benefit from the CAP. The centrality of the CAP in Community decision-making immediately puzzled British senior civil servants and politicians.<sup>35</sup> The new British vice-president of the Commission in Brussels, Sir Christopher Soames, complained to Heath that agriculture dominated the affairs of the Commission and that this would have to change.<sup>36</sup> On the other hand, Heath's Cabinet secretary and head of the European Unit in the Cabinet Office, Sir John Hunt, suggested a more conciliatory and subtle strategy: 'We shall need to work very hard to obtain support for our views and, above all, to avoid being in a minority of one. The truth is that we are in a perpetual state of

negotiation with our partners, and presentation is an integral part of getting what we want.<sup>37</sup> This was good advice that, it must be said, was later rarely heeded, at least with regard to the CAP.

Even though the change from a Tory to a Labour government is often seen as a watershed, in terms of their respective relations with the EC both governments' approaches to the CAP were similar, differing more in tone than in substance. In his memoirs Heath himself argued that his Minister of Agriculture, Joseph Godber, had already been pressing for CAP reform following accession, particularly to reduce costs and surpluses through tackling the CAP's price mechanisms.<sup>38</sup> In early 1973, the government came under pressure from anti-Marketeters in parliament who argued that price rises in the CAP were the cause of increased food prices in the UK even though world-wide conditions, in particular the onset of the World Food Crisis, were more to blame. The first Agriculture Council in spring 1973 became a challenge to reconcile the wish to be perceived as a cooperative member of the EC while limiting price rises, something Godber managed fairly well, limiting the increase of consumer prices in the UK to 0.2 per cent overall as well as gaining assurance that the Commission would conduct a review of the CAP.<sup>39</sup> Heath had thus some reason to be optimistic about his ability to change the CAP or at least to limit its effects on Britain. However, the fate of the previous EC reform memorandum, the so-called 'Mansholt Plan' of 1968, should have made Heath wary as to the feasibility of far-reaching CAP reform. This radical reform proposal triggered massive farm protests in continental Europe and merely resulted, after years of acrimonious negotiations, in three structural policy directives.<sup>40</sup> Heath should not have had any illusion that a reform of the CAP would be easy. Britain was faced with a pro-farm front made up of the Commission and leading member states such as France. However, the gradual approach Godber had embarked upon and

Labour's Fred Peart continued, might have reaped rewards had Callaghan allowed it to continue.

### **3. The CAP and the Labour Governments 1974-79**

#### ***Renegotiation***

The general election in February 1974 restored Harold Wilson as prime minister of a Labour government. For Britain's relationship with the Community, the six years of Labour government during a period of severe economic crisis did not bode well.

Divided over the issue of European integration since 1945, during its time in opposition, the Labour party had become more hostile to British EC membership.<sup>41</sup> To placate the anti-Marketeers, in its election manifesto Labour had pledged a renegotiation of the terms of British membership, including 'major changes in the Common Agricultural Policy so that it ceases to be a threat to world trade in food products, and so that low-cost producers outside Europe can continue to have access to the British food market' and 'new and fairer methods of financing the European Community budget'.<sup>42</sup> The results of this renegotiation should be put to the British people in a referendum.

However, even though the manifesto demanded 'major changes' to the CAP, Wilson and his Foreign Secretary, James Callaghan, were in fact not set on a particular outcome regarding the CAP. They merely wanted concessions from the Community that could be presented to Parliament and the British public as a 'success' in order to appease Labour anti-Marketeers and justify campaigning for remaining in the EC. Anti-Marketeers such as Labour MP and Minister of State in the Department of Industry, Eric Heffer, however, took the phrasing 'major changes' literally and demanded that the 'fundamental principles of the CAP' needed indeed to be challenged.<sup>43</sup> Following the



vote on the renegotiated terms on 9 April 1975 where Heffer went into the 'No' lobby, Wilson sacked him as minister.<sup>44</sup> Before the vote, Callaghan reminded Heffer that Labour had decided to seek 'our agricultural objectives by negotiating within the CAP'<sup>45</sup>. This approach was in fact not much different to how the Heath government had envisaged proceeding after accession. Instead of battling for a 'major' reform, Callaghan, who led the renegotiations, was content to accept solutions to very specific issues the UK had with the policy. The agreements made at the Dublin European Council on 10-11 March 1975 included an automatic correcting mechanism for the British, or any member states', budget contribution at the end of the transition period (but only if GDP was 85 percent or less of the Community average) and concessions for New Zealand dairy products, for example that butter imports at 1974/5 levels could continue at those levels beyond 1977 when they were due to be phased out.<sup>46</sup> More generally, in September 1974 German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt himself had proposed a fundamental review of the CAP to address the British problems and also to express his own frustration with the CAP. Like the 'Improvement of the CAP' memorandum of 1973, the ensuing 'Stocktaking' exercise at least held the promise of future CAP reform and could be used by the British government to demonstrate that things were moving in the right direction on the CAP.<sup>47</sup> While not addressing the CAP directly, the Lomé Convention concluded in February 1975 between the EC and 46 African, Caribbean and Pacific countries, many of them Commonwealth members, dealt with the renegotiation demand for a fairer deal for developing countries.<sup>48</sup>

Finally, the renegotiation coincided with the World Food Crisis in 1974/75 that had resulted in worldwide food shortages and pushed up food prices on the world market, thus ensuring, for the time being at least, a comparably secure supply at reasonable prices for the EC due to the CAP. For Wilson and Callaghan, these results

were deemed sufficient to campaign in favour of remaining in the EC in the referendum of June 1975. Saunders convincingly demonstrates that the ‘Britain in Europe’ campaign successfully used the World Food Crisis to deflect anti-Marketeers’ arguments that membership was to blame for food price increases. Instead, as prices were rising faster outside the Community than inside, they turned it into an argument about the CAP providing food security at reasonable prices.<sup>49</sup>

The referendum resulted in a decision of 67 percent of the British population voting ‘yes’ to Britain staying in the Community.<sup>50</sup> However, for the anti-Marketeers in the government and the Labour party these corrections fell far short of a ‘major reform’ of the CAP and therefore did nothing to silence their opposition to the policy and EC membership as a whole.

During and after the renegotiations, the relationship between agricultural minister Fred Peart and his continental counterparts was cooperative and promised a new beginning in the relationship between the Labour government and the Community. Until the early 1970s, Peart had opposed British entry to the Community and the CAP, but according to Pimlot, he had not been absolutely ‘committed against the Wilson government trying to get in’ in 1967.<sup>51</sup> When Labour took over government in 1974, Peart as Agricultural Minister had changed his mind and, according to Michael Palliser, became ‘passionately pro-European’.<sup>52</sup> Some attribute his conversion to his close collaborator, Permanent Secretary in MAFF, Freddie Kearns, who had been responsible for the agriculture portfolio during the accession negotiations and had an excellent grasp of the subject matter.<sup>53</sup> Perhaps it was Kearns’ authority and experience in Brussels, which made it seem possible to Peart that Britain could play an instrumental role in gradually modifying the CAP or at least gaining advantages for British agriculture.

This was borne out in the negotiations for the agricultural price package in January and February 1975, where the UK gained concessions such as the beef premium, effectively allowing Britain to continue the deficiency payment system for this commodity and add it to the CAP as a scheme open not only to the UK but other member states as well, funded with £45m from the Community budget. Britain had thus achieved a ‘basic change in the Community’s beef regime’ and obtained an increase in the butter subsidy. In addition, at this Council meeting ministers also adopted the Less Favoured Area Directive of which Britain was a net beneficiary.<sup>54</sup> Callaghan and Wilson were content with the outcome and congratulated Peart; anti-Marketeters, however, such as Secretary of State for Health and Social Services, Barbara Castle, and Secretary of Trade, Peter Shore, were not placated.<sup>55</sup>

These negotiations demonstrate that a different and more cooperative kind of approach to the Community could reap results. However, Peart’s, and his right hand man Kearns’, days at the helm of MAFF were numbered and the renegotiation was not the end of British opposition to the CAP. For the Labour government the notion that the CAP contributed to increasing food prices for the British consumer and, with inflation already rocketing, contributed to a general increase in prices, was hard to bear and increasingly caused difficulties within the Labour party. The government also became more and more concerned with the fact that at the end of the transition period in 1979 Britain would be hit with the full costs of membership, contributing to a budget that was continuously driven upwards by spending increases on the CAP. It was on those two issues that the British government did battle in Brussels for the remainder of the 1970s.

### ***John Silkin, the CAP and the UK Presidency of 1977***

In September 1976, Peart was replaced as Agriculture Minister by John Silkin, who had

campaigned against British membership in the referendum campaign in 1975. Callaghan thus put a convinced anti-European in charge of dealing with the Community's most important, most visible, most expensive and most contentious policy.<sup>56</sup> As a staunch anti-Marketeer, Silkin saw his role in Brussels as one of open opposition to the EC. He took pride in his achievements of blocking decisions: 'Deadlock [in the Council of Ministers] occurs if dissenting Ministers [i.e. himself] have enough willpower and physical stamina to conquer their weariness and *fight on*.'<sup>57</sup> He preferred 'total opposition' to what he deemed the 'continental' habit of compromise where the minority eventually, after extracting minor concessions, adhered to the majority view.<sup>58</sup> Silkin's 'total opposition', however, did not achieve the desired results and, like the continental tactic of holding out for concessions, it also only obtained him minor concessions when negotiations resumed, but the tactic contributed decidedly to poisoning the atmosphere. Silkin showed little understanding and tolerance for other ministers' needs and domestic constraints. His aim was to cause maximum outrage in Brussels to play to the growing domestic Eurosceptic audience in the Labour party and the British public.<sup>59</sup> Tellingly, he used combat vocabulary not only when describing his relationship with his continental counterparts but also with the more integration friendly Foreign and Cabinet Offices in Whitehall: 'In my three years as Agriculture Minister I found myself fighting not only the other member states, but the Foreign Office in both London and Brussels.'<sup>60</sup> He called the Cabinet Office 'an instrument of appeasement' with Brussels.<sup>61</sup>

Unlike his predecessor, Silkin did not believe that CAP reform was possible or indeed desirable given that his aim remained ending Britain's membership of the EC. He thus did not put forward any ideas for reform that went beyond resisting commodity price rises.<sup>62</sup> Instead, he tried to extract the maximum gain for the UK, for example by

adjusting the rate of the 'green pound' through which income for UK farmers could be increased while prices in Britain could stay relatively low,<sup>63</sup> while at the same time limiting the financial implications of the CAP for Britain by insisting on the lowest possible price increases in the annual price negotiations. The British government's position on the CAP was thus a frustrating one for its Community partners, often denying other farm ministers the price rises they were demanding for their own farmers.

What were Callaghan's motives for appointing Silkin to the post? As Prime Minister of an unstable minority government, Callaghan found himself in a difficult position. On the one hand, he had to honour Britain's membership in the EC and establish a constructive relationship with his European counterparts. On the other, he faced a deepening divide in the Labour party at home between the pro- and anti-Marketeters as well as having to deal with the worst economic crisis since the 1930s. Callaghan himself was a self-confessed 'agnostic' when it came to European integration and he was critical of the CAP.<sup>64</sup> In Silkin he had a strong and determined politician calling out the policy's wastefulness and 'doing battle' in Brussels without Callaghan having to do so himself. This was bound to go down well with the anti-Marketeters in his Cabinet, Parliament and the Labour party. Domestically the CAP became increasingly contested as it was seen to increase food prices and fuel inflation. Silkin's confrontational attitude was useful to demonstrate to the public that the government was fighting for 'British interests'. However, an appointment such as Silkin's demonstrated to Britain's Community partners the government's lack of commitment to Community membership and contributed to establishing Britain's reputation as an awkward partner in the Community. What is less clear, though, is why Callaghan gave such a prominent platform to an ambitious politician who had his eyes on the party leadership.

A particularly 'awkward' moment came in the first half of 1977 when the UK was due to take over the Council presidency in the Community. Alternating every six months between member states, this allowed a member to set the agenda of European Council meetings and occupy the chair in the Council of Ministers meetings. The UK government came to see the 1977 presidency mainly as an opportunity to advance British interests in the Community. Aiming to mimic what they perceived as the more successful French government's approach towards the EC, in a Cabinet meeting discussing the presidency in June 1976, Callaghan suggested to: 'make the Community dimension part of our departmental thinking and pursue this with the same determination as the French: but in so doing we should also remember the need sometimes to cloak a hard position in suitably "communautaire" doctrine and phraseology.'<sup>65</sup> In short, adopting suitably 'communautaire' language was seen as automatically bringing the right results for Britain. The Cabinet agreed that the presidency should be used to 'demand major reforms of the Common Agricultural Policy'.<sup>66</sup> In the meeting Agricultural Minister Peart, then still in post, constructively proposed procedural changes to decision-making in the CAP, for instance to involve consumer organisations in preparing the agricultural price proposals and to establish a joint Agriculture/Finance Council. Such changes to the CAP decision-making process aimed at limiting price increases and keeping the costs of the CAP down. His suggestion how to achieve Britain's aims was also fairly suave, 'we should ... organize the discussions more sensibly with time for reference to capitals before the final settlement'.<sup>67</sup> If pursued, these changes could have indeed had an impact on the further development of the CAP. Consumers as well as Finance Ministers had notoriously little to say in CAP decision-making, which was left to Agricultural Ministers under the

influence of powerful farm lobbies. However, Peart's suggestions were not taken up by his successor, Silkin.

When Britain took the presidency in early 1977, one of the first items on the agenda was the annual price negotiation in the Council of Agricultural Ministers. Not surprisingly, Silkin did not attempt to play the role of the impartial chairman at the Council, eager to achieve a satisfactory result for all member states. Instead, the Cabinet had agreed to 'take as tough a line as was compatible with the avoidance of confrontation'.<sup>68</sup> However, according to Denman, Silkin was deliberately confrontational without gaining much by blocking a decision. Denman concluded that the annual price review was 'the episode which did most damage to Britain's reputation' in the Community.<sup>69</sup> Silkin delayed an agreement of the ministers to obtain a small rise in the subsidy on butter granted to the UK to compensate for price increases. The other ministers wanted to settle for seven pence per lb of butter which Silkin's entourage deemed 'just acceptable'. Silkin however declined the offer so that the Council had to meet again a month later, only to settle for 8.5 pence per lb, achieving 'no significant change' and having had to 'climb down'. Denman also deplored that the Foreign Office did not intervene as it considered this a technical detail, apparently not appreciating the damage Silkin's opposition did to Britain's first ever presidency and its reputation in the Community more generally.<sup>70</sup> Denman's judgement was scathing: 'It is doubtful whether the British reputation in Europe has ever really recovered from this setback.'<sup>71</sup> German weekly *Der Spiegel* also deplored that Britain unashamedly fought for its national interests while in the presidency chair, using Silkin's performance in the Council as an example. The magazine referred to a new disease affecting Brussels following the presidency: 'galloping Anglophobia'.<sup>72</sup>

Foreign Secretary David Owen's report on the presidency acknowledged that 'there has been some criticism of our presidency for lack of restraint in this respect [pursuing national interests]'.<sup>73</sup> The report's analysis of the results of the CAP negotiations then drew attention to the advantages obtained for the UK, thus showing that by manipulating the rate of the green pound (a 7.5 percent devaluation had been decided at the Council), price increases added only 0.5 percent to the price index for consumers, while British farmers enjoyed an increase of farm prices of 10 percent.<sup>74</sup> Seen in this light, UK advocacy of price restraint in the name of Community interest while at the same time manipulating the green rate of the pound to benefit UK farmers was dishonest.

In a domestic context, in the late 1970s the CAP became increasingly the target of opponents of British membership in the Community both within the parliamentary Labour party and the party as a whole. The press also became more critical of EC membership and questioned whether the benefits of membership outweighed the costs and disadvantages with which the CAP was associated. In a House of Commons debate in July 1977, Labour MP Dennis Canavan's question to Silkin was symptomatic of the general mood: Can he 'tell his Common Market counterparts that nowhere is the stupidity of the Common Market so evident as in his three areas of responsibility? In agriculture, it has meant inefficient production. In fisheries, the absence of an exclusive zone continues to threaten the very livelihood of our fishermen. In food, it has meant inflated food prices and mountains of waste.'<sup>75</sup> In that same month the Labour Party National Executive Committee (NEC), dominated by the left wing of the party, called for the question of EC membership to be reopened. In June 1978 an anti-EC group, the Labour Common Market Safeguards Committee, issued a manifesto on which the party should campaign in the EP elections the following year. The manifesto, championed by



Secretary of State for Energy, Tony Benn, was vociferously opposed to British EC membership; one of the first issues it aimed to tackle was a ‘complete overhaul of the notorious Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) so that we can import cheaper food from world markets and abolish the food mountains’.<sup>76</sup>

With anti-Marketeer sentiment rife in the Labour party and support for EC membership dwindling in the population as a whole, Callaghan’s minority government responded with a more hardline position on Europe. Silkin’s performance in Brussels was thus far from being out of tune with the government and the party. Indeed, the Parliamentary debate on the issue shows that while standing up to his partners in the Council in Brussels, at home Silkin was still attacked for not having driven an even harder bargain or indeed advocated the dismantling of the CAP.<sup>77</sup> The CAP thus became an easy target, used to question Britain’s EC membership, spread doubt on its benefits and to campaign for withdrawal from the Community.

Given the domestic situation and his personal preferences, Silkin continued his collision course in the Council of Agricultural Ministers. In a statement following the Council in March 1979 – his last one - he again let off steam:

‘I regard any increase in common prices as an act of cynical and contemptuous indifference to the interests not only of the United Kingdom, but also to the overwhelming majority of people throughout Europe. Confronted with the irrefutable evidence of waste and bad management in the common agricultural policy, it has become impossible any longer to ignore it. ... [It is] the United Kingdom that is expected to agree to these so-called “compromise” proposals to raise food prices, taxes, the mountains of wasted food and the intolerable transfer of resources from the United Kingdom to other and richer member countries. ... I may be alone in this Council. I shall try to bear it with fortitude, as I have done – from time to time in the past.’<sup>78</sup>

This outburst, first and foremost for the consumption of the British public and the anti-Marketeters in the Labour party, comprised all the criticisms the government had levied against the CAP for the last six years: food mountains, increase in food prices, costs to the Exchequer and the consumer as well as the idea that the UK, then one of the poorer countries in the Community, was funding inefficient European farmers and was barred from importing cheaper food from third countries. His tirade demonstrated the isolation Silkin was prepared to accept, as he was not forging effective links with his partners in the Council.<sup>79</sup> Rather, in a difficult economic, social and political climate in the UK, Silkin needed and wanted to be seen as protecting British interests in Brussels. Given that the British farm sector was rather small, he also did not risk great opposition by farmers at home as did for example his French, Dutch or German counterparts. Silkin's 'brutal' style affected relations with the other member states but was applauded at home.<sup>80</sup> It is not unreasonable to conclude that the constant opposition to the CAP fostered an 'us' versus 'them' sentiment in the British public and among parts of the political elites already during the first years following British accession.

#### **4. Elusive Allies: The Fickle Germans**

While it was well-known in Whitehall that French politicians put their farmers on a pedestal and regarded them as the backbone of French society, British Prime Ministers were surprised that the Germans, in particular the governing Social Democrats, held a similar view.<sup>81</sup> Attempts by Heath and his successors to gain the support of the German government, also a net payer into the EC budget and deemed a natural ally, failed repeatedly. Foreign Office and Cabinet Office documents suggest that British ministers and civil servants were puzzled over the German attachment to the CAP. The Foreign

Office was set on the case to solve this mystery, thus shining a spotlight on German governments' ambiguous attitude towards the CAP.<sup>82</sup> The FCO recognised that even with Chancellor Schmidt (1974-82) willing to back CAP reform, he would have had to persuade both the German Agricultural Ministry and the Foreign Ministry, in the latter of which 'the development of the Community, and European considerations generally, loom large'. The study concluded: 'Germany is not prepared to challenge the basic principles of the CAP because she knows that the French, and others, would not accept its abandonment.'<sup>83</sup> Like all German governments, Schmidt and his coalition government also succumbed to the German ambiguity regarding the CAP: a general dislike for and open criticism of the policy went hand in hand with a support of the status quo.<sup>84</sup>

When Callaghan became Prime Minister in 1976, he developed a close and cordial relationship with Schmidt.<sup>85</sup> However, Callaghan's, and also later Margaret Thatcher's, reluctance to adopt the European Monetary System (EMS), which Schmidt had enthusiastically promoted in 1978, meant that Schmidt would in turn be even less likely to challenge his farm minister, Josef Ertl from the Free Democratic Party (the Social Democrats' junior coalition partner), and thus threaten the survival of his own coalition government to tackle CAP reform with Callaghan. However, confusingly for the British, in his public statements Schmidt continued to be critical of the policy, for instance when in July 1978 at the Bremen European Council Schmidt claimed that he was prepared to 'take on the vested interests of European agriculture' ... 'given support from his partners'.<sup>86</sup> While Schmidt could be relied on to criticise the CAP, he was less reliable when it came to taking action and would not be pushed to act in unison with the British. In a meeting between Schmidt and Callaghan in October 1978 Schmidt rowed back from his bold position in Bremen, saying that 'he had to take account of the view

of his Agricultural Minister'.<sup>87</sup> Generally, German politicians tended to have a soft spot for small and poor farmers and grudgingly accepted the budgetary implications for Germany of price rises if they benefited small farmers. This was in contrast to the British government's obsession with the costs created by the policy and the wastefulness of agricultural surpluses. Schmidt and his government also made sure that the issue would not result in a rift between them and their main Community ally, France. Not least, Germany came to see the policy as a useful bargaining tool to gain concessions from the French.<sup>88</sup> At their meeting in late 1978, Schmidt invited Callaghan to send him a 'non-paper' setting out his ideas on improving the CAP. This set in motion a collaboration between the Cabinet Office and the Chancellery in Bonn that would continue under Prime Minister Thatcher until Schmidt ended the affair in 1981.

Callaghan's non-paper was duly prepared - in the Cabinet Office, not in MAFF. It was not even shown to Silkin or Foreign Secretary Owen. The paper set out the achievements of the CAP and its problems, focusing on how the policy encouraged surpluses and thus increased costs to the budget while at the same time hampering the development of other policies. The solutions Callaghan proposed were not revolutionary; he repeated the usual British insistence on a 'realistic price policy', denying any price increases for products in surplus. Hardship caused to farmers could be cushioned by national aids should a government so wish. This idea could have been acceptable to the Germans, but it would have been unacceptable to the French as it violated one of the CAP's core principles of financial solidarity and the French were a net beneficiary of the CAP. In the paper, Callaghan also made Schmidt aware of the fact that the UK benefited very little from the budget because of the CAP and was due to become a net payer to the budget.<sup>89</sup>

Callaghan and Schmidt got along with each other at a personal level and trust existed between both men. Callaghan was anxious that Schmidt understood the implications of the CAP and reminded his staff to keep the language of the paper as simple as possible, adding a handwritten note on a draft that he himself 'gave up'. '[I]t is because Schmidt's English is not as good as we think – and as he will read this in English – I don't believe he will follow a lot of it.'<sup>90</sup> It was perhaps naïve of the Prime Minister to think that his paper would open Schmidt's eyes to the problems of the policy and give him 'some ammunition to argue with Herr Ertl about CAP reform'.<sup>91</sup> Callaghan and the Cabinet office seemed to underestimate the domestic policy constraints Schmidt was under, holding together an increasingly volatile coalition with the FDP and keeping in check the still powerful German farmers' lobby.

Callaghan's attempts to persuade Schmidt, as a fellow net-payer, to tackle CAP reform and the budget came to nothing. Schmidt preferred to focus on the EMS and showed disappointment in Callaghan's decision in December 1978 to join the EMS but to keep Britain out of the Exchange Rate Mechanism that would have tied Sterling into a system of semi-fixed exchange rates.<sup>92</sup> To the German chancellor this demonstrated that Britain was not prepared to be fully engaged in the Community and taking risks for CAP reform – domestically and with close Community partners – was not worth it. In 1981 Schmidt broke off the backchannel discussions about the CAP. By then, CAP reform had become too closely linked to the British budget issue. The German chancellor might have become wary of being drawn into this issue and be seen as complicit with the British government's quest for reduced contributions or a refund.<sup>93</sup>

After Thatcher won the 1979 elections, the Prime Minister and British government ministers continued to seek close contacts with their German counterparts. They shared Labour's idea that as a fellow net payer to the Community budget, and the

largest one at that, the Germans were Britain's primary allies.<sup>94</sup> However, the relationship between Thatcher and Schmidt was initially not very cordial. Cabinet Office and Treasury civil servants were thus trying to mend fences and convince Thatcher of the importance of improving the relationship with Schmidt and gaining him as an ally.<sup>95</sup> Since French President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing lost the elections to Socialist François Mitterrand in May 1981, the traditional Franco-German relationship in the Community faced an uncertain future. Schmidt had supported his friend Giscard in the elections in spite of Mitterrand being a fellow Social Democrat. Mitterrand had campaigned on a very left-wing ticket and both Schmidt and Thatcher were united in their concern over France's future economic policies. For the British government, this presented an opportunity to, if not replace, at least add an Anglo-German element to the traditional Franco-German motor in the Community. The summit meeting between Thatcher and Schmidt in May 1981 was successful and there was hope of Schmidt backing Thatcher for a 'fairer deal' in Europe. The press even spoke of an 'Anglo-German entente'.<sup>96</sup> However, Schmidt was replaced, in the autumn of 1982, by Helmut Kohl, a Christian Democrat who would rekindle the Franco-German alliance with President Mitterrand. Kohl and Thatcher never found much to like about each other.<sup>97</sup>

## **5. CAP Reform and the Budget Issue**

In 1979 the transition period came to an end and Britain would have to pay the full membership 'fee'. The realisation how much Britain would actually have to pay came slowly and to obtain firm estimates was a difficult undertaking. The spending on the CAP fluctuated year on year, as did therefore member states' contributions to the budget. The European Commission was not forthcoming with statistics on member states' net contributions and net gains as it wanted to avoid a situation where member

states asked for a *juste retour* of their contributions. The Treasury carried out its own calculations showing that between 1973 and 1977 Britain contributed about £2 bn to the Community budget and received about £1.2 bn from it.<sup>98</sup> Callaghan added in the margins of the note: ‘Nigel, what this shows is that the Germans and ourselves are the largest contributors ... as we are one of the poorer Members is this not absurd? And should I not say so?’<sup>99</sup> Callaghan decided to indeed say something, not least as it became clear that the financial mechanism negotiated in the renegotiations on the terms of membership would not apply to the UK, as conditions were not fulfilled. The main avenues to remedy the situation were to reduce expenditure (i.e. the costs of the CAP), increase UK net receipts from the budget or reduce the UK’s share of the budget burden.<sup>100</sup>

Callaghan first drew public attention to the issue in his speech to the Lord Mayor’s Banquet at Guildhall on 13 November 1978. In this speech he called for CAP reform as one of the main means to remedy the issue. In 1978 the policy consumed 75 percent of the budget. Realistically, the expectations that British receipts, for example in regional or social policy, could be increased were seen as limited.<sup>101</sup> By early 1979 it dawned on senior civil servants such as Cabinet Secretary, Sir John Hunt, that all of the devices officials have come up with to reduce Britain’s budget contribution or increase its receipts, even taken together, would not come close to narrowing, let alone closing, the gap between net contribution and receipts. Hunt expected the matter to be ‘a long process of attrition’ the beginning of which should best be postponed until after the general election.<sup>102</sup> The general election in May 1979 returned a Conservative-led government under Prime Minister Thatcher to the House of Commons. It fell to her to address the budget issue. For a government which, when in opposition, had pledged to approach the EC with a more positive spirit than their Labour predecessor, it would be

hard to reconcile this contentious issue with this conciliatory attitude. Impossible, really, as it turned out.

## **6. Conclusion**

Britain's journey to Community membership had been lengthy, with both major political parties struggling to adapt to post-war realities; being obliged to adopt a policy such as the CAP following accession did nothing to pacify the anti-Marketeters. Rather, it fuelled continued debates about the merits of EC membership within the Labour party in the 1970s but also the country as a whole. The CAP as a policy was not seen as working in the British interest. Rather, the policy seemed to underscore the drawbacks of being tied to common rules and supranational policies within the Community. The CAP was therefore resisted rhetorically both in Brussels and in London, particularly as it came to be tied up with the economic recession and, crucially, the unfolding problem of the British budget contribution that would dominate British policy towards the EC in the early 1980s.

For Labour's anti-Marketeters the CAP epitomised all that was wrong with the Community; the agricultural *Sonderweg* Britain had embarked on since the 19<sup>th</sup> century was compared positively against the 'wastefulness' of the Brussels CAP regime even though the deficiency payments system clearly also had its flaws.<sup>103</sup> The Labour governments' difficulties with the CAP contributed to shaping attitudes and setting the tone for the relationship between Britain and the rest of the Community. With a party irreconcilably torn over the issue of 'Europe', Prime Minister Callaghan did nothing to dispel Britain's growing reputation as an 'awkward partner' in the Community. In fact, being 'awkward' in Brussels became a domestic necessity and came to be associated with the political survival of the Labour party, at least in the eyes of its leadership. What Young said about Labour's predicament in the renegotiation 1974/75, namely that



‘Britain’s role in the EEC was at the mercy of British domestic considerations’, applied to the remainder of the 1970s and, arguably, the entire period of Britain’s membership.<sup>104</sup> The fact that with Commission President Roy Jenkins Britain had a fellow Labour politician at the helm of this important EC organisation made little difference to the Callaghan government’s relationship with ‘Brussels’. That the party eventually did break apart – with the creation of the Social Democratic Party in 1981 and Jenkins one of its founders – precisely because of the party’s uncooperative European policy and increasing hostility to membership, is thus ironic.

There is no doubt that the CAP posed a real difficulty for Britain. The country was at a disadvantage as it arrived ‘late at the party’. Britain had to adopt the *acquis communautaire* of the Community, which included recently completed supranational policies such as the CAP, and also the equally contested Common Fisheries Policy. While in the early 1960s, Harold Macmillan’s Conservative government had been ‘enthusiastic about participation in a common European system of agricultural protection,’<sup>105</sup> any such enthusiasm for the CAP had waned by 1973. The method for financing the CAP meant that Britain as a nation importing a large proportion of its foodstuffs was not gaining much from the CAP. It also meant that the UK had to adopt an agricultural policy that went against its two principles of ‘cheap bread’ and Commonwealth preference. In terms of the timing, Britain could not have joined the EC at a worse moment, at the end of the thirty-year post-war economic boom, when Europe and the Western world were entering into a period of economic recession, monetary turbulences, and structural unemployment. The wastefulness of the CAP, dramatically rendered visible in the food mountains, and the budgetary contributions linked to the policy, were thus proportionately more of an issue than had Britain joined in the more prosperous 1960s.

From the early days of membership, the UK government envisaged CAP reform.<sup>106</sup> This remained a constant and much repeated aim throughout the Heath government as well as the subsequent Labour governments. However throughout the 1970s British politicians and civil servants were unable to spell out what shape or form such a reform should take. There is no indication in MAFF files that civil servants worked on serious reform proposals for the CAP. Reform ideas, albeit of a very general kind, were mainly floated in the Cabinet and Foreign Offices. This is also because John Silkin, who took over the agriculture portfolio in 1976, was an anti-Marketeer who was more interested in withdrawing from the Community than in substantial reform of a policy he rejected.

Silkin is a good example that the way British politicians approached these challenges mattered and became a litmus test to how effectively they were adapting to the realities of Community membership. Would they be able to devise a Community diplomacy that was persuasive and effective? Would they try and be successful in modifying the CAP to suit British interests better? Ministers such as Silkin proved resistant to the idea of forging coalitions and engaging in the give and take of Council negotiations to advance their interests. This reluctance to adapt can partly be explained by anti-Marketeer conviction, or, for more Europhile politicians, by their fear of drawing domestic criticism for 'going native' and not defending the national interest. Wall argues that the British confrontational attitude was in fact a result of their ignorance and inexperience with continental politics, imposing on continental political leaders and ministers in coalition governments the need to find compromises.<sup>107</sup> Indeed, politicians like Silkin were not used to such give and take and took it for a weakness. Ignorance of, or disinterest in, the domestic constraints of Community partners also explain the exaggerated faith placed in German Chancellor Schmidt's ability and

willingness to commit to CAP reform. The Prime Minister and the Cabinet Office seemed unaware of German domestic reality of coalition government and influential farm lobby wedded to the CAP on the one hand and Germany's general acceptance of its own net payer status in the Community. Wall concluded that the lack of allies in the Community pushed the British government to adopt a more hardline position: 'Without such alliances [like the Franco-German relationship], Britain tended to rely more on tenacity and obstinacy' to defend its position.<sup>108</sup>

Finally, the battles over the CAP accentuated the clash in philosophy over farm policy and the role of farmers in society that had been at the origin of the conflicts over the CAP between Britain and its continental partners. For the latter, particularly the French but also the Germans, the CAP became a yardstick for the UK's commitment to European integration and their willingness reach compromises with their Community partners. Alongside the decision not to join the ERM, the battles over the CAP therefore underscored Britain's reluctance to fully commit to Community membership in the 1970s.

## Endnotes

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- 1 Cf. Franklin, *Joining the CAP*; Moravcsik, “De Gaulle between Grain and Grandeur”.  
In 1967 the three existing organisations, the European Economic Community (EEC), Euratom and the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) were merged to form the European Communities (EC), although it is also customary to speak of the European Community. This article will use the acronym EC when discussing the period after the merger in 1967 and EEC when discussing earlier periods.
- 2 George, *Awkward Partner*.
- 3 Spoerer, “Fortress Europe”, 143.
- 4 Cf. Ludlow, *Roy Jenkins*, 208-9.
- 5 Young, *This Blessed Plot*; O’Neill, *Britain’s entry into the European Community* and Franklin, *Joining the CAP*.
- 6 Denman, *Missed Chances*.
- 7 Ludlow, *Dealing with Britain*; Kaiser, *Using Europe, Abusing the Europeans*; Pine, *Harold Wilson and Europe*; Parr, *Britain’s Policy Towards the European Community*.
- 8 Wall, *From Rejection to Referendum* and Wall, *Tiger Unleashed*.
- 9 Young, *Britain and European Unity 1945-1999*, dedicates one a short chapter to the entire 1970s including the accession negotiations. Of this chapter, merely five pages covers the period 1976-9. An exception is the chapter by Schenk, “Britain and the Common Market”. This is set to change with recent studies on the 1975 referendum such as Saunders, *Yes to Europe!* already discussing the CAP as an issue during the renegotiation and referendum campaign. Cf. also Aqui, *Britain*.
- 10 George, *Britain and European Integration since 1945*, 97.
- 11 While not specifically addressing the CAP, a Euro-barometer survey of 1976 put ‘Rising Prices’ as the main concern of UK respondents where most respondents in other EC member states had put ‘Unemployment’. *Euro-barometer*, No. 5, July 1976, 8.
- 12 Saunders, *Yes to Europe!* shows that the Yes campaign was able to defuse the argument of rising food prices which was deemed to be crucial to the result of the referendum, 256.  
Also Hedges, “The Final Four Years”, 54.
- 13 See e.g. Knudsen, “Ideas, Welfare, and Values”; Bluche, Patel, “Der Europäer als Bauer”.
- 14 Fennell, *Common Agricultural Policy*, 1; for the figure on Britain, see Tracy, *Agriculture in Western Europe*, 229.
- 15 Patel, “Europeanization *a contre-coeur*”.
- 16 Cf. e.g. Knudsen, *Farmers on Welfare*; Ludlow, “The Making of the CAP”.

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- 17 See the arguments in Knudsen, *Farmers on Welfare*.
- 18 Patel, *Europäisierung wider Willen*, 259; Knudsen, “Creating the Common Agricultural Policy”.
- 19 The Mansholt Plan, the Commission’s first attempt at a radical reform in 1968 failed miserably, see Seidel, “Taking Farmers off Welfare”.
- 20 Tracy, *Agriculture in Western Europe*, 41-46.
- 21 *Ibid.*, 153-169.
- 22 Agriculture Act of 1947. 1947 Chapter 48. Available at: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Geo6/10-11/48/introduction/enacted> (accessed 18 January 2019).
- 23 The governments White Paper, *Britain and the European Communities. An Economic Assessment* (London: HMSO, 1970) (Cmnd. 4289, 1970), pt. 28 estimated food prices would increase between 18 and 26 percent from accession to the end of the transition period, thus adding 4-5 percent overall to the cost of living index.
- 24 For these arguments see Kaiser, *Using Europe, Abusing the Europeans*, 140-1; Franklin, *Joining the CAP*, 193.
- 25 Franklin, *Joining the CAP*, xiv; 95.
- 26 *Ibid.*, xviii.
- 27 *Ibid.*, 211-246.
- 28 *Ibid.*, xix. Plumb advocated Britain’s EEC membership and later became a Conservative member of the European Parliament (1979-1999), even serving as its President from 1987 to 1989.
- 29 70/243/ECSC, EEC, Euratom, Council Decision of 21 April 1970 on the replacement of financial contributions from Member States by the Communities' own resources; Regulation (EEC) No 729/70 of the Council of 21 April 1970 on the financing of the common agricultural policy.
- 30 Franklin, *Joining the CAP*, xx. On the Heath-Pompidou summit meeting in 1971 see Moeckli, *European Foreign Policy*, 49-51.
- 31 ‘Statement from the Paris Summit, 19-21 October 1973’, in: *Bulletin of the European Communities*, October 1972, No 10 (Luxembourg, Office for official publications of the European Communities, 1973), 14-26.
- 32 Franklin, *Joining the CAP*, 365-6.
- 33 Schenk, “Britain and the Common Market”, 205.
- 34 See Seidel, “The Challenges of Enlargement” and Seidel, “Contested Fields”.

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- 35 CM (73) 4th Conclusions, Cabinet of 30 January 1973, The National Archives (henceforth TNA), CAB 128/51, pt. 3. Cf. also Wall, *From Rejection to Referendum*, 458.
- 36 Quoted in Wall, *Rejection to Referendum*, 458.
- 37 Minute from John Hunt [cabinet secretary] to R. T. Armstrong [also cabinet and his successor as cabinet secretary], London, 12 April 1973, TNA, PREM 15/1529.
- 38 Heath, *Course of My Life*, 543. Cf. also Aqui, *Britain*, 74.
- 39 Aqui, *Britain*, 76-80.
- 40 Seidel, "Taking Farmers Off Welfare". The 1973 memorandum was entitled Improvement of the Common Agricultural Policy, Historical Archives of the European Commission, Brussels, COM(73) 1850, 31 October 1973.
- 41 For a brief overview of Labour's attitude towards European integration see George, *Britain and European Integration*, 73-82.
- 42 Renegotiation of the Terms of Entry to the European Economic Community. Text of a Statement delivered by the Secretary of State of Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs in the Council of Ministers of the European Communities in Luxembourg on the 1st of April 1974. European Communities No. 8 (1974). TNA CAB 129/175/19 C (74) 19, 1 April 1974.
- 43 TNA PREM 16/412, Eric S Heffer MP to James Callaghan, London, 11 February 1975.
- 44 Benn, *Against the Tide*, 362.
- 45 Ibid., Callaghan to Heffer, London, 24 February 1975.
- 46 See Harold Wilson's outline of the deal *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, [HC Deb cc1456-80, 18 March 1975](#).
- 47 Stocktaking of the Common Agricultural Policy, Bulletin of the European Communities, Supplement No. 2/75, COM (75) 100.
- 48 Migani, 'Development aid'.
- 49 Saunders, *Yes to Europe!*, 289-91.
- 50 On the 1975 referendum see Saunders, *Yes to Europe!* On the World Food Crisis see Gerlach, "Fortress Europe".
- 51 Pimlot, *Wilson*, 440.
- 52 Michael Palliser in: *CCBH Oral History Programme*, 88. See also Peart's intervention in Parliament following the renegotiation: *Hansard Parliamentary Debates* HC Deb vol 889 cc1243-371 (here 1243-51), 9 April 1975.f
- 53 E.g. Benn, *Against the Tide*, 165.
- 54 Minister of Agriculture to Foreign Secretary, The Common Agricultural Price Package for 1975/76, London, 13 February 1975, TNA, PREM 16/412.

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- 55 Note from Callaghan to Peart, 20 February 1975 with handwritten note from Wilson: ‘Yes, this is very good’, TNA, PREM 16/412; cf. also, CC (75) 3rd Conclusions, Cabinet, Conclusions of a Meeting of the Cabinet held at 10 Downing Street on 16 January 1975 at 10.30 am, TNA, CAB 128/53/3. Castle, *The Castle Diaries, 1974-76*, 229-30.
- 56 Crucially, Silkin was also in charge of fisheries. Apart from the CAP, the common fisheries policy (CFP) caused the most protracted conflict between Britain and its Community counterparts. For an introduction see Seidel, “Contested fields”, 328-35.
- 57 Silkin, *Changing Battlefields*, 183 [emphasis added].
- 58 Ibid., 184.
- 59 For the first time since 1973 more British people thought EC membership was a ‘bad thing’ (40%) than a ‘good thing’ (35%), cf. Wall, *Tiger Unleashed*, loc. 3089.
- 60 Silkin, *Changing Battlefields*, 188.
- 61 Ibid., 189.
- 62 Neville-Rolfe agrees that between 1973 and 1979 the British government did not advance reform proposals beyond price freezes to mitigate the effects of the CAP on domestic food prices and the budget and thus the British contribution. Neville-Rolfe, *Politics of Agriculture*, 50-1.
- 63 Due to the monetary turbulences of the 1970s and the resulting exchange rate fluctuations, the Community had to come up with a complex system of Monetary Compensatory Amounts (MCAs) or ‘green money’ to counterbalance these currency fluctuations. The UK had what was called ‘positive MCAs’ to compensate for the weak Sterling rate. Usually MCA rates were adjusted during the annual CAP negotiations. The UK was able to ‘devalue’ the ‘green pound’ which worked as a price rise for UK agriculture, thus benefiting its farmers without having to agree to general price increases in the Commission’s price package.
- 64 Moeckli, *European Foreign Policy*, 305.
- 65 CC (76) 9th Conclusions, Cabinet, Conclusions of a Meeting of the Cabinet held at 10 Downing Street on Friday 11 June 1976 at 10.30am, TNA, CAB 128/59/6.
- 66 Ibid.
- 67 Ibid.
- 68 CP(77)32, Cabinet, Community Agricultural Support Prices 1977-78. Memorandum by the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, London, 21 March 1977, TNA, CAB 129/195/7.
- 69 Denman, *Missed Chances*, 256. Neville-Rolfe, *Politics of Agriculture*, agreed with Denman that Silkin’s resistance to the deal backed by the other eight ministers only won him a

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- minor concession, albeit on the highly emotive issue of the butter price, which he could present as a ‘victory’ at home. The price he deliberately paid was ‘a trail of bruised feelings, involving as they did an undisguised partisan use of the presidential chair, 285.
- 70 Denman, *Missed Chances*, 256 .
- 71 *Ibid.*, 257. On the presidency see also George, *Awkward Partner*, 121-4. Wall records a range of opinions on the presidency but does not cast a final judgement, *Tiger Unleashed*, loc. 2974.
- 72 “Gemeinsamer Markt. Neue Krankheit”, *Der Spiegel*, 29/1977, 11 June 1977.
- 73 CP(77) 82, Cabinet, Developments in the European Communities: Report on the Presidency. Note by the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, London, 18 July 1977, CAB 129/197/12.
- 74 CP(78) 96, Cabinet, Developments in the European Communities January – June 1978. Note by the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, London, 2 October 1978, p. 6, TNA, CAB 129/203/21.
- 75 *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, HC vol 936 cc909-11 (here 909-10), 28 July 1977.
- 76 *The Morning Star*, Benn’s six-point plan to end the evils of the EEC: ‘Change Market from Within’, 2 June 1978; and *Tribune*, The political vision behind the anti-marketeters’ fight with the EEC, 2 June 1978, TNA, MAF 207/200.
- 77 *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, vol 929, cc411-20, 30 March 1977.
- 78 John Silkin, M.P., speaking at the EEC Council of Agricultural Ministers, 29 March 1979, Historical Archives of the European Union, Florence (henceforth HAEU), Fonds Graham Avery (GJLA) 242.
- 79 For this point see also Patel, “Europeanization *a contre-coeur*”, p. 157. Agricultural Commissioner Finn Olav Gundelach thought Silkin was one of the least likeable Council members. Jenkins, *European Diary*, 334.
- 80 Avery to Mr Tickell, President, Council of Ministers (Agriculture) 23/24 January (1978), Commission meeting 25 January, 25 January 1978, HAEU, GJLA 241 (6); *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, vol 965 cc1165-80, 3 April 1979.
- 81 Record of conversation between the Prime Minister and the French Minister of Agriculture at 5.15 P.M. on Thursday 5 July at 10 Downing Street, 6 July 1973, TNA, PREM 15/1561.
- 82 Cf. e.g. W B McCleary, Formulating agricultural policy in the Federal Republic, January 1976, TNA FCO 30/3349; Silkin to Owen, German attitude to the CAP and Fisheries, London, 5 May 1978, TNA, PREM 16/1629.
- 83 W B McCleary, Formulating agricultural policy in the Federal Republic, January 1976, TNA FCO 30/3349.



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- 84 Patel, "Europeanization *a contre-coeur*", 158. See also Jenkins, *European Diary*, 331 for a discussion Jenkins had with Schmidt who told him he could not accept a reduction in farm incomes and Ludlow, *Roy Jenkins*, 188.
- 85 On this issue see the forthcoming book by Haeussler, *Helmut Schmidt and British-German Relations*.
- 86 Note Brian Cartledge to Richard Packer, 12 July 1978, TNA, PREM 16/1629.
- 87 Extract from the note of a discussion held in Chancellor Schmidt's room in the Federal Chancellery, Bonn on Wednesday 18 October 1978, TNA, PREM 16/2041.
- 88 Patel, "Europeanization *a contre-coeur*", 154-5.
- 89 T.P. Lankester to H. Schulmann, Common Agricultural Policy, 14 November 1978, TNA, PREM 16/2041.
- 90 Handwritten notes by Callaghan on N.L.W. to Prime Minister, 27 October 1978, TNA, PREM 16/2041.
- 91 Note John Hunt to Prime Minister, 2 November 1978, TNA, PREM 16/2041.
- 92 Wall, *Tiger Unleashed*, e.g. locs. 3695; 3862. On the EMS see Murlon-Druol, *A Europe Made of Money*.
- 93 'Nevertheless we need to be careful not to give the Germans an excuse for thinking that we are not really interested in CAP reform but only want a budget corrective mechanism.' Robert Armstrong to Mr Alexander, Anglo-German Contacts, 10 March 1981, TNA, PREM 19/455; cf. also *ibid*, Michael Franklin to Robert Armstrong, 5 March 1981.
- 94 E.g. A J C Edwards, Note of part of a meeting between the Chancellor of the Exchequer and Dr Schulmann at 11 Downing Street on Monday, 11 May 1981 at 2.45pm, 12 May 1981, TNA, T 444/25.
- 95 Anglo-German Consultations, 11-12 May 1981. Steering Brief on the European Community. Brief by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 30 April 1981, TNA, T 444/25.
- 96 *The Times*, 13 May 1981, 'Schmidt backs Thatcher on fairer deal in Europe'; *The Times*, 'Schmidt seeks ceiling on EEC budget contribution', 17 June 1981.
- 97 Campbell, *Margaret Thatcher*, 303-4.
- 98 F.K. Jones to Nigel Wicks, 28 February 1978, TNA, PREM 16/2036.
- 99 F.K. Jones to Nigel Wicks, 3 March 1978, TNA, PREM 16/2036.
- 100 Eg. Note, Tactics for reducing the UK's net contribution to the Community budget. Note by officials, undated [November 1978], TNA, PREM 16/2041.
- 101 Eg. Note, Tactics for reducing the UK's net contribution to the Community budget. Note by officials, undated [November 1978], TNA, PREM 16/2041; cf. also Wall, *Unleashing the Tiger*, loc. 3942-3.

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- 102 Note of a conversation between the Prime Minister and Sir John Hunt at 10 Downing Street on 28 February 1979 at 1545, TNA, PREM 16/2036.
- 103 One such article, written by two eurosceptic economists, hails the deficiency payments system as superior without discussing its problems, while the CAP is condemned outright. Burkitt, Baimbridge, “Performance of British Agriculture”.
- 104 Young, *Britain and European Unity*, 112.
- 105 Kaiser, *Using Europe, Abusing the Europeans*, 210.
- 106 E.g. Note Edward J G Smith (MAFF) to L Pliatzky (Treasury), 10 January 1973, TNA, T224/2873.
- 107 Wall, *Tiger Unleashed*, loc. 3370.
- 108 *Ibid.*, loc. 1766.

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