

PRESS COMMUNIQUE

Proposed by trade unionists working in the British cane sugar industry, the four day Seminar on "The Challenge to Cane Sugar in the 1980's", which was opened by the Prime Minister of Fiji at the Commonwealth Institute on 26th April, brought together representatives from Britain and from the four corners of the cane sugar industry - governments, industrial management, trade unions, and cane farmers - from 10 African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries which supply cane sugar to the EEC - the bulk of which comes to the United Kingdom. The participating countries were Barbados, Belize, Fiji, Guyana, Jamaica, Mauritius, St. Kitts, Swaziland, Trinidad and Tobago and Zimbabwe.

This Seminar has been a unique occasion in that for the first time it allowed for discussion on a wide range of problems affecting the whole industry.

Major consideration was given to the formidable economic, social and technical problems affecting each of the ACP cane sugar producing countries where sugar plays a vital part in employment and foreign exchange earnings. Another major consideration was the important number of jobs it provides in British sugar refineries in London and at Greenock.

The Seminar examined important issues affecting the relationship of this group of countries with the European Community in implementing the various articles of the Sugar Protocol of the Lomé Convention.

The Seminar discussed the world sugar scene on the eve of the International Sugar Conference which opens in Geneva on Monday 2nd May.

The Seminar received separate briefings on the role of the British voluntary organisations on behalf of the developing countries, the British beet sugar industry, cane sugar refining in Britain, and the role of the ACP representatives in Brussels. It ended with discussion of the work of the Group of ACP sugar High Commissioners in London, the role of the trade unions in cane sugar in Britain, and of competition and marketing of cane sugar.

The Seminar was also fortunate to hear the comments of representatives of some of the major industrial users of cane sugar in Britain which are anxious to maintain traditional ACP sugar sales to the United Kingdom as one of their principal sources of supply.

Designed as an opportunity for a full and frank exchange of views on these topics, the Seminar particularly stressed the importance of :-

1. maintaining physical access to the European Community, above all to Britain, for the 1.3 million tonnes of cane sugar annually, under the Sugar Protocol of the Lomé Convention, and ensuring its sale and consumption;
2. ensuring that full and continuing effect is given to the guarantees in the Sugar Protocol of the Lomé Convention and to the undertakings given by successive British Governments;
3. maintaining and enhancing cooperation between all sections of the ACP cane sugar producing countries and the refining industry in Britain in the face of the severe problems which beset the industry as a whole;
4. ensuring meaningful negotiation of equitable prices for ACP sugar in the European Community;
5. securing a workable International Sugar Agreement with the fullest participation of the EEC, which will guarantee fair arrangements for the sale of ACP cane sugar in the world market.

The seminar was pleased to hear that the beet sugar producers accept the traditional place in the British market for ACP sugar and wish to see this maintained. The Seminar recognised the need for cooperation by the two industries in facing the problems created by the expansion of the production and sale of artificial and other sweeteners, and the decline in sugar consumption. The Seminar considered that much of the current criticisms of sugar in nutritional and dietary fields is based on insufficient research.

Finally, the Seminar expressed the hope that ongoing consultation of the kind which has proved so fruitful during these four days will be arranged, and that the Organising Committee of the Seminar should examine the best way of doing this.