

**It's not just about Europe, sugar. Contesting global economic relations, 1964-1974**

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On the 3rd of December 1968, the Dutch minister of Economic Affairs Leo de Block was met by an awkward-looking Saint Nicholas in The Hague. The holy man presented the administrator with a large heart made out of cane sugar. Members of Parliament received – less flamboyant, but all the more practical – small bags of cane sugar. These gifts were part of a larger manifestation through which activists called attention for the cane sugar campaign, which had started two months earlier.<sup>1</sup> The stated goal of the campaign was to render visible the 'structure of world trade disadvantageous to developing countries' through the use of sugar as a telling concrete example.<sup>2</sup>

Why should we be interested in the pranks of a group of Dutch activists with an appetite for cane sugar? First of all, the cane sugar campaign was one of the earliest instances of a fair trade initiative in Europe. Its focus on changing the structure of international trade was unparalleled by other initiatives which are now cited as early appearances of the fair trade movement, such as the arts and crafts-shops in the United States and the Oxfam campaigns in Great Britain.<sup>3</sup> The cane sugar campaign was also the immediate precursor to the founding of so-called world shops, in which several products produced in developing countries could be purchased in order to support those countries both practically and symbolically. This model of action would become a huge success within the Netherlands and would be fruitfully exported to cities around the world during the 1970s.

The cane sugar campaign is also an interesting case, because it demonstrates how citizens positioned themselves within a postcolonial world. It was a direct reaction to the stalling of the negotiations within the framework of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), which were instigated in 1964 on behalf of the new postcolonial states and their allies at the United Nations. The campaign constituted an early reaction by citizens to the process of European economic integration, which was at least partly driven by the need to come to terms with a postcolonial world order.<sup>4</sup> The Common Agricultural Policy, which was a cornerstone of the European Economic Community (EEC), contributed to the stalling of the UNCTAD-negotiations during the spring of 1968 by encouraging the production of sugar within the EEC and fixing its price, by inserting an additional negotiating level, binding the European participants at the UNCTAD-conferences, and by regulating the relations of EEC-countries with former colonies of these countries separately from the relations to other sugar producing countries.

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<sup>1</sup> Koninklijke Bibliotheek, ANP Radiobulletins Digitaal 1937-1984: ANP Radiobulletin 03-12-1968, berichtnummer 71.

<sup>2</sup> Perscommuniqué Rietsuikeractie 1968. Privéarchief Paul van Tongeren. All translations from Dutch by the autor.

<sup>3</sup> Kathryn Wheeler, *Fair Trade and the Citizen-Consumer: Shopping for Justice?* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 35–42.

<sup>4</sup> Giuliano Garavini, *After Empires: European Integration, Decolonization, and the Challenge from the Global South, 1957-1985* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

Finally, the cane sugar campaign is a telling case precisely because of its failure. Third World-activists attempted to internationalise the Dutch campaign at the beginning of the 1970s, but did not manage to mobilise notable support and media attention to these attempts. This failure is all the more notable, because all the ingredients for a successful internationalisation seemed to be in place: the sugar trade was a distinctly international phenomenon. Sugar was in fact one of the few commodities for which a functioning international trade framework was in place at the end of the 1960s. The fact that the trade was regulated both at an international and at a European level would guarantee activists a common framework.

Europe has not figured prominently in the histories of social activism in the 1960s and 1970s. Neither has it received much attention in the analyses of fair trade activism. The eye-catching social movements of the 1960s and 1970s addressed issues which were only distantly related to concurrent main areas of European integration. Accounts of the history of fair trade have focused on its global pretensions and their local and sometimes national translations.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, post-war European integration had rendered Europe a relevant frame of reference for civil society actors by the 1960s. This relevance is clearly visible in the history of trade unions.<sup>6</sup> Scholarship on the history of the consumer movement has also illustrated the importance of Europe for relatively new forms of social action.<sup>7</sup> 'If Europe is becoming a polity (...), sooner or later ordinary citizens will turn their claims and their forms of contentious politics beyond their borders and toward this new level of governance', Douglas Imig and Sidney Tarrow have remarked of the effect of European integration on social movements.<sup>8</sup> Thus, a movement taking aim at the structures of world trade during the 1960s and 1970s Europe has to be expected to not just take Europe as a relevant frame of reference, but also develop activities and organizations on that level. Such Europeanisation of fair trade activism proved much more difficult than could have been expected.

Why then did the attempts to spread the campaign across the Dutch borders fail? The answer to this question can be found in a more differentiated view of 'globalisation' and 'Europeanisation' as spatial frameworks for social action: the rise of frameworks for the governance of global and European trade did not simply rise as separate, new frames of reference. On the contrary, they forced citizens to find new balances between local and translocal spaces.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, the new relevance of the

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<sup>5</sup> Michael Barratt Brown, *Fair Trade. Reform and Realities in the International Trading System* (London: Zed Books, 1993); Daniel Jaffee, *Brewing Justice: Fair Trade Coffee, Sustainability, and Survival* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007); Frans van der Hoff and Nico Roozen, *Fair Trade: Het Verhaal Achter Max Havelaar-Koffie, Oké-Bananen En Kuyichi-Jeans* (Amsterdam: Van Genneep, 2001); Harald Homann and Verena Ott, "Das Europa Der Konsumenten: Konsumkultur, Konsumentenmoral Und Kulturkritik Um 1900 Und 2000," *Themenportal Europäische Geschichte*, 2013, <http://www.europa.clio-online.de/2013/Article=575>; Konrad Kuhn, "'Das Produkt Als Aufhänger Für Information Und Schulungsarbeit': Die Entwicklungspolitische Konsumentenaktion 'Jute Statt Plastic', 1976-1979," *Traverse* 12, no. 3 (2005): 27–39; Konrad Kuhn, "'Entwicklung Heisst Befreiung'. Strategien Und Protestformen Der Schweizerischen Dritte-Welt-Bewegung Am Symposium Der Solidarität 1981," *Mitteilungsblatt Des Instituts Für Soziale Bewegungen* 38 (2007): 77–95.

<sup>6</sup> Patrick Pasture, *Christian Trade Unionism in Europe since 1968. Tensions between Identity and Practice* (Aldershot: Brookfield, 1994); Jelle Visser, 'Learning to play: The Europeanisation of trade unions' in: Patrick Pasture and Johan Verberckmoes, *Working-class internationalism and the appeal of national identity. Historical debates and current perspectives on Western Europe* (Oxford: Berg, 1998) 231-257.

<sup>7</sup> Alasdair R. Young, "European Consumer Groups. Multiple Levels of Governance and Multiple Logics of Collective Action," in *Collective Action in the European Union. Interests and the New Politics of Associability*, ed. Justin Greenwood and Mark Aspinwall (London: Routledge, 1998), 149–75; Matthew Hilton, *Prosperity for All: Consumer Activism in an Era of Globalization* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009).

<sup>8</sup> Douglas R. Imig and Sidney G. Tarrow, *Contentious Europeans: Protest and Politics in an Emerging Polity* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2001), 7.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Angelika Eppele, "Lokalität und die Dimensionen des Globalen. Eine Frage der Relationen," *Historische Anthropologie* 21, no. 1 (2013): 4–25; Erik Swyngedouw, "Neither global nor local. 'Glocalization' and the

global and European frameworks provided by global trade regulation and European economic integration did not automatically provide activists with a common frame of reference. The actions of the citizens affected by the shifting balances between the local, the national, the European and the global level did not just make European and global institutions more visible in the daily lives of the citizens affected. Activities such as the cane sugar campaign also show how these frameworks at once functioned as integrating and disintegrating factors among European citizens.

It is in this ambivalence of Europeanisation that the answer to the failure to 'export' the cane sugar campaign can be found. An analysis of the history of the cane sugar campaign from the first United Nations Conference on Trade and Development in 1964 to the debates about dissolving the campaign in 1974 demonstrates that Europeanization was a fundamental part of establishing the local, national and transnational relations of European citizens, rather than a mere reaction to globalization.

### *Bringing global trade home*

The impulse to strife for a reform of the structure of global economic structures came from what was by the 1960s being called the 'Third World'. Taking up a pre-war traditions of anticolonial struggle and pan-Africanism, the leaders of countries from Asia, Africa and Latin-America discussed their position in a world order now dominated by the Cold War.<sup>10</sup> Instead of a divide between the East and the West, these countries proposed to view global relations in terms of a divide between the North and the South.<sup>11</sup> Assuming their economic dependence on industrialised nations to be one of the crucial factors hindering their own development, these countries channelled their joint political weight into international politics. As a result of decolonization in the 1950s and 1960s, the states willing to associate with this movement increased rapidly. During the 1960s, they could muster a majority of votes at the United Nations.<sup>12</sup> Aided by this majority, they adopted a UN-resolution to set up the UNCTAD-conference for 1964, insisting in a following resolution that this conference should take steps in the direction of self-sustaining growth for developing countries.<sup>13</sup> Raúl Prebisch, the Argentinian economist who became the face of these attempts at economic reform, restated the expectations of the developing countries more bluntly at the opening of the 1964 UNCTAD-conference in Geneva: 'It's either reform, or your necks'.<sup>14</sup>

The call to provide developing countries with a fair chance within the postcolonial global economic structures resonated with several European groups, which had been devoting their attention to issues such as emergency relief, the problems of development, transnational solidarity, and notions of global citizenship. The struggles for emancipation by Third World countries inspired them and

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politics of scale" *Spaces of Globalization: Reasserting the Power of the Local*, Perspectives on Economic Change (New York: Guilford Press, 1997), 137–164.

<sup>10</sup> Vijay Prashad, *The Darker Nations. A People's History of the Third World*, A New Press People's History (New York: New Press, 2007), 3–50.

<sup>11</sup> Mark Berger, "After the Third World? History, Destiny and the Fate of Third Worldism," *Third World Quarterly* 25, no. 1 (2004): 9–39.

<sup>12</sup> Prashad, *Darker Nations*, 102–103; Ian Taylor and Karen Smith, *United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)* (London: Routledge, 2007), 6–9.

<sup>13</sup> Karl P. Sauvant, *The Group of 77. Evolution, structure, organization* (New York: Oceana Publications 1981) 1; Mourad Ahmia ed., *The collected documents of the Group of 77. Volume IV: Environment and sustainable development* (Oxford 2012), 5-7.

<sup>14</sup> Dick Scherpenzeel, *Trieste Balans: Beschouwingen over Ontwikkelingssamenwerking, Afrika En de Derde Wereld, 1965-1973* (Den Haag, 1976), 25.

forged new connections between different radical groups throughout Europe.<sup>15</sup> Their frustration about the lack of results achieved through intergovernmental negotiations was the immediate cause for the attempts to bring about fair trade for developing countries through selling cane sugar. Neither the UNCTAD-conferences of 1964 and 1968, nor the more limited attempts to negotiate about single commodities, brought about manifest improvement. Whilst Western observers had at first assumed the cumbersome negotiations were the result of the lack of interest for the fate of the developing countries<sup>16</sup>, many of them became convinced that Western governments were in fact not willing to do anything for poorer countries which would hurt their own immediate interests.<sup>17</sup> This unwillingness to many was epitomised by the refusal of EEC-member states to consider their common trade policies in the light of the interests of developing countries. Positioning themselves as citizens in a postcolonial world thus necessitated relating to the process of Europeanisation.

One strategy to which activists from the nascent Third World movement turned was to bring the issue home to the general public.<sup>18</sup> 'The political unwillingness of the rich countries has been exposed', the activist Piet Reckman concluded. 'Isolated actions to achieve a little increase in the budget for development aid are no longer meaningful', he continued. 'After New Delhi, we have to find a completely new strategy. They in the south. We in the north.'<sup>19</sup> In the north, this new strategy would have to aim at changing public opinion by targeting not just politicians and administrators, but individual consumers as well. 'It's about sugar and cacao. Including therefore any consumer of these commodities of world trade.' By demanding to buy the products which were kept from the European markets by import tariffs and subsidies for European products, regular consumers would be able to make a difference. 'At least by taking at face value what we have always been told: "The customer is king"', Reckman exhorted. 'Well then, the customer king from now on demands cane sugar from his grocer.'<sup>20</sup>

A group of Amsterdam students ambitiously took up these ideas brought forward by Reckman and others. Sugar had been one of the commodities brought forward time and again as an example of colonial exploitation and the following postcolonial trade inequality.<sup>21</sup> In the 1960s, it was also a product which could, when imported from developing countries, make a real difference to their economic situation.<sup>22</sup> Their first attempts to sell cane sugar among students were well-received, emboldening them to form a committee which would plan a large-scale campaign starting in the fall of 1968. After finding a wholesaler to provide them with the required amounts of cane sugar, gathering support from prominent figures such as the economists Jan Tinbergen and Gunnar Myrdal,

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<sup>15</sup> Robert Gildea, James Mark, and Niek Pas, "European Radicals and the 'Third World': Imagined Solidarities and Radical Networks, 1958–73," *Cultural and Social History* 8, no. 4 (December 1, 2011): 449–71.

<sup>16</sup> Henk van Randwijk, "Twee Redevoeringen, Die Op de Wereldhandelsconferentie Niet Werden Uitgesproken," *Maatstaf* 12, no. 3 (1964): 212–32.

<sup>17</sup> Dick Scherpenzeel, 'Praten zonder een besluit te nemen' in: idem, *Trieste balans*, 67-72, citaat 72 [oorspronkelijk afgedrukt in de *Groene Amsterdammer* op 6-4-1968].

<sup>18</sup> 'Radioverslag van onze speciale correspondent D. Scherpenzeel 189-3-68', *Informatie-bulletin UNCTAD-2* (1968) 22.

<sup>19</sup> Piet Reckman, *Je geld of je leven: Naar een nieuwe wereldhandel en-wandel* (Baarn: Bosch & Keuning, In den Toren, 1968), 101.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 50, 53.

<sup>21</sup> Ulbe-Tjeerd Bosma, *The Sugar Plantation in India and Indonesia: Industrial Production, 1770-2010*, Studies in Comparative World History (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Sidney W. Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (New York: Viking, 1985).

<sup>22</sup> H. M. de Lange, *Rijke En Arme Landen: Een Verantwoordelijke Maatschappij in Mondiaal Perspectief*, Anatomie van de Toekomst (Baarn: Wereldvenster, 1967), 68–70.

and devising promotional material, the committee was all set by the end of the summer.<sup>23</sup> On the 30<sup>th</sup> of September the campaign officially commenced. Local action groups were provided with several ways to draw the attention of the public to the issue of cane sugar, and therewith to the inequalities of world trade. 'The aim is to bring about a change of mentality, which will force the government, facing a new attitude among its citizens, to choose the side of the poor countries in international negotiations', the campaign brochure stated.<sup>24</sup>

The crucial role of the EEC was acknowledged from the start by these activists. The brochure which informed the public about the issue took clear aim at Europe right from the start: 'They receive 15 cents per kilo of sugar, we pay 60 cents per kilo of sugar on export subsidies', it stated. 'The EEC-countries should admit the cane sugar producing countries to their markets', the authors of the brochure continued.<sup>25</sup> The well-documented pages considered the role of the EEC extensively. The attitude of the EEC-members during the UNCTAD-negotiations on sugar had been 'bewildering' according to the activists. They had demanded a special position for the EEC regarding production subsidies and import tariffs. Moreover, the subsidizing policy and the protectionism pursued by the Community encouraged overproduction of European sugar producers, even as producers in developing countries were depending on their sugar exports to provide them with a dire-needed income. The EEC therefore acted 'strongly inward-looking, selfish and short-sighted', the authors concluded. In their view, the Dutch government carried part of the blame, at once claiming to want to help developing countries whilst hiding behind its membership of the EEC during crucial negotiations.<sup>26</sup>

The cane sugar campaign thus aimed to reconfigure the relationship between local and translocal spaces. Rather than focussing on one particular dimension, the inequalities of the world trading system which were discussed at the level of UNCTAD and the EEC were related to the half-hearted approach of the Dutch government and finally to individual Dutch citizens, who could purportedly make a difference by demanding cane sugar at their local grocer.

However, this interpretation was contested from several directions. In the first place, Dutch sugar producers countered the brochure published by the campaign committee with a brochure of their own. This publication, of which 50.000 were sold and another 120.000 distributed for free<sup>27</sup>, regarded the problem of inequality in the global sugar trade as a problem beyond the reach of Dutch consumers. Sugar prices on the world market were extremely volatile and on average too low to make a profit for producers, due to the dumping of large amounts of subsidized produce. Under those circumstances, the EEC-policy to stabilize prices within the Community did not deserve to be criticized. What was needed according to the Dutch sugar industry, was a more effective system of global regulations, including a fund to buy up surplus production and to facilitate modernize sugar production and diversification in developing countries.<sup>28</sup>

The participants in a radio debate on the campaign were more nuanced in their views of its limitations. Notably, even Henk Manders, the spokesman for the Dutch beet sugar producers, noted that his clients disapproved of the existing EEC-policy and its effects on developing countries. However, could Dutch citizens make a difference for sugar producers in these countries? Eduard van

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<sup>23</sup> 'Werkgroep Rietsuikeractie 1968 – notulen van 8 augustus en agenda voor 15 augustus'. Archief Sjaloom, Regionaal Historisch Centrum Zuid Oost Utrecht (RHCZOU), bestand 117.

<sup>24</sup> Eduard van Hengel, *Suikerraffinement: Rietsuikeractie 1968*, Kosmoschrift 9 (Amsterdam, 1968) back matter.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. front matter.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Piet Reckman, *Riet. Het Verhaal van de Suiker* (Baarn, 1969).

<sup>28</sup> J. J. Eshuis, F. C. de Jong, and G. J. de Gilde, *Suiker En de Ontwikkelingslanden: Bietsuiker-Productie Een Gezonde Zaak* (Rotterdam: Ned. Suikerindustrie, 1968), 27–31.

Hengel, one of the campaign's initiators, argued that by participating, citizens could pressure their own government to take action on the matter. Widespread support for the campaign would provide Dutch officials with the backing needed to take a firm position during international negotiations. Manders replied that the action could very well have adverse effects, because the public would mistake the symbolic nature of the campaign with an attempt to provide immediate aid to sugar producers in developing countries. This was misleading, because most of these countries imported sugar themselves. Moreover, the sugar sold by the Dutch campaign was, Manders insinuated, probably produced in South Africa, which was neither considered a developing country, nor very popular for its politics.<sup>29</sup> His second concern pertained to the marginality of the campaign. Only a very small part of the world trade in sugar was conducted through the world market. A campaign which would have little practical effect and simplified its subject matter beyond the pale would most likely leave participants disillusioned and unwilling to contribute to future attempts to improve the situation of developing countries.<sup>30</sup>

The labour politician Henk Vredeling was more positive. He approved of the way in which the campaign encouraged citizens to take action themselves. This might result in more awareness about the inequalities of world trade. Still, he did not expect these local activities to bring about change in the short turn, because he deemed the possibilities of Dutch officials who were addressed minute. The Dutch minister of Agriculture had been among the most critical of the EEC agrarian policies, but had until then been unsuccessful in his attempts to improve it, he noted. Therefore, Vredeling suggested that the campaign could above all be criticized for failing to approach a European issue on a European scale: the campaign should be internationalized to have a chance of being effective.<sup>31</sup>

#### *Towards a European campaign*

The proliferation of the cane sugar campaign across European countries was actively attempted by the Dutch activists from early on. In January 1969, the campaign's secretariat drafted an English letter which summarized the goals, the concept and the practical opportunities to participate in the campaign. This first letter was sent to around a thousand international relations of the several organisations which participated in the Dutch campaign.<sup>32</sup> From then on, such letters were regularly updated and sent out across Europe. By the end of 1970, the activists proudly presented the results of their attempts in the Netherlands to those interested abroad. They claimed that the campaign had received a lot of attention both nationally and abroad. The key publication issued by the activists had sold 40.000 copies in Dutch and German, and the consumption of cane sugar had doubled since 1968. On the other hand, the political pressure exerted by the campaign had only been 'moderately successful'. Although the Dutch Parliament had expressed sympathies for its goals, it had not

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<sup>29</sup> This insinuation that cane sugar sold in the Netherlands was imported from South Africa was often echoed by those sceptical of the campaign. In fact, the cane sugar imported for consumption stemmed for the largest part from Surinam, whilst a small amount came from Cuba. Cf. Paul van Tongeren, 'Rietsuikeractie slaat ook in andere landen aan', *Groene Amsterdammer* 2-1-1971, 4.

<sup>30</sup> 'Tekst van het programma "zin en tegenzin" op zondagavond 13 oktober 1968. Onderwerp: rietsuikeractie'. Archief Sjaloom, RHCZOU, T 00248, bestand 117.

<sup>31</sup> 'Tekst van het programma "zin en tegenzin" op zondagavond 13 oktober 1968. Onderwerp: rietsuikeractie'. Archief Sjaloom, RHCZOU, T 00248, bestand 117.

<sup>32</sup> 'Schrijven over buitenlandse contacten', januari 1969 door Paul van Tongeren. Archief Sjaloom, RHCZOU: T 00248, bestand 117.

undertaken any concrete actions. European Parliament and the EEC Commission had considered the issue as well, without consequence.<sup>33</sup>

Seeing as though political pressure had not produced satisfying results, the Dutch campaigners deemed internationalisation essential: 'Changes in the EEC sugar policy are unthinkable unless there is political pressure in the other member countries as well', they urged those who received their letters. By then, the coordinating committee estimated around 2000 international contacts had received information about the campaign. The attempts to export the initiative across the Dutch border had sorted some effect. For example, in 1969, the World Council of Churches in cooperation with the oecumenical Committee on Society, Development and Peace recommended the initiative as an example of how churches could become involved in action for economic justice.<sup>34</sup> In 1970, the campaign had been taken up in Great Britain, whilst relations in Belgium, France, Italy, Germany and Denmark were purportedly also considering participation.<sup>35</sup>

The 'Working-Congress of Action-Groups on International Development', which was held in Egmond aan Zee at the beginning of April 1970, saw a more direct attempt at internationalisation. The conference brought together some eighty activists from all over the world, though mainly from Western Europe. Its stated aim was to bring about 'internationalised development action'. The keynote address was delivered by the well-known Latin-American trade union leader Emilio Maspéro, who stressed the need for action against international capitalism by activists in the 'rich countries', where the head of the capitalist serpent was to be found.<sup>36</sup> Amidst debates about several aspects of development action such as education and political pressure, liberation movements and strategies for development, the viability of internationalising the cane sugar campaign was discussed in a section on consumer action.

As the campaign was discussed with an audience including delegates from both European and developing countries, several complicating factors were identified. First, the appalling conditions of workers procuring sugar cane were pointed out, just as the fact that most of the production was controlled by European firms. The campaign would thus have to include attempts to pressure these firms in order to improve the working conditions in the sugar cane industry. Secondly, if the production of cane sugar was indeed controlled by Western firms, an increase in profits on cane sugar would not benefit the people of developing countries. A third concern brought forward was that if the production of sugar in Europe would not be decreased, substituting the European consumption of beet sugar for cane sugar would lead to a dumping of the European sugar surplus on the international market, resulting in lower prices for cane sugar as well. Therefore, the campaign would have to aim at reducing the production of sugar in Europe in order to achieve its aims. Fourth, it was objected that the campaign would strengthen the economic ties between unequal partners. The dependency of the weaker partners in this relationship had been exposed during earlier economic crises, during which their products and services had been less sought after. In other words, development action should aim to increase the independence of developing countries, not their dependence on rich countries.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> 'Cane sugar campaign in the Netherlands', December 1970. Privéarchief Paul van Tongeren.

<sup>34</sup> 'Rietsuiker en de wereldraad', *Sjaloom: Maandblad* 6 (1969) 6, 7.

<sup>35</sup> 'Cane sugar campaign in the Netherlands', December 1970. Privéarchief Paul van Tongeren.

<sup>36</sup> Henk Biersteker and Huub Coppens, *Towards internationalised development action. Report of the international working-congress of action-groups on international development* (The Hague: Novib, [1970]) 68.

<sup>37</sup> Henk Biersteker and Huub Coppens, *Towards internationalised development action. Report of the international working-congress of action-groups on international development* (The Hague: Novib, [1970]) 87-89.

Despite this critical appreciation of the campaign, the meeting ended by discussing the concrete possibilities for its internationalisation. First of all, the participants agreed to exchange information relevant to the campaign. Secondly, they agreed to pursue actions to pressure the EEC-members to sign the International Sugar Agreement, which they had not done up till then due to the incongruity between the aims of the international deliberations and the EEC-policy on sugar production. Third, the applications of four new members to the EEC were deemed an issue deserving joint action in order to prevent these countries from gaining admission 'at the expense of underdeveloped countries'. Possibly, the international coordination of the campaign could be entrusted to a new Third World Center, which was to be set up in Geneva with the help of the World Student Christian Federation.<sup>38</sup> In the end, the participants both agreed on the need to find an institution capable of coordinating international activities, and on the desirability to focus on sugar as a first topic of joint consumer actions.<sup>39</sup>

Although a European secretariat for a large-scale campaign never materialised, the attempts at spreading the campaign across Europe met with some success. In November, British activists from the World Development Movement presented Prime Minister Edward Heath with a heart of cane sugar. With this gift, they wanted to call attention to the fate of the sugar producers within the British Commonwealth. Due to England's planned accession to the EEC, the cane sugar imports to England from Commonwealth countries such as Barbados, Jamaica, Fiji and Mauritius were threatened to be substituted by the sugar surplus produced within the EEC.<sup>40</sup> At the same time, local groups distributed leaflets and over 200.000 packets of cane sugar among the public, held sugar tasting competitions, and addressed their Members of Parliament on the subject.<sup>41</sup>

The protest against the effects of gaining admission to the EEC for sugar cane farmers demonstrate how the opposition against joining the EEC forged an unstable amalgam of – among others – conservative nationalists, Commonwealth business interests, trade unionists concerned about job security in Britain and Third World activists pragmatically trying to salvage the privileges of former British colonies.<sup>42</sup> This coalition was especially uneasy for the latter activists, who found themselves cooperating with business representatives they would usually oppose. According to Clifford Longley of *The Times*, the World Development Movement was quietly supported by the Commonwealth Sugar Exporters' bureau and its powerful director John Southgate.<sup>43</sup> The paradoxical situation by which Third World activists thus chose the side of the sugar industry, trying to uphold a system of preferences based on colonial ties lead to bitter controversies within the movement.<sup>44</sup>

The protests in British cities thus were considerably different from the cane sugar campaign in the Netherlands. Although they focussed on the same product and took aim at the role of the EEC as well, they above all aimed at securing the interests of Commonwealth countries. Whilst Dutch

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<sup>38</sup> At that time, the WSCF was ridden by tensions following attempts of radical members to set the organisation on a more politically radical course. Setting up a Europe/Africa study group was among the initiatives aiming to aide this attempt. Ironically, the African members of the orgnaisation rejected the initiative. Risto Lehtonen, *Story of a Storm: The Ecumenical Student Movement in the Turmoil of Revolution, 1968 to 1973* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 121–127.

<sup>39</sup> Henk Biersteker and Huub Coppens, *Towards internationalised development action. Report of the international working-congress of action-groups on international development* (The Hague: Novib, [1970]) 90, 105-106.

<sup>40</sup> Paul van Tongeren, 'Rietsuikeractie slaat ook in andere landen aan', *Groene Amsterdammer*, 2-1-1971, 4.

<sup>41</sup> Clifford Longley, 'How the cane sugar lobby is preparing for battle', *The Times*, 15-2-1971, 12.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. 'Marching with the sugar workers', *The Times*, 19-10-1973, 18.

<sup>43</sup> Clifford Longley, 'How the cane sugar lobby is preparing for battle', *The Times*, 15-2-1971, 12.

<sup>44</sup> Henk Biersteker and Huub Coppens, *Towards internationalised development action. Report of the international working-congress of action-groups on international development* (The Hague: Novib, [1970]) 93.

activists hoped to achieve a worldwide restructuring in the production of sugar – shifting the weight from beet to cane sugar production and from Europe to developing countries – their fellow campaigners in Britain aimed at maintaining the preferences for members of the Commonwealth. Commenting on the dissimilarities visible in these related protests, one author concluded that ‘the illusion that the EEC contributes anything to unifying Europe, let alone the world, is already very old and very worn down.’<sup>45</sup> Nevertheless, activists in the Netherlands supported the initiative by sending a letter to the Dutch prime minister, urging him to consider the position of developing countries within the framework of the talks about the admission of new countries to the EEC.<sup>46</sup>

Not much pressure was needed, however, to persuade the British government to place special emphasis on the future of the Commonwealth sugar production within the EEC. Next to New Zealand dairy products, sugar was a crucial issue for government negotiators.<sup>47</sup> To the dismay of many cane sugar activists, the Commonwealth countries accepted the result of these negotiations, thus drawing off much of the momentum of their campaign.<sup>48</sup> The British cane sugar campaign thus was both successful and largely redundant regarding the issue of the EEC-negotiations. Even though the interests of Commonwealth sugar producers were a vital interest in the negotiations, leading to a substantial commitment by the British government to import cane sugar in the years following its admission to the EEC, Europe remained a prime culprit in the protesting activities of the World Development Movement. A nationwide advertisement in 1972 called on the public to ‘Help turn Europe inside out’, because it – among other things – denied free entry to cane sugar to developing countries. Europe was ‘keeping them poor’ by its trade policies, whilst the British government neglected the interests of the poorer members of the Commonwealth.<sup>49</sup>

The coalition with those critical of British EEC-membership and the World Development Movement could therefore persist beyond the process of negotiations. The issue of cane sugar remained valuable to the movement both as a concrete bond between their campaign and the workers in the sugar industry, and as a highly visible example of the inequality of international trade. Moreover, it was relatively easy to find support, because the interests of British workers and those in developing countries could at least rhetorically be united, whilst a foreign ‘Europe’ could be presented as the main problem. In 1973, members of the movement joined workers of the cane sugar refining company Tate & Lyle in a march of about 2000 people to protest the fate of cane sugar in Britain after its receiving EEC-membership. The protesters united behind slogans like ‘keep the cane’ and ‘beat the beet’. Whilst the workers were primarily concerned with their own job security in an industrial branch which had come under increased pressure by Common Market regulations, World Development Movement-activists stressed the needs of workers in developing countries, who also depended on Britain importing sugar cane.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> ‘Rietsuiker – Engeland’, *Sjaloom: Maandblad* 8 (1971) 1, 7.

<sup>46</sup> ‘Engeland noord-zuid’, *Sjaloom: Maandblad* 8 (1971) 1, 7.

<sup>47</sup> Alex May, “The Commonwealth and Britain’s Turn to Europe, 1945–73,” *The Round Table* 102, no. 1 (2013): 29–39; Michael Franklin, *Joining the CAP. The agricultural negotiations for British accession to the European Economic Community, 1961-1973* (Bern: Peter Lang), 211-234, 320-321.

<sup>48</sup> ‘Riet-biet-suiker. Ontwikkelingslanden voor pressie van rijke landen gezwich’, *Sjaloom: Maandblad* 8 (1971) 7, 10.

<sup>49</sup> ‘Keeping them poor’, *The Times*, 6-12-1972, VIII; Haslemere Declaration Groups/Third World First, *Sugar today, jam tomorrow? A study of the sell-out over Commonwealth sugar in the Common Market negotiations* (London [1972]).

<sup>50</sup> ‘Politics of sugar’, *The Times*, 16-10-1973, 17; ‘Marching with the sugar workers’, *The Times*, 19-10-1973, 18. Cf. ‘Tate & Lyle Sugar Workers Strike’, British Pathé, <http://www.britishpathe.com/video/tate-lyle-sugar-workers-strike/> (20-08-2014).

## Low on sugar

The need to start activities quickly in Great Britain due to the ongoing EEC-negotiations had spoiled the plan originally voiced at the congress in Egmond aan Zee to initiate an international campaign at a coordinated date. Nevertheless, West-German members of *Aktion Selbstbesteuerung* set up a cane sugar campaign for the fall of 1971.<sup>51</sup> Elaborating on their plans in a letter, Werner Gebert of that organisation recalled how Dutch activists had presented their initiative at the international congress and proposed to transform it into an international campaign in order to effectively challenge the sugar policy of the EEC. Even though British fellow activists had had to start their campaign earlier, the international campaign remained desirable according to Gebert, precisely because the sugar trade was a subject concerning all EEC-member states. Moreover, the focus on sugar would raise awareness of international inequality among the general public and help those affected by this inequality to better understand its nature.<sup>52</sup>

The optimism about launching the cane sugar campaign in West-Germany was shared by fellow activists in the Netherlands. The main Dutch publication on the campaign was quickly translated into German, whilst the developments in Germany were enthusiastically commented: soon, the *Ruhrgebiet* would be turned into a *Rohrgebiet*, they announced to their compatriots.<sup>53</sup> However, the ambitions voiced by the initiators inadequately matched their means, as Gebert himself noted in his letter. The members of the preparatory group planned to sell or hand out bags of cane sugar, accompanied by informative flyers, eye-catching posters, possibly also street theatre and audio messages. However, just the packaging and distributing of a sufficient amount of cane sugar to support such an undertaking were not available at the time of writing in early 1971. Attempts to bring large organisations in as participants had failed. Gebert stated that he expected churches, trade unions and large charity organisations to be interested in participating based on the goals these organisations subscribed to.<sup>54</sup>

Even though the initiative drew interest from several sides, the cane sugar campaign appears to have been crowded out by other initiatives and lacked the support of resourceful organisations. Members of the *Aktion 3. Welt Handel*, who coordinated many initiatives to promote fair trade with the aid of the main churches, signalled that they had no capacity to participate.<sup>55</sup> Among the leadership of the protestant churches, the question whether such local initiatives should be supported to promote development was only decided in 1973.<sup>56</sup> Many likeminded activists were sympathetic to the

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<sup>51</sup> *Aktion Selbstbesteuerung* constituted a West-German self-tax initiative. Its aim was to make an individual donation for development projects calculated by subtracting the percentage the country of residence was in fact paying for development aid by the percentage it should pay for development and applying the difference to personal income. The 1970 international congress in Egmond aan Zee had been hosted by its Dutch counterpart XminY.

<sup>52</sup> W. Gebert, 'Wirken Sie mit an der Planung und Vorbereitung der internationalen Rohrzuckerkampagne', april 1971 [Universitätsbibliothek Basel].

<sup>53</sup> Piet Reckman, *Rohr. Die Geschichte Zuckers*, Stichwörter Zur Schalomarbeit 7 (Nürnberg, 1970); 'Sjaloom-Duitsland', *Sjaloom: Maandblad* 5 (1968) 11, 8. Initiatives in the Ruhr area were promoted at the University of Bochum. Cf. Hans-Eckehard Bahr ed., *Politisierung des Alltags. Gesellschaftliche Bedingungen des Friedens* (Darmstadt: Luchterhand, 1972); Hans Jürgen Schultz ed., *Von Gandhi bis Cãmara. Beispiele gewaltfreier Politik* (Stuttgart: Kreuz, 1971).

<sup>54</sup> W. Gebert, 'Wirken Sie mit an der Planung und Vorbereitung der internationalen Rohrzuckerkampagne', april 1971 [Universitätsbibliothek Basel].

<sup>55</sup> Ernst Schmied, *Wandel Durch Handel. Die Aktion Dritte Welt Handel, Ein Entwicklungspolitisches Lernmodell* (Stuttgart: AEJ, 1978), 153–154. Ironically, members of *Aktion 3. Welt Handel* had to devote much of their time to clarifying the relations with the Dutch organisation *SOS Wereldhandel*, which provided local fair trade initiatives with products from developing countries.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 298–299.

initiative, but this did not translate into tangible financial or personnel support.<sup>57</sup> Still, the campaign mustered around 10.000 signatures for a petition addressed to the Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation.<sup>58</sup>

Considering these difficulties, it must have been quite a surprise to hear the cane sugar campaign suddenly mentioned in the *Bundestag*. On the 16<sup>th</sup> of June 1972 the West-German minister of economic cooperation Erhard Eppler had to answer questions on the issue. Gerd Ritgen, a Christian Democrat expert for agricultural policy, demanded to know whether the Eppler's department had subsidised *Aktion Selbstbesteuerung* to help set up a cane sugar campaign. Eppler replied that funds had been provided to *Aktion Selbstbesteuerung*, but not for this campaign. Ritgen then asked Eppler whether he regarded sugar a product fit to exemplify that relations between developing countries and the EEC had to be changed. His answer was telling for the fate of the campaign. Although sugarcane was indeed a product which could easily be produced by developing countries, Eppler noted, the EEC had already decided to allocate no more agricultural plots for producing beet sugar, so that developing countries might cover possible rises in demand for sugar. Moreover, although the sugar industries in developing and developed countries had severely competed over sugar markets during the 1960s, the global sugar market had been marked by scarcity and sugar prices accordingly notably risen during the last years.<sup>59</sup>

The circumstances which had made cane sugar appear as an ideal subject with which to illustrate the imbalances of global trade had evaporated around the turn of the decade. First off, there was little room to pressure European governments. EEC-governments themselves were critical of the creation of surpluses subsidized through the EEC's agricultural policies. During the 1970s, a possible shortage of sugar was the bigger concern for these governments. As a result, the EEC continued to buy large quantities of cane sugar from developing countries after the entry of United Kingdom in 1973 and after the renegotiations with the associated developing countries in 1974. Second, the skyrocketing prices at the sugar market made consumers in EEC-countries beneficiaries of the existing sugar regulations. In 1968, consumers could be roused by the notion that they were made to pay prices which were well above those at the world market. During the 1970s, the contrary was true: sugar prices within the EEC were markedly lower, whilst the sugar shortages which were felt in other parts of the world were also kept at bay.<sup>60</sup>

A third problem with sugar as a focus for Third World activism was the relatively unique position the product held in world trade. Not only was sugar one of the few products for which effective international market regulations were in place. It was also one of the few primary commodities which during the 1970s did yield a good return on the world market. It therefore failed to illustrate one of the main problems of developing countries, which usually had to sell their primary commodities at steadily decreasing prices, therefore paying relatively increasing prices for the industrial products they imported from richer countries.<sup>61</sup> As the developmental ideal of an international division of labour – which would have an increase of international interdependency to the benefit of all – was replaced by the ideal of national autonomy and the accompanying diversification of national production branches, the focus on importing cane sugar from developing countries gradually lost its appeal.

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<sup>57</sup> Cf. Konstanze Kemnitzer, *Der Ferne Nächste: Zum Selbstverständnis Der Aktion "Brot Für Die Welt"* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2008).

<sup>58</sup> *40 Jahre Aktion Selbstbesteuerung. Friede durch gerechte Entwicklungspolitik* (Stuttgart 2009) 4-5.

<sup>59</sup> Protokoll: Deutscher Bundestag, 193. Sitzung, Bonn, Freitag den 16. Juni 1972, 11285.

<sup>60</sup> Felix Spies, 'Das Süße Fieber', *Die Zeit* (1974) 49, 35.

<sup>61</sup> Welthandel unter Druck, *Der Spiegel* 26 (1972) 18, 48-50.

These developments naturally also detracted from the enthusiasm to keep the cane sugar campaign going in the Netherlands, where the campaign had been much more successful. Other factors were just as influential in eclipsing the campaign in the first half of the 1970s. In some ways, it became the victim of its own success. Many Dutch participants had broadened their perspective by way of founding world shops, which had entered the scene in 1969. Like the cane sugar campaign, these shops combined the practical selling of products from developing countries with attempts to raise awareness for their situation. The world shops quickly became very popular. In 1970, ten world shops joined forces in a national organisation, which already had a 120 members in 1972.<sup>62</sup> Many of these world shops continued to sell cane sugar, but this was only a small part of a wide range of different activities deployed by local world shop groups.

A strong focus on sugar also seemed less and less attractive, as the exhaustive attention to the subject brought to light several complications. For example, much of the cane sugar sold in the Netherlands turned out to be imported from Surinam, then still a part of the Dutch commonwealth. There was all the more reason to be critical about this relation, because the sugarcane plantation was owned by a Dutch company, which thus benefited from the campaign more than Surinam workers did.<sup>63</sup> A group of agricultural students from Wageningen which was particularly active in this debate pointed out that selling cane sugar from developing countries would only make farmers in those countries more dependent on the West, whilst it also pitted Dutch activists against farmers in their own country, although these were also victims of a capitalist mode of production.<sup>64</sup>

The critique of the cane sugar campaign left many world shop activists in doubt. Many of their customers were happily buying cane sugar, which thus remained a suitable product to attract attention to the problems of developing countries. At the same time, their increased knowledgeability about the subject discouraged many activists from wanting to sell the product.<sup>65</sup> Some of the initiators of the campaign even publicly announced their decision to terminate their participation in 1974.<sup>66</sup> Others considered the product only to be suitable for a distinct phase of raising awareness, and therefore wanted every local group to consider for themselves whether they wanted to continue to sell it.<sup>67</sup>

In 1975, one possible solution to this dilemma was found in the *riet-biet-aktie*, or cane-beet-campaign. Thus, in Amstelveen, a group of activists offered up cane sugar and beet sugar for sale in a local shopping centre. Their lay-out was accompanied by noticeboards informing the shopping public about the reasons in favour of and against buying cane sugar. In conversations ensuing with passers-by as a result, the group members attempted to make clear how farmers in developing and developed countries were both victims of the capitalist system.<sup>68</sup> Seen from this perspective, the differences caused by the varying local and national perspectives which had hindered the emergence of a unifying outlook across different countries was eclipsed in favour of a perspective in which people across the globe were uniformly seen as suffering from exploitation by capitalists. Even though this view was able to set aside local and translocal differences, the ideological radicalism and the lack of nuance implied was rejected by many fair trade supporters in what had overwhelmingly started as a reform-oriented movement.

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<sup>62</sup> Hans Beerends et al., *Anders Nog Iets?*, Sociale Blauwdrukken 2 (Amersfoort: De Horstink, 1979), 9–10.

<sup>63</sup> 'Argumenten tegen de rietsuikeraktie', *Wereldwinkelbulletin* 2 (1971) 4, 3-4.

<sup>64</sup> 'Discussiestuk Wageningen september 1971'. Archief Sjaloom, RHCZOU: T 00248, bestand 130.

<sup>65</sup> 'Rietsuikerenquête Breda', januari 1974. Particulier archief Landelijke Vereniging van Wereldwinkels.

<sup>66</sup> 'Niet het volk plukt de vruchten van de kapitalistische ruilhandel', *Wereldkrant* 2 (1974) 11, 8.

<sup>67</sup> Hans Beerends, 'Reaktie wereldwinkels op sjaloom-besluit. Rietsuikeraktie: stoppen of doorgaan', *Wereldkrant* 3 (1975) 1, 8.

<sup>68</sup> Mia Goos en Willem van het Hekke, *Wereldwinkels en producten. Theorie & praktijk* (Utrecht 1977) 60.

### *Learning from failure*

Europe thus was an important frame of reference for fair trade activists engaged in the cane sugar campaign since the 1960s, first and foremost because the EEC determined to a large extent the structures within which trade with developing countries took place. The activists not only frequently referred to Europe in their local and national campaigns, they also attempted to set up a Europe-wide organization and campaigns on a European scale. These attempts, however, failed. In part, the failure to set up a cane sugar campaign on a European scale was due to the changes which took place in the global sugar trade during the early 1970s. Nonetheless, the EEC continued to limit imports from developing countries and implemented a trading system which heavily favoured former colonies of member states. More importantly, then, an explanation for the failure to set up a European cane sugar campaign has to regard the ways in which Europe as a frame of reference was intertwined with other frames.

The developments in Great Britain may serve to illustrate the integrating and the disintegrating role Europe could play as a frame of reference. There, the battle against the EEC united those focused on the potential loss of jobs in Britain with those concerned by the trading position of the developing countries in the Commonwealth. At the same time, the relations of British activists with development advocates from developing countries was complicated by the issue of the EEC, not just because the British activists claimed a special position for developing countries from the Commonwealth, but also because activists from the latter countries regarded such a position a neo-colonial arrangement. The distinct timetable and of the British negotiations to join the EEC impeded the coordination of a cane sugar campaign on a European scale, which had been tentatively planned for 1971.

In the Netherlands and in West-Germany, a critique of 'Europe' at first united fair trade activists with a broad field of politicians and interest groups who were also critical above all of the European agricultural policy. These criticisms predated the initiative for a cane sugar campaign, and could only successfully be translated into social action after the initiators of the cane sugar campaign developed the means to turn this European issue into a local issue as well. By distributing cane sugar at local events and by encouraging people to buy cane sugar in local stores, the public was invited to engage with the consequences of European trade policies for developing countries and to take active part in challenging these policies. This focus on local activities was a key to the success of the campaign in the Netherlands, but might have been one of the causes for the failure to set up an effective European organization.

Lastly, the opposition to European beet sugar production brought Dutch and German activists into conflict with beet sugar producers in their own vicinity. Oftentimes, the farmers planting sugar beets at close sight did not so much appear as people trying to stave off development, but above all as people working hard to make a living. Such local encounters made the demands for transforming Europe's trading structures in favour of farmers in developing countries harder to maintain. In reaction, some activists turned to the deterritorialized notion of international capitalism as the enemy holding people all over the world ransom. However, it was presumably the neglect of local, national and regional differences of this perspective which caused it to convince only a small group of radicals.

Thus, the relation between local, national and transnational frameworks has proven crucial for understanding the dynamics of social activism. Local activism aimed at influencing national, European and global trade policy in an attempt to express solidarity with people in developing countries. Europeanization, then, did not just shape economic relations between economic parties

within and outside Europe, but also encouraged disconcerted citizens from all parts of world to connect. Their actions brought Europeanisation and globalization home by making worldwide economic relations visible in daily life.

Although Europeanisation provided activists across Europe with a shared frame of reference, this did not automatically imply a unified perspective for social movements. The perspectives of different local and national groups of activists continued to interlink local and several translocal frameworks. Europeanisation was not a mere reaction to globalisation, but can be seen to have been a fundamental factor in establishing the local and translocal relations of European citizens. However, Europeanisation – or globalisation for that matter – cannot be regarded simply as new translocal frameworks replacing others. These processes have to be analysed as reconfigurations of local and translocal spatial frameworks. Europe has proven to be a crucial element in this reconfiguration for fair trade activism since the 1960s, but at the same time: It's not just about Europe, sugar.