

Who's sabotaging food aid to Africa

by Marcia Merry

During the first week of December, President Reagan both announced new emergency food-aid commitments to Africa and met with President Kountche of Niger for a first-hand report on the famine and debt crisis plaguing the continent. Reagan issued two executive orders to make more food available. He authorized sending wheat from the uncommitted inventory of the government-owned Commodity Credit Corporation, estimated by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, highly unreliably, at 5.4 million tons. To obtain it, foreign nations or private charities and organizations must request wheat donations from U.S. government-owned supplies.

In addition, on Dec. 5, Reagan made available for meeting food donation requests 300,000 metric tons of wheat from the U.S. government food security reserve.

At the Dec. 5 signing ceremony for the African Famine Relief Directive, Reagan said, "I'm happy to announce that the United States is taking additional actions today to provide increased assistance to the victims of the terrible drought which affects major parts of Africa."

President Reagan made the U.S. wheat available for a good reason—to save lives. But the Department of Agriculture's undersecretary, Daniel Amstutz, who issued the specifics of the food aid offer Dec. 6, has no such intentions. Amstutz was a top Cargill, Inc. grain cartel executive, with long ties to Switzerland. He knows full well that grain inventories in North America and elsewhere in the West are being drawn down to danger levels, while farmers are being driven into despair and bankruptcy. Not enough food is being produced to meet the persisting crisis in Africa—and as per grain cartel policy, he intends to keep it that way.

The Amstutz farm policy announced last week by Agriculture Secretary John Block calls for continuing the bankrupting of thousands of independent family farmers, in the name of cutting the budget and allowing more of a (cartel-controlled) "market orientation." Record numbers of bankruptcies and foreclosures are taking place. Dairy and beef herds are being liquidated for good.

Secretary Block, Amstutz's Charley McCarthy, called the shutdown process "painful" but necessary.

Meantime, Amstutz is organizing an unprecedented rate

of 50 million tons of grain shipments from the West to the Soviet Union this year. In the 1983 Long Term Agreement Amstutz negotiated with the Soviets, there is an unprecedented "sanctity of contract" clause which compels the United States to provide the Soviets with the grain imports they desire unless the United States officially declares war or emergency. And yet, diverting even half of this to Africa would save the whole continent, while huge new food harvests could be mobilized throughout the West by coordinated government executive orders for wartime-style emergency farm output.

Like a cruel mockery, the food aid program itself is being run by the USDA and the State Department as a guaranteed income for the cartel companies. In the name of expediting food delivery, the Agency for International Development reports that as of this fall competitive bidding has been suspended for determining which companies get the government funding to provide the grain and shipping of food to Africa. No farmers or farmer organizations are now ever awarded the contracts to provide government-funded food. Only about seven cartel companies monopolize the P.L. 480 food aid program. In reality, the additional funding of \$50 million for food aid to Africa that President Reagan announced, will be channeled through the cartels.

Speaking to the press after President Reagan's aid announcement, Amstutz played down the idea that large food flows would be going to Africa. He emphasized the mechanics and procedures whereby foreign nations or private charities are invited to request wheat donations from U.S. government supplies, and said that such requests are expected to be much less than the total 5.4 million tons of wheat the President made available. Amstutz meanly reported that other nations with hunger problems can also request the wheat. "You know there are hungry people throughout the world," he said.

How much food is needed?

In simple bushels and tons, there is not enough food to go around to do the job of saving lives and restoring health and hope. Even assuming most of the wheat offered by Reagan would get to Africa, this would still leave another 20 million tons of emergency food this year to properly deal with the famine and collapse conditions. In addition to the cereal grains, millions of tons of animal feed should be in the pipeline to quickly produce the meat and milk supplies needed for Africa.

As of the most recent count, the United States has pledged to provide Ethiopia over the next 11 months with 222,349 metric tons of food—mostly grain, with less than 10% milk powder and vegetable oil. Adding in the estimated pledges from other nations, the total expected for the year amounts to under 500,000 tons of food aid. However, to begin to properly nourish people, at least 2 million tons of food-aid cereals alone are needed this year. The 500,000 tons pledged

is only one-quarter of the amount of grain needed. In addition, Ethiopia needs thousands of tons of milk and corn-soy powder, dried beans, and animal protein to regain strength.

The U.N. Food and Agricultural organization sets the total food aid requirement for Ethiopia at 1.2 to 1.7 million tons this year—much too low. But even by this inadequate measure, only one-quarter is pledged at most.

Defense vs. food?

Unfortunately, President Reagan did not also announce measures to mobilize to grow more food, or to provide needed logistical infrastructure to ensure that food's rapid distribution where it is most needed.

What is required in Africa, in addition to emergency food tonnages, is a coordinated program of temporary infrastructure development—floating piers, fleets of off-road trucks, emergency sanitation and health facilities. The Soviet Union and the Western

closely over recent years with the World Bank and International Monetary Fund to prevent the building of the most simple food and transportation infrastructure in Ethiopia. At the main Ethiopian port of Assab, there is no suction grain discharge to offload bulk carriers, there are no conveyor belts or baggers. There are no portable piers or proper airbag temporary storage. Ships sit in the harbor, waiting in line. The Ethiopian Relief Committee requested that no more food arrive until later in January because it could not be unloaded.

And yet, this fall, for example, the last U.S. company that produced off-road vehicles shut down production for lack of a market. If this infrastructure need is to be met, the industrial production of the advanced-sector nations must be geared up now for rapid export. Thousands of tractors, trucks, and implements are required.

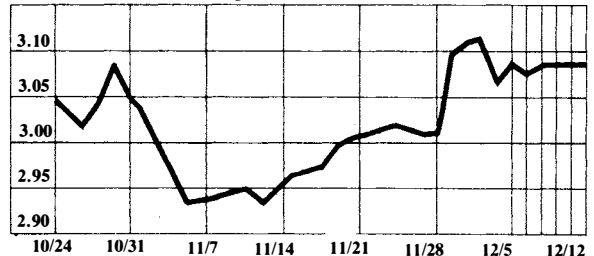
During the first week of December, a group of liberal congressmen also made an announcement. They held a press conference to announce that in January they will ask for an additional \$1 billion in food aid for Ethiopia and Africa. Some of the most cynical backers of forced population reduction are in on the food campaign, such as New York's Rep. Ted Weiss. These are also the most vocal opponents of a strong U.S. defense policy, and may be expected in coming weeks to demand that the additional food-aid monies be taken out of the defense budget.

Ironically, the seed of the solution to the world food problem is found not in the Amstutz-authored agriculture policy, nor in the President's overall economic policy, but in the very defense policy most opposed by the liberals: the Strategic Defense Initiative or beam-weapons program. The last few years of farm income crisis means that the capital stock of those farms still struggling in operation is in very poor condition. The most modern forms of laser and electron-beam welding are needed to mass produce high-quality farm equipment, and these are among the civilian spinoffs of a defense mobilization to build beam weapons.

Currency Rates

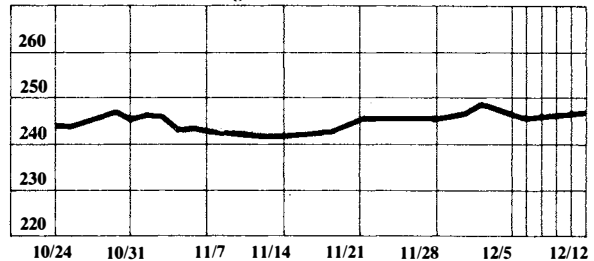
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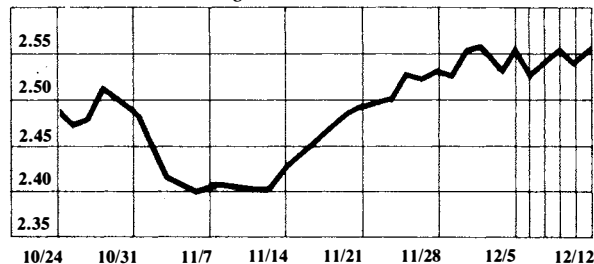
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The dollar in Swiss francs

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The British pound in dollars

New York late afternoon fixing

