

Food for Peace activists hold conferences around the U.S.A.

by Suzanne Rose

Activists of the international Food for Peace movement sponsored conferences around the United States during October and early November, to further the idea that no person on this planet should be allowed to go hungry. The organization was founded Sept. 3-5 in Chicago. By Nov. 6, Food for Peace had 20 such regional conferences, with a second international conference scheduled to take place in Chicago on Dec. 10-11.

Most Americans, since the end of World War II, have understood that the United States has developed the technology that would enable U.S. farmers to be able to feed the world. Yet, the sponsors and founders of the new Food for Peace movement have concluded that, 40 years later, not only have hunger and malnutrition increased dramatically around the world, but the increase in the United States alone is cause for alarm.

Thus, since the founding conference of Food for Peace, participants from the United States and other countries, have held conferences around the country to expand the Food for Peace movement. John Neill, a farmer from New Zealand, kicked off the mobilization by touring farm areas of Texas, Ohio, Indiana, and Pennsylvania. Neill told U.S. farmers of the deteriorating conditions in New Zealand, once an agricultural exporter, which now produces only one-fourth of its own food requirements.

He warned American audiences that the financial circles behind the destruction of New Zealand's agriculture, embodied in "New Zealand 1990," are also behind the "Europe 1992" proposal that would eliminate all barriers to financial looting of European agriculture. This same perspective would also succeed in bankrupting the American family farmer, unless common principles to prevent this patriots in every advanced-sector nation.

Following Neill's tour, three European farm leaders accompanied by American Food for Peace spokesmen Marcia Merry and Lawrence Freeman, addressed conferences in both urban and rural areas of the United States. Merry and Freeman both stressed that the family farmer, the cornerstone of modern agriculture, will be eliminated, unless there is an international mobilization of citizens to reverse the policies

that have caused the current crisis in agriculture, with food shortages so acute that they could lead to war. An example of this is the current unrest in East bloc countries such as Poland and Yugoslavia.

The farm leaders blame the agricultural crisis on the policies of the U.S. Department of Agriculture; General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT); the Trilateral Commission; the International Monetary Fund (IMF); international financial institutions, and the international grain cartel companies, such as Daniel Archer Midland and Cargill.

Food banks being shut down

In the cities of St. Louis, Missouri; Houston, Texas; and Seattle, Washington, Food for Peace meetings featured spokesmen from area food banks. Such food banks been set up to distribute surplus food to needy people. These spokesmen reported conditions that destroy the myth of "overproduction" and "surpluses," by describing not only a decrease in the amount of surplus foodstuffs they are receiving, but the total lack of staples such as milk powder, cheese, and grains.

A Seattle area administrator of a program to distribute food and medical aid for small Indian reservations reported that tribes in the immediate area are living in Third World conditions of dire poverty. The government has cut payments to her office by 60%. Each tribe of 1-2,000 people now gets \$100 per month for emergency food and medical aid.

Often, the administrator said, she has to decide whether to give an extra \$10 to an elderly person who needs medical supplies, or to a child whose only source of food is the school lunch program.

Representatives of food banks also spoke at the Houston Food for Peace meeting. One was a minister who had made a public appeal through the *Houston Chronicle* for food donations the previous week. He has had to shut his pantry down three times this past year for lack of available government "surplus" food.

Another woman who runs a suburban food pantry said she has a capacity to feed 700 families, but the need is closer to 20,000. She stressed that she supplies people in middle-class neighborhoods. Yet, she can no longer get surplus food

Food for Peace Conferences in 20 Cities, October 1988



from the government, nor can she get food from the major food banks, such as Second Harvest, but must seek donations to buy food from supermarkets.

A woman from Los Angeles who runs a food bank for the Catholic Church reported that her normal suppliers have run out and even they cannot buy food. Claude Jones, chairman of the Harris County (Houston) Democratic Party commented that one-third of the people in Houston are hungry. A similar report was presented by a food bank representative at the Seattle meeting who said that 40% of all the schoolchildren in the state of Washington are hungry. The head of a food bank in St. Louis reported that 19,000 families in that area are dependent on food from food banks. One farmer in Moline, Illinois, reported that a food bank for farmers in his area was empty.

The situation in France

The situation in Europe is parallel to that in the United States. Where 20 years ago, farmers active in groups like the National Farmers Organization reported that they had dumped

milk as a tactic to drive the price up, they found instead the price went down. Today, out of desperation, French farmers are trying similar tactics, according to Aline Cotten, a French farm activist from Brittany, who spoke at a number of U.S. Food for Peace meetings.

Miss Cotten said she became motivated to work with the Schiller Institute's Agriculture Commission in Europe, which shares the goals of Food for Peace, as she saw the farm crisis in her native Brittany worsening. She told an audience in Erie, Pennsylvania, that farmers in France are subject to the same kinds of threats and penalties U.S. farmers face for "overproducing."

"The government tells you how much to produce and bankrupts farmers who overproduce by imposing penalties. The farmers have responded with futile, desperate actions: They puncture tires, or try to hijack milk trucks and hide them. They mistakenly think that by doing this, the government will rescind their penalizing policies.

"This is why Food for Peace is indispensable in France," Miss Cotten said. "People are that frustrated. We have to

show them we can change things and win. The quotas are lowered every year in France. Farmers are told to produce less and less. We need a global approach among patriots. If people don't become political and don't organize for political actions, all will be lost," Miss Cotten declared.

West German environmentalists

In West Germany, the problems are also compounded by environmentalists. Dairy farmer Edmund Belle told audiences in Louisiana, Minnesota, Illinois, Wisconsin, and Ohio how the environmentalist movement in West Germany has been able to force production cutbacks. Laws have been passed to prevent fertilizer use on land that lies near the water table. If the nitrogen content in groundwater tests at more than 50 milligrams per liter, the land is taken out of production. So far, thousands of acres have been taken out of production for this reason.

According to Belle, the income of the family farmer has dropped by 27% while multinationals like auto giant Daimler-Benz are receiving subsidies from the European Community to go into hog production in Spain. Other multinationals are raising beef cattle in Brazil. Belle said, "We should be using food as a positive weapon for peace. We need to be producing 2.6-2.7 billion tons of grain per year. We must have this expansion because of the threat posed to world peace by the collapse in Soviet agriculture, and the need to provide food to nations like Sudan and Bangladesh which are on the brink of extinction due to starvation and disease."

He also described the pricing system through which the Soviets loot Western European economies in order to subsidize their current military gear-up. For example, the U.S.S.R. pays half a deutschemark per kilo for butter, he said; the European consumer pays 12 deutschemarks per kilo.

The situation in the Third World is even worse. Countries such as Egypt, which 20 years ago were nearly self-sufficient in food production, today are in dire straits. At a Sacramento, California Food for Peace meeting, Professor El Mullah, from the Egyptian Consulate in San Francisco, told how the developing nations of the world in the 1940s and 1950s held the U.S. in high esteem, when the U.S. was supplying them with food, and their nations held the promise for development.

Professor El Mullah said when he left Egypt in 1963-64, Egypt was almost self-sufficient in food production. Today, Egypt produces only half of its national requirements. Currently, its people live on a diet of bread and beans. Once a week they might have chicken or lamb.

Dr. Fred Wills, former foreign minister of Guyana, also shed some light on the reasons for the plight of countries like Egypt. He recounted the history of the founding of the Bretton Woods system after World War II, and its chief financial agency, the International Monetary Fund, offspring of the United Nations. The policies of these agencies are directly responsible for the world's poverty, Wills said.

They tell developing nations not to grow food, that their problem is overpopulation. They tell the advanced sector not to produce, that the problem is overproduction. "Seventy-five percent of the world's population is hungry. They tell you not to produce. This is immoral," Wills emphasized.

Farmers at every meeting acknowledged that a recovery is impossible unless policies in the advanced sector are changed. They stated that the effects of last summer's drought, if not the drought itself, will continue for at least another year, because the lack of moisture in the ground will affect next spring's planting.

Andrew Olson, a grain farmer from Minnesota who also ran for Congress as a LaRouche Democrat, said that his crop this year was 35% the size of last year's, and that he does not expect the situation to improve.

A farm leader in Illinois said the drought had so dried the soil this year, that farmers in his area cannot apply fertilizer. In addition, one of the major seed companies in his area is out of seed wheat because of the drought. So many of the farm-related industries have closed down, that combines needing repair had to sit idle during harvest for lack of spare parts. "If there were a normal crop, could we have harvested?" one farmer said. "The concern I have is the ability to produce as farmers are being destroyed," said another.

Water projects

Two issues that beg for legislative action were also discussed at many of the Food for Peace meetings. Several meetings showed a 20-minute videotape of the North American Water and Power Alliance (NAWAPA), a proposal to divert north-flowing water from Canada and Alaska to the United States and Mexico, made by the Ralph Parsons Engineering Co. in the early 1960s. The proposal, unfortunately never adopted, represents the foresight of some people who knew 20 years ago that America needed to increase her supply of water, to avoid severe water shortages in the 1980s. Food for Peace members resolved to push for emergency legislation to build the NAWAPA project.

The other issue is the collapse of farm prices, and the immediate remedy, paying farmers a parity price. According to Don Eret, a former Nebraska state legislator who addressed the Nebraska Food for Peace meeting, the policy of paying farmers a parity price—the actual cost of production—was discontinued under the Eisenhower administration, because of pressure to adopt "free trade" policies exerted by the major grain cartels.

This one action had major consequences for all society, Eret said. It is ultimately responsible for the bankruptcy of two-thirds of U.S. farmers since World War II, as well as the elimination of farm-related industries, including farm equipment manufacturers, seed companies, and fertilizer and pesticide manufacturers. Eret stated that the Food for Peace movement will sponsor legislation calling for parity prices to be paid to farmers, as part of its mobilization.