

## Agriculture by Marcia Merry

### New U.S.-U.S.S.R. grain treaty

*It makes big promises to Moscow; over whose dead bodies will Yeutter deliver the goods?*

**A**t the scheduled June summit meeting between President Bush and Soviet head Mikhail Gorbachov, there is to be an official signing of a new Long-Term Grain Agreement. This LTA—the continuation of one begun in 1983—exceeds all previous treaties in terms of the size of the U.S. food commitments to Moscow, and the sweetheart terms of trade.

The pending treaty was agreed upon by negotiators for the respective nations on March 22, in Vienna, in what observers called a “surprise” decision. Last December’s round of talks on the treaty was inconclusive. But after only one day in Vienna, the new package was announced.

Typical of the farm media reaction was the headline, “Sudden Decision by Moscow Suggests Soviet Union Wants to Buy for a Long Time,” from the San Angelo, Texas *Standard Times*.

Speaking on behalf of Agriculture Secretary Clayton Yeutter, his press secretary Kelly Shipp tried to play down the significance of the treaty. She told Associated Press, “They just came to agreement much quicker than anyone anticipated. They were just able to wrap it up.”

Events in the Soviet Union in 1990 indicate why the rush to agreement over food supplies. George Bush and a band of financial and commodities powers in the West are backing Gorbachov—or his possible stand-in—no matter what the body count, as Moscow intervenes against the strikes, hunger riots, and freedom movements now sweeping the Soviet empire.

The related question about the new LTA, is: How will Yeutter make good on his sweetheart deal? Who will not eat in order for Bush and Yeutter to try to placate Moscow?

There now exists an unprecedented, global grain shortage. For the third season in a row, the world has harvested a total grain crop (wheat, corn, rice, barley, millet, sorghum, oats, and all grain types) that is *lower* than the annual average consumption as of the end of the 1980s. Starvation is racking Africa on the scale of genocide. And “Africanized” conditions now prevail in large parts of Mexico and South America. Mexico, for example, which was a grain exporter in the 1960s, harvested a corn crop last year that was *half* the recent annual acreage. Years of harsh IMF conditionalities have destroyed the physical productive powers of whole nations, that now need short-term food relief and massive rebuilding.

Mocking the suffering, the powers holding sway over the agriculture policy in the major food-exporting countries—whose productive potentials could make a difference in the short run—are refusing to introduce food output emergency measures. Instead, in the U.S., Canada, the European Community, Australia, and New Zealand, food *reduction* policies are being implemented, in the name of “protecting the environment.”

Therefore, sending U.S. grain to the Soviets, without mobilizing new production, will take food from the mouths of someone else in the West—a needless, immoral situation.

The following are some of the new

features of the LTA pact. The pact will:

- Increase the annual minimum shipments of grain to the Soviets to 10 million tons, up from the current minimum shipment of 9 million tons. This will guarantee a total of 50 million tons of grain exported to the U.S.S.R. over the five-year treaty life, as opposed to the current 45 million ton total.

- The cap on how much the Soviets may buy in any one year—without asking for special authorization from Washington—will be raised to 14 million tons, up from the current cap of 12 million tons. In recent years this cap has been routinely ignored by Moscow, and Washington has granted automatic approval for additional grain exports.

Over the last trade year—the first year of the Bush administration—Soviet purchases were more than double the specified minimum limit of 9 million tons, and several million tons over the 12 million tons cap. Much of this grain has been sitting and rotting in Soviet ports, storage, handling, and transport facilities. But Bush and Gorbachov are proceeding regardless.

- Allow the U.S.S.R. greater flexibility in its annual shopping list for grains. For the first time, the agreement includes barley and sorghum along with corn, under the treaty-approved classification of feed grains.

- Allow Moscow to substitute up to 750,000 tons of corn or wheat for each other, when tallying that the Soviets meet the treaty specification of purchasing a minimum of 4 million tons each of wheat and corn.

- Allow Moscow more flexibility in any one trade year in choosing how much of a feedgrain or wheat (food grain) to buy in that year; although the minimums are to be met over the life of the pact.