

## Agriculture by Marcia Merry

### European farmers defend production

*Farmers in Europe are fighting "free trade," GATT, and to protect the food supply; will U.S. farmers fight?*

**P**lans are afoot in Europe for 20,000 farmers to block the highways to Brussels on the eve of the Dec. 3 General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) talks of the U.N. This follows protest actions by thousands of farmers in Paris, France, Geneva, Switzerland, and other cities during November. On Nov. 12, about 10,000 demonstrated in Milan, Italy where two cows showed up at the deluxe Galleria on the Piazza del Duomo.

The proposals on the agenda for GATT include drastic cuts in a nation's right to support its farmers and secure its food supply.

To date, there have been no protest actions within the Anglo-Saxon bloc of nations—U.S., Australia, New Zealand, Canada—whose leaders have led the charge in the GATT for slashing farm income and for ending national rights to set farm and food policies. However, the recent collapse in farm prices and the fierce new measures against farmers in the U.S., Australia, and other nations, are creating the potential for a fight.

The new five-year farm bill passed by the U.S. Congress cuts various already low farm supports by over 25% at a time when grain prices are plunging. Wheat prices are at record lows. Soybean prices, which at harvest were about \$6 a bushel, fell to \$5.30 a bushel in the first three weeks of November. The price of corn at harvest was about \$2 a bushel, and has dropped by 15¢ in the same period. Though prices for hogs and cattle are up, many farmers no longer have livestock.

Minnesota farm leader Andy Olson compares the current situation

to the mid-1980s. "In 1985, farm bankruptcies and crises were precipitated by a cut-off of credit. Loans were called. Banks squeezed. Today, the squeeze is led by the low prices. In 1985, there was a clean-out of highly leveraged farm operations. Today, the crisis is price-related. But, credit issues will feed on it and blow it up."

The protest mood among European farmers is akin to that in the U.S. which inspired the 1979 tractorcades to Washington, D.C. Since that time, however, U.S. farmers have been subdued by the barrage of 1980s propaganda about "free trade" being the solution to their plight, and by a network of counterinsurgents deployed to demoralize and confuse them. However, there is a mood of farm revolt against all the policies in Washington, including Bush's Mideast war drive.

In every farm county, families are being hit directly by the Gulf deployment, in addition to the higher fuel prices and fall in exports and crop prices because of food warfare. Many families have been forced onto food stamps now that the head of their household has been sent to Saudi Arabia in the call-up. In Iowa, a 43-year-old farmer who has been in the National Guard in order to get the income for "grocery money" for his family, was just shipped out. Before he left, his farm neighbors pitched in to help haul the man's livestock to slaughter. His situation is typical.

On Nov. 9-10 in Kansas City, Missouri, a number of farm groups held a "Rural Strategy Summit," attended by 200 people, to confer on the

farm crisis. There was broad sentiment against GATT and against the Mideast war designs. However, the grouping that ran the proceedings focused on only rear-guard strategies. Instead of opposing the GATT altogether, the proposal called for Washington to reject any international trade agreement that would phase out farm programs or reduce U.S. farm income. Farmers were urged to support new legislation to prevent any "fast track" approval of any treaty that emerges from GATT talks.

When challenged by members of the audience, National Farmers Union president Leland Swenson refused to oppose the GATT institution outright. He later announced that the NFU plans to take a big delegation to Geneva to the December GATT talks.

There was talk of a protest action in Washington, D.C., and a date was moved up from March to December. However, Merle Hanson, who heads up the farm front of the Socialist International (called North American Farm Alliance) and who chaired the conference, offered only warmed-over "militancy as usual," even on the immediate war danger.

The follow-up mailing from the "Rural Strategy Summit" focused instead on removing Clayton Yeutter as Secretary of Agriculture, and on preventing the re-election of Rep. Kika de la Garza (D-Tex.) as chairman of the House Agriculture Committee.

Many who attended the event will find the policy fight they are seeking on Dec. 15-16 at the international teach-in against war in Chicago, hosted by the Schiller Institute's Food for Peace group—its fourth international conference since its founding in 1988. Resistance leaders from around the world will meet with hundreds of U.S. students, farmers, and other citizens on how to stop the war craze and create peace through economic development.