

Farmer makes unique run for Congress

On Aug. 3, South Dakota cattle and grain farmer Ron Wiczorek filed for Congress in the state capital of Pierre as an independent for South Dakota's only congressional seat. He faces three-term incumbent Democrat Tim Johnson. Judging from Wiczorek's past activities, his campaign to fight for farmers and improve the farm economy promises to be unique.

At the press conference following his filing, Wiczorek said he did not intend to run in the traditional mold of farm protest candidates, although the situation facing farmers, himself included, is dire. Rather, he said, he would use his campaign to organize a coalition of labor, the civil rights movement, Native Americans, churches, and others, to try to change the economic policies nationally which are distressing all Americans.

Wiczorek told the press that he supported the economic plan of independent presidential candidate Lyndon LaRouche. He told Associated Press and the radio stations which covered his announcement outside the state auditor's office in the capitol, that the country needs a congressman who knows, first and foremost, how to solve the economic crisis. He emphasized the LaRouche policy of putting the economy through bankruptcy reorganization to reduce the debt, and generating new, low-cost credit for production by nationalizing the Federal Reserve and establishing a national bank.

A moral obligation

Conditions in the farm belt require emergency action. Prices have been below 50% of the cost of production throughout the 1980s and liquidations have claimed vast numbers of independent family farmers, but it is the view of a growing number of activists around the Food for Peace campaign, which Wiczorek represents, that a return to productive farming conditions for farmers in the United States can only come about through a movement which recognizes the moral obligation of farmers to feed the world. They intend to link up with farmers abroad who share this commitment, and with eaters in the cities, to break the stanglehold that "free trade" and "market-oriented" production policies have over the U.S. agricultural sector. Over the past three years, Wiczorek has hosted Australian and German farm leaders in his hometown of Mitchell.

As one of the byproducts of free trade, farmers have watched each other go bankrupt in order to profit at one another's expense. Wiczorek challenged this outlook and

organized 40 farmers, mainly friends and neighbors, to demonstrate outside Davison County Court House on July 23 to protest a pre-foreclosure hearing on his own property by the Farmers Home Administration (FmHA). At the hearing, he challenged the conventional wisdom that farmers like himself are going broke because they are poor managers or because they have not adopted "market-oriented" farming approaches. He called for an investigation of the corrupt practices of the government-backed farm credit agencies (the FmHA and the Farm Credit System) which have become little more than arms for the usury of the Wall Street bankers and the grain cartels. Farmers like himself were offered debt restructuring if they were unable to manage their huge debts at current below-cost prices. The catch was that these agencies were just buying time to stagger the liquidations, seizing more assets and cash in the process.

Wiczorek told demonstrators, "Although I am facing the possibility of having my farm and home foreclosed by the Farmers Home Administration, the issue here goes way beyond my own personal situation. The issue here is a criminal policy of forcing good farmers off the land who are ready, willing, and able to produce, while our nation and the world are facing a food shortage disaster. Whatever the result of my own hearing today, I intend to help build the Food for Peace movement of farmers united with the eaters of the big cities to change government policy. I will invite civil rights leaders to come and meet with us in South Dakota. I will reach out to the churches, labor, Native Americans, and leaders of eastern European and other ethnic groups. I will welcome support and solidarity from farmers in Australia, Canada, Poland, Germany, and elsewhere."

In June, he traveled to Washington to meet with the offices of South Dakota Sens. Larry Pressler (R) and Tom Daschle (D) to present evidence of widespread government-countenanced fraud against farmers in the Omaha Farm Credit district, which includes South Dakota. He attacked the Dutch giant Rabobank for buying up farm loans in the United States, including government-guaranteed loans, from cash-strapped farm banks, only to turn around and liquidate the farmer. Daschle promised that the information presented by Wiczorek would be investigated.

On another front, Wiczorek has challenged traditional ideas about farmer organizing. In contrast to the impotent organizing of most U.S. farm organizations which tell farmers to look out for themselves first, Wiczorek has stressed that the purpose of farming is to feed people. As a leader in the Committee to Save the Children in Iraq, he helped to promote and publicize efforts to send milk powder from the United States to children in Iraq who have been starved because of the U.S.-led embargo. The campaign has organized the delivery of over 9,750 pounds of non-fat dry milk to children's hospitals in Baghdad, largely through the efforts of farmers. He promises that his campaign will support more humanitarian relief to Iraqi children in the near future.