
Showdown in Rome

EIR Puts Food Security On FAO Summit Agenda

by Alexander C. Pusch

Whoever thought that the High-Level Summit of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), which took place in Rome June 3-5, would result in a swift and clear program of action, with concrete and direct means to deal with the world hunger crisis, had another think coming. As Helga Zepp-LaRouche had suspected, and repeatedly warned, the Summit developed into a veritable showdown between the forces of national sovereignty, on the one side, and the British imperial interests controlling globalization, on the other.

This became obvious in the final hours of the Summit, when the Committee of the Whole, even after hours of debate, was unable to come to an agreement on the final conference communiqué. We owe that to the proud delegations from Argentina and Venezuela, and many other countries of the South, who did not want to bend to the pressure, and submit to a declaration that included language condemning “restrictive trade barriers.” From this seemingly formal objection to free-trade language arose a revolt of countries of Ibero-America, which declared their solidarity with the hungry in the world, and attacked the hypocrisy of the debate. How could one seek to ameliorate the situation for the 900 million desperately hungry persons on this planet, while at the same time, pushing or submitting to free-trade policies harkening back to the heyday of the British Empire?

The representative of Venezuela used her concluding remarks to point to the fact that a great opportunity had been tragically wasted with the Summit. “The 900 million persons suffering from hunger cannot wait,” she proclaimed, in her speech supporting the Argentinian delegation’s determination not to go along with the “consensus.” The only thing which remained to be added, was that this tragically missed opportunity was due to the willful sabotage of all constructive debate by the delegations from Great Britain, the U.S.A., and other countries currently under the thumb of the British imperial institutions.

Food Security vs. the ‘Market’

From the opening of the Summit, there were clear signs that the world food crisis had led at least some officials to

recognize the necessity of touching upon the “forbidden” subjects. Rome Mayor Gianni Alemanno, for example, a former agricultural minister, made emphatic remarks concerning the inability of the market to create food security; and Italian President Giorgio Napolitano stated, in his opening remarks: “We cannot rely on the balancing forces of the market to overcome the food crisis and provide a perspective of real food security!”

During the three days of the Summit, *EIR*’s representatives provided participants with a clear definition as to where the lines were drawn. There was not a press conference that took place during the entire Summit, in which there was not at least one *EIR* spokesman pointing to the irreconcilability of the goal of increasing agricultural productivity, on the one hand, and the ideologically motivated initiatives for further trade liberalization and the “speedy conclusion of the Doha Round of the WTO [World Trade Organization],” on the other.

For instance, during the initial press conference, an *EIR* reporter directed a question to FAO director-general Jacques Diouf:

“I’m Andrew Spannaus of *Executive Intelligence Review*, the magazine of Lyndon LaRouche,” he began.

“There is much discussion of the importance of coordinated intervention to deal with the crisis,” Spannaus continued. “However, there is a large contradiction: At the same time, trade liberalization is being pushed with the Doha Round of the WTO.

“In speaking with delegations from developing countries, many see this policy of trade liberalization as a continuation of the IMF policy, and colonialism, of only exporting to rich markets. In Europe, there is also a spirited defense of the Common Agricultural Policy.

“Would it not be better to work together for a policy of guaranteeing investment and food self-sufficiency, and abandon the market policy, which is subject to financial speculation and distortion, rather than having to clean up the mess created by that market policy afterwards?” Spannaus proposed.

Diouf began with a passionate response to the problems in the low-income countries. There is a lack of investment, technology, inputs, and infrastructure, which does not allow those countries to produce efficiently, Diouf said. Some countries, with only 2-4% of their population, are able to produce and export; others, with 60-80% of their population in agriculture, do not succeed in producing enough. Seed and fertilizer are needed. Investment must be increased. This is the supply response.

He then failed, however, to challenge the “rules of the game” set by the conference organizers, adding: But, there is also the demand response. Some progress has been made. The question is whether there is enough supply to meet demand. There are problems, represented by subsidies, tar-

iffs, and property rights on seeds, which prevent supply from meeting demand. So it is a complex question, we have to look at all of the issues.

In terms of priority, Diouf concluded, immediate measures need to be taken for planting, to allow countries to deal with the immediate crisis.

Behind Closed Doors

At the next press conference, an *EIR* reporter asked former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan a similar question. The press conference had been convened as a signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between the World Food Program, the FAO, and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), with the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa, a Rockefeller Foundation- and Gates Foundation-funded initiative, of which Annan is the chairman. *EIR* pointed to the need for an industrial revolution as the basis for a Green Revolution in Africa, given the drastically inadequate infrastructure development. As Lyndon LaRouche has emphasized, the amount of food that is destroyed after the harvest, by pests and rot, is a big part of the problem.

“When one considers this,” *EIR* stated, “the memory of the great American President Franklin Roosevelt must come to mind, who led such an industrialization program in the U.S. But development of infrastructure and industry requires long-term investment, which in turn, requires long-term financial stability. This has been much discussed recently in light of the blowout of the U.S. housing bubble and the related securities sector. For example, there has been a letter circulating recently in Europe by 14 former prime ministers and finance ministers, calling for a reform of the financial system. Therefore, my question to you is, whether there is a willingness to consider and discuss a Green Revolution in Africa from the standpoint of systemic reform.”

The former secretary-general responded, “You are right!” But then he made clear that he was not willing to commit publicly to one or the other side of the divide between national sovereignty and development, and free-trade, imperial policy.

On the sidelines of the conference, and in the ensuing press availabilities, one of the main subjects of discussion among the delegates was the LaRouche PAC Food Policy Memorandum (see *EIR*, June 6, 2008), which *EIR* was circulating there, and which helped to create an environment in which, particularly the delegations from the smaller nations found the support to resist the pressure from the G-8 nations and the EU.

Setting a New Agenda

Many delegates expressed joy at the presence of associates of LaRouche, as they themselves, being diplomats and

government representatives, did not have the freedom to publicly express themselves concerning the more fundamental aspects of economic policy, which *EIR* is known for having no qualms about raising.

The president of the African Development Bank Group (AfDB), Donald Kaberuka, was asked by *EIR*, whether he saw the willingness in international institutions such as this conference, to consider the food crisis from a systemic standpoint, and from the perspective of the necessary reform of the financial and economic system. He answered: “I think this food crisis has acted like a wake-up call for the whole world, and I think this wake-up call means that we have to re-analyze, to re-think the way we support agriculture. In the developed countries, as well as in the developing countries, there will have to be a rethink of the way we conduct our business.”

The following discussion ensued between *EIR* and Emilia Harahap, Assistant Minister for Institutional Relations and International Cooperation in the Ministry of Agriculture of the Republic of Indonesia:

EIR: What is your view of the outcome of this conference?

Harahap: Well, I think, from this conference, at least all stakeholders will build our recommitment to the importance of agriculture; that is the main point.

EIR: I have been in discussions with many delegations, especially from the developing sector, which expressed that on the one side people are talking about investment; on the other side, there is also a lot of talk of trade liberalization, and concluding the Doha Round of the WTO. Was there any tension around these issues here?

Harahap: I think, there are, of course, two issues: We need to have close cooperation; on the other side, the question is, how to build food security. Not only globally, but starting at the regional, the domestic level, the household level, the national [level]. Then we come to the bigger and bigger scale. Of course, by having this experience of the food crisis, now we realize that one country depends very much on another country, which means that we should create fair trade, for this, and the developed countries—I don’t like to say the developed countries. . . .

EIR: You mean the G-8 nations?

Harahap: Well, what I want to say is that one country cannot impose its power and policies on other countries, because food is the essential basic need. I think one country, even though it be a rich country, cannot let other people die because of lack of food. So the essential thing is the interest of humanity! That’s why I think the Doha Round also has to consider changes. Now, I don’t know. They are still stuck with several issues on the agenda, particularly agriculture.

They have to re-think the situation and deal with it in a more wise manner. We should not let one group try to determine the policies; it would be better if we work together, hand-in-hand, fight for the best solution of how to fulfill food security to better the lives of our people and protect our planet. I think that is the very basic, again, the interest of humanity.

What's Next?

In spite of the good intentions of some participants, the result of the Summit will be seen as totally inadequate in the face of the continuing escalation of the worldwide crisis, since there were no decisive measures taken, that would treat the situation as it should be: as an emergency for all of humanity. The declaration finally adopted by the conference consists mainly of commitments of a far too general nature, and there remains the commitment to biofuels, emphasized by the U.S. delegation in a final statement in the plenary session.

This is a head-long dash into a suicidal policy, although it has been opposed by a group of nations led by Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak. The continued destruction of food for creating fuels is sold to developing countries as a wonderful means to return to prosperity by joining the frenzy. Brazil, in particular, has fallen victim to this trap, as it has a developed sugar cane industry from colonial days, still functioning in much the same way it did then, and therefore it hopes to make it big in the ethanol business. But with the continued decline of food security, the issue will again come to the top of the world's agenda.

A special High-Level Task Force was created to continue the coordination of the UN response to the food crisis. This Task Force does not have any representative value, as it is linked to the IMF and World Bank, in which it is the developed, rich countries which have the last word, whereas the FAO still has a "one country-one vote" framework. All of this is a great disappointment, given the hope for real change with which many had come to Rome, and with which many around the world watched the proceedings there.

Director-General Diouf reflected this reality in the final press conference, noting that, with 181 countries represented, consensus would never be easy to reach, and one should not expect universal solutions in this context.

This will not be the case, of course, until there is willingness to admit the total and irreparable bankruptcy of the current system, as LaRouche has consistently and correctly forecast. Effective structural, systemic reforms have to be devised from this standpoint.

And the foundation has certainly been laid for this to occur, with the strategic alliance of the powerful nations of Russia, China, and India coming together to resist the plans of the representatives of British imperial policy, as the crisis unfolds.

What They Said at the FAO World Food Summit

The following short summaries provide a sampling of the official presentations in Rome at the June 3-5 High-Level Conference on World Food Security: The Challenges of Climate Change and BioEnergy, of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization. The excerpts are grouped by theme.

Food: A Human Right

Egypt: President Hosni Mubarak spoke of "the inalienable human right to food and life," and decried the biofuels craze, saying that "agricultural crops [should be used] as food for human beings, not as fuel for engines."

China: Minister of Agriculture Sun Zhengcai identified the causes of the current global food crisis as, "the continuous sharp rise of international oil prices, the general increase of production costs, the rapid growth of bio-energy, the rising demand for food, reduced production caused by national disasters, and the manipulation of speculative capitals."

Sun added, "Food security for all is a fundamental human right in modern societies. The continuous growth of global demand for food is an irreversible trend for a pretty long time to come. Eradication of hunger and malnutrition, proper increase of food consumption levels, and steady improvement of living standards is not only a common wish and justified right of the people in the developing world, but also a main indicator of the world's development and progress. . . . There are still 820 million undernourished people in the developing world. The surge of food prices has caused them great suffering and could lead to further social riots and political unrest, putting the permanent peace and common prosperity at risk.

"The basic function of agriculture is to satisfy food demand for human survival and development. The production of grain-based biofuels has driven up grain utilization, exacerbated the already tight food supply and demand balance, with potential to trigger off more and far-reaching problems. . . . We will adhere to the principle of 'no competition for grains with people and no competition for land with grains,' putting stringent control over the production of biofuels using feedstock such as maize and oilseeds, while at the same time promoting biofuel production using crop straws and stalks, or by way of proper expansion of energy crops.

"China is committed to contributing to the development of world food and agriculture. . . . China is taking advantage of its agricultural expertise such as hybrid rice to assist other