

Agriculture by Susan B. Cohen

The ghost of Henry Kissinger

Administration 'confrontationists' are stalling efforts to lift the Soviet grain embargo.

Now that the new administration has initiated a cleanup at the U.S. Department of Agriculture, placing an avowed advocate of production agriculture at the helm, it remains to be seen who will actually control farm policy. The way things are shaping up, John Block will not be free to directly tackle the problems facing American agriculture. First, he will have to settle accounts with Alexander Haig, the secretary of state.

The issue will center on the controversial Soviet grain embargo, whose termination was a key Reagan campaign promise. At issue is whether American agriculture will be held hostage to an adventurist foreign policy featuring the "food weapon," in spite of mounting evidence that the embargo has damaged only American farmers.

Secretary Block has already put himself on record recommending that the ban be lifted promptly. Haig, in his Jan. 28 press conference, disagreed. "It's not so simple as it might sound if you are a representative of our agriculture."

As of the Feb. 4 Cabinet meeting, where the issue was first formally discussed by the administration, no decision had been taken by President Reagan. A day earlier, U.S. Trade Representative Bill Brock predicted the decision would take months, and said it should be "linked" with other Soviet-U.S. issues.

Brock asserted that national se-

curity questions are the single most important factor to be considered. President Reagan took the matter out of the hands of the National Security Council at Secretary Block's request.

Following the Cabinet meeting, Sen. Nancy Kassebaum (R-Kans.) announced that the President had scheduled a meeting on the embargo with twelve farm-state senators for Feb. 17, making a decision unlikely before then. "The President recognizes that the twelve farm-state senators have a perspective that is valid on the embargo issue," a spokesman for Kassebaum told the press.

Since Nov. 20, pressure on Reagan has mounted to extend the embargo despite the fact that indications of its actual effectiveness are lacking.

The Heritage Foundation, for example, just sent a study to President Reagan recommending that the embargo be extended and "tightened"—namely, that "other outlets" for Soviet purchase of livestock feed be cut off. This is a prescription for confrontation, not just with Argentina and Australia, but with Western Europe, where France has actively opposed the embargo.

Not surprisingly, this kind of foolish confrontationism against U.S. allies is motivated by the most wildly irresponsible foreign policy delusions concerning relations with potential adversaries, and the belief

that food can be an effective "weapon."

"If meat is scarce and prices are high," the Heritage Foundation fantasizes, "the U.S.S.R. could experience uprisings such as the ones which have occurred recently in Poland."

Back in the real world, the USDA's latest assessment of the embargo has revealed that the Soviets will have imported a total of 34.5 million metric tons of grain from all sources in the "year of the embargo" ending June 30, at least one million tons more than the Soviets themselves had estimated they would need!

Further, while Soviet production reports show that grain production in 1980, though higher than 1979 levels, fell short of projected yields, there is no indication that the Soviets have been forced to scuttle their ambitious livestock program—the target of the embargo, and the focus of the "riots and uprisings" for which the schemers hope.

On Jan. 1, total Soviet livestock population was higher than one year ago. The cattle herd rose from 115.1 million head to 115.5 million (compared to 111 million in 1976). Meat production declined 2 percent from 1979, an indication that slaughter rates were stable to declining.

There are no indications that the difficulties that have confronted Soviet agriculture for years have been decisively exacerbated. In fact, as I reported last week, former Soviet agriculture officials insist that the embargo has given new impetus to the marshaling of additional capital resources to successfully tackle the blocks to expanded productivity.