

Agriculture by Marcia Merry

Not the man for the job

The difference between Richard Lyng and John Block is "more style than substance."

Testimony was presented March 4 in the Senate Agriculture Committee on the matter of the nomination of Richard Lyng as the next secretary of agriculture. Lyng is just the kind of "grey man" that does not evoke controversy in Congress, so there were no sparks flying at the hearing, and confirmation by the committee came on March 5, by voice vote.

Lyng was state agriculture director in California from 1967 to 1969, and served in the USDA during the Nixon administration, and the first four years of the Reagan administration. From 1977 to 1979, Lyng was president of the American Meat Institute.

The state of disarray and collapse of U.S. agriculture as of March 1986 shows that only a "superman" could cope with the USDA job under the disastrous policy direction taken by the administration and Congress. Both government branches have acted under the myths that there are food "surpluses" in the United States, that lowering farm crop prices will promote "competition" on world export markets, and that everything will improve. In fact, serious food shortages will inevitably be the result of the current acreage reduction and farm bankruptcy programs, and world famine and epidemics will be guaranteed.

In the meantime, low crop prices are simply guaranteeing the domination and profits of the major food cartel export houses—Cargill, Bunge, Continental, Louis Dreyfus, André, and the rest.

Testimony to this effect was presented in writing to the Senate Agriculture Committee on March 3 by the National Democratic Policy Commit-

tee. On March 4, the day of the hearing, committee chairman Jesse Helms contrived the time and circumstances for the NDPC to speak in a way intended to play down criticism of the USDA.

Helms invited the NDPC spokesman, Gerald Kopp—a wheatgrower and Democratic Party contender for Congress from North Dakota, to speak soon after 12:00 noon. That is the time when the MUZAK goes on in the Russell Office Building corridors, so no one in the back of the hearing chambers can hear anything.

Just before introducing Mr. Kopp, Senator Helms publicly announced that Richard Lyng was welcome to leave at that time. So, Lyng did not have to meet the NDPC farm leader face to face.

Kopp began his testimony, "I am advising against the confirmation of Richard Lyng as secretary of agriculture, because, based on his previous USDA service record, and his performance to date, he has not shown himself disposed to take on the tasks of reversing the disastrous policies, and moral and bureaucratic breakdown, of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The requirements that the next agriculture secretary must meet include, in particular, the willingness to stop the domination of USDA policies by Cargill, Inc., and similar cartel interests, through the office and channels of influence of Undersecretary of Agriculture Daniel Amstutz. Amstutz himself should be removed from his position on grounds of conflict of interest."

Amstutz joined the USDA in 1983. He had spent 25 years with Cargill,

and then established the commodities trading division of the Wall Street brokerage house, Goldman, Sachs. Since 1983, Amstutz has personally shuttled between Washington and Moscow to guarantee cheap U.S. food exports to the Soviet Union, and at the same time, has collaborated with George Shultz to initiate "food trade war" programs against U.S. allies.

During the Senate confirmation hearing, Lyng deferred to this policy, called euphemistically the "export enhancement program," by announcing that increased farm exports would be his top priority. Next month, for example, the rice "export enhancement" program goes into effect, in which government-owned Commodity Credit Corp. (CCC) rice stocks will be given for free (at taxpayers' expense) to the cartel rice exporters, to undercut farm exports of allies of the United States, like Thailand.

Ironically, the same week as the hearing, the Commodity Credit Corp. requested an emergency \$5 billion authorization from Congress to continue meeting its purchase obligations to farmers.

Lyng testified to the committee that the new five-year farm law, which lowers CCC and all price supports to U.S. farmers, will make their products more competitive. He used heman rhetoric to reassure the committee he would conduct a "hands-on, full-pressure effort" to improve exports, which, he finally added, "would not be easy."

On farm bankruptcies, Lyng lamely commented, "I have a concern and compassion for these people and realize that USDA has a particularly significant role in trying to bring solutions wherever possible."

Perhaps his most accurate statement concerned the difference between himself and the outgoing John Block: It "would be more in style than in substance."