

## Agriculture by Marcia Merry

### Preliminaries to Venice summit

*The plans call for reducing food and farmers, but the grain cartels will be subsidized even more.*

In June, the Venice economic summit meeting of nations will take place, for which the issue of so-called "world food surpluses" was promoted months ago as one of the leading agenda items. In May, there has been a countdown of government meetings—OECD, GATT Food Round, congressional hearings, Strasbourg Parliament—whose deliberations on both sides of the North Atlantic have already resulted in stated commitments to disastrous policies for the West: to reduce food output, and cut supports for farmers.

Just as the Venetians of 500 years ago—pirates parading as City Fathers—forced all of the Mediterranean peoples into food dependency on the Venetian grain merchants, so today policy makers meeting in Venice plan to plunge the entire world into food dependency on a chosen few family-trust commodity companies who are "in on the deal" (Cargill, Bunge, Continental, Nestlé, Armand Hammer's IBP and fertilizer empire, Archer Daniels Midland, Louis Dreyfus, André/Garnac, Unilever, and the rest). The meeting in Venice will ensure that these companies get all the subsidies and concessions they need to dominate world food.

On May 11 and 12, officials of 24 nations of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development met in Paris and agreed to a seven-point program whose results will be to eliminate large numbers of productive farmers, and cause food shortages even in the so-called "industrialized" OECD member countries. The program document calls for phasing out government intervention to maintain national

farm sectors, and for allowing "market signals to influence . . . the orientation of agriculture production." The "market signals" are set by the world food trade cartel.

The final OECD communiqué called for "a progressive and concerted reduction of agricultural support" to farmers. In the short term, the communiqué advised governments to impose limits on farm production, and to stop guaranteeing price levels for farmers. The guidelines advise governments to support farm incomes directly, if necessary, but not through the use of price-support mechanisms.

The week of May 19, the European Parliament met in Strasbourg and approved a package of measures to curb farm support spending in the European Community (EC) this year. Many of the 518 members of the Parliament did not vote, but the message was clear. The vote included backing of a proposal by the European Community Commission to curb production of oil seeds by levying a penalty on oilseed producers, and taxing oilseed imports.

Earlier in May, ministers of the 12 EC nations met in Brussels and agreed to a package of drastic cuts in the Common Agriculture Policy farm income supports, for the ostensible purpose of reducing food "surpluses."

The week of May 4, the new round of GATT meetings began in Geneva, Switzerland. The mandate for the talks—which may proceed for years—is to negotiate ways to police subsidies to farmers of any member nation that supposedly harm other nations' farmers. In the United States, both the House and Senate heard testimony in

May about how to curb food output. For example, a measure was introduced to deny government-subsidized irrigation water to farmers producing crops seen as contributing to food "surpluses."

However, both the House and Senate passed measures to increase the subsidies given to cartel food company exporters, raising the ceiling from \$1.5 billion to \$2.5 billion in the "export enhancement program." Under this sleight-of-hand law, exporters will receive, *for free*, government-held commodities, in exchange for the exporters filling sweetheart discount sales to selected nations. For example, Cargill will get almost \$50 a ton worth of free grain for every ton of wheat it ships to the U.S.S.R.

In protest of these policies, 25,000 farmers from throughout Europe demonstrated May 20 in Brussels, against the EC ministers, calling them "Dictators of Hunger." Slogans included, "The EC Bureaucrats are Killing the German Farmers"; and "Do Not Speak About Surpluses As Long As Millions Are Starving." The demonstration was timed as the EC Agricultural Council "Marathon" negotiations started, in which farm prices are to be lowered.

In the United States, there has been a black-out of this and other farm demonstrations this spring in Europe, reinforcing the idea in the United States that farmers around the world are isolated and helpless. That was the sentiment expressed by Dean Kleckner, the head of the American Farm Bureau Federation, when he went to Geneva, in May to meet with the U.S. ambassador, Michael Samuels, the head of the U.S. trade delegation to GATT. Kleckner said, "We cannot move our [farm] subsidies down unilaterally. There has to be some agreement in the world and, right now, GATT is the only mechanism we have."