

Agriculture by Marcia Merry

German farmers in fighting mood

It has gone unreported here, but Western European farmers have taken to the streets to demand a just food policy.

For most of 1987, the U.S. headline stories on European agriculture news have been about the transatlantic trade war. First there was the conflict over tariffs on U.S. corn exports to Spain; next, President Reagan's vow in Venice to end all farm subsidies. At the end of July, a "pasta war" was narrowly averted, when the European Community agreed to cut subsidies for Italian pasta exports to the United States, and refrain from imposing a tariff on EC imports of U.S. durum wheat.

The unreported story is that government policies on both sides of the Atlantic are imposing hardship conditions on farms to the point of mass shutdowns. A few years ago, U.S. farmers staged mass protests—especially at the time Paul Volcker jacked up farm debt service payments.

But since Washington has ignored these pleas for emergency measures to preserve the farm sector, farmers have not mobilized to continue their demands. Many have been dispossessed, and those still farming are preoccupied with survival.

In Europe, huge farm demonstrations have taken place this year, protesting the orders to cut farm output and income from Brussels and national capitals. There has been an almost total blackout of these actions in the U.S. media. With knowledge of the real situation facing farmers in Europe, and the fight shown by European farmers, American farmers—led by local citizens who have been forced to abandon farming—could potentially renew their activation in the U.S. for

national food emergency measures. Even more important, the non-farm public needs to know about how precarious the food supply is becoming, as control of the production base, food processing, and distribution is concentrated in the hands of the international food cartel companies.

This spring, regional demonstrations brought out hundreds of farmers in towns throughout Denmark and West Germany, culminating in a protest day of tens of thousands in Brussels in mid-June. Ten thousand turned out in Hamburg alone. Large regional conferences are planned for farm cities for after the harvest season this fall, co-sponsored by the Schiller Institute—the pro-NATO, pro-growth policy group founded by Helga Zepp-LaRouche, the German wife of U.S. presidential candidate Lyndon LaRouche.

Typical of the protest spirit in Germany is the annual meeting of the West German Farmers Association, in Nordhausen, the weekend of June 29, whose association president, Baron von Heereman, complained that the Bonn government was not fighting hard enough in Brussels for German farmers' interests. The attendees, wanting more than lobbying and rhetoric, carried the signs of the Schiller Institute: "Give Away the Butter; Store the Bureaucrats!" "Parity Price Forever Helps Consumers and Farmers!" "No to the 35 Liter Week!"

The last sign ridicules the milk output quotas imposed in the past two years to cut production, and also refers

to the government "solution" to industrial unemployment, of cutting weekly work hours from 40 to 35, and "sharing" jobs. The spark to these actions was the continued imposition of farm output and farm income cuts, demanded by the European Community Agriculture Commission, in the name of preventing farm "surpluses."

In reality, the food commodities now in storage in Europe—meat, butter, grain, etc.—do not constitute a "surplus." This is merely the unsold product of farms, which has piled up in depression conditions under which European families cannot afford to buy the quality foods they want, and foreign importers cannot buy because they are burdened by trade and debt conditionalities of the International Monetary Fund.

In addition, the food cartel companies that broker the majority of internal and export food trade, have a political motive to use these European food stocks for discount sales of meat and butter to the Soviet Union. The big-name food brokers, like Toepfer in Hamburg, know that the food "surplus" propaganda is intended for the gullible public.

Farmers are supposed to believe that the reason they get low prices from the cartels, far below costs of production, is that there is such a large "surplus" that it depresses the market. The cartels manipulate Brussels policy so that the EC budget is used to pay farmers a certain amount (called a "subsidy," which is decreasing) for their unsold product. Then the cartels obtain the same goods from EC storage, for even less, and broker sweetheart deals to Moscow. The farmers and the EC public are the losers. The cartels get the subsidy.

In the United States, this swindle is called "export enhancement," and has just been renewed by Congress.