

Floods, bugs portend Soviet food crisis

by Rachel Douglas

"The food problem . . . perhaps the sorest point in the life of society, the most acute problem."

Those words from the keynote report to the 19th All-Union Conference of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, read to the conference by Mikhail Gorbachov on June 28, were dramatized as that event continued. "The workers are asking," cried V.A. Yarin, a rolling mill operator and conference delegate, "where is *perestroika*? The situation concerning food supplies in the stores is as poor as it was before. . . . There was no meat before, and there is none now. And as for consumer goods, they seem to have disappeared altogether."

Also in late June, reports began to come out of the U.S.S.R., suggesting that the already severe food shortages there will be compounded by unusual conditions in the main Soviet grain-growing areas this year.

In view of the drought in the United States and how it will affect the Soviet ability to purchase food abroad, this prospect points to the probability of even greater social and political explosions inside the Soviet bloc than have already occurred this year.

According to *Oilworld*, the Hamburg source on oilseed production, Soviet crops are threatened by very bad insect infestations. In all the major growing areas—the Ukraine, Moldavia, the North Caucasus, the Central Black Soil Region, and the Volga—there has been "an outbreak of insect pests to an extent never seen before. Warm weather encouraged insect breeding and the larvae will sizably affect plants and plant growth."

On July 7, Moscow *Pravda* reported that some of these regions have suffered heavy damage from flooding. Writing from Krasnodar Krai (territory), a prime grain-growing region in southern Russian north of the Caucasus, *Pravda*'s correspondent said, "You cannot look without anguish and sympathy at the fertile Kuban [river valley] fields, deceptively golden with ripe barley and wheat. When you come closer, the grain is in water almost up to the ears. The sugar beet and sunflower, vegetable and alfalfa crops, orchards and vegetable gardens will die."

As much as 300,000 hectares (1 ha. = 2.47

flooded in Krasnodar, which is nearly 0.5% of the land planted in grain crops in the entire Russian Republic, and it is some of the most productive. The crops on one-third of the flooded fields "have died."

Food protests

In early June, the agriculture daily *Selskaya Zhizn* (*Rural Life*) reported that Moscow was a city of empty meat counters, devoid even of horsemeat-pork mix sausage. The situation has become even more acute in outlying towns.

The city of Kuibyshev, on the Volga River, was the scene of a demonstration by 10,000 people on June 22. Calling for the ouster of the local party chief, a leader of the demonstration, Agence France Presse reported, said that his failing was to have permitted food shortages, lawlessness, and "a critical situation in agriculture." The same week, as *EIR* has reported, saw 50,000 people march in the Ukrainian city of Lvov, in protest of horrendous food shortages there.

A discussion published June 5 in the weekly *Moscow News* revealed that consumers in another western area of the U.S.S.R., Belorussia, have suffered from eating food contaminated by the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear power plant fire—because that was already all there was, even then. Economist Gavriil Popov said, "The wife of my distant relative living in Belorussia [downwind from Chernobyl] was expecting her first child. During a check-up at the polyclinic she showed signs of having radiation sickness. . . . It was supposed that radioactive food was the cause. Indeed, they had bought food products at the local market. Why did the would-be mother take the risk? Didn't she realize? Of course, she did. But state shops had long stopped selling meat and vegetables."

Grab for grain

The July 4

Party Conference decided to convene a party Central Committee plenum in late July, in preparation for which a committee of three Politburo members is supposed "to prepare additional measures . . . to increase the production and improve the supplies of foodstuffs to the population."

From shipping and farm sources in Europe and the United States, it is clear that one quick measure has already been taken: to grab every bit of grain for sale in the West. In early July, reports originating with London shippers came in, that the Soviets had made a million-ton off-season purchase of American corn. European grain traders were astonished, that the Russians would buy large volumes of grain just before negotiations with Washington (held starting July 7) on a new five-year grain accord. Many hold the view that the purchases mean a level of desperation is being reached, over food supplies in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union itself. On July 6, the Danish national Farmers' Organization reported that 150,000 tons of feedgrain, sold for export out of the Danish portion of European Community Intervention Stocks, were destined for customers in Eastern Europe.