

# East Germans form association for independent agriculture

Rosa Tennenbaum

Have you read that there is no interest in East Germany in private agriculture? Well, that is clearly the hope of many politicians, including some in the West. But, in fact, the exact opposite is true: All those who have remained in agriculture in East Germany after 40 years of terror are now considering how to make themselves independent. They are attempting to find out what conditions, such as taxes and the cost of production, exist in the Federal Republic of Germany, and are calculating whether they will have the basis for existence, given the land they have. How great the interest in free agriculture actually is, was demonstrated impressively at the founding conference of the Association of German Farmers (VDL), which took place on June 16 in East Berlin. Since only a small space was available, the association had to strictly limit the number of participants to 300. Nonetheless, 600 came, and, under normal circumstances, there would have been easily double that number.

In February, the board of the State Collective Farm (LPG) changed the name of the "Union of Mutual Farm Assistance" (VdgB), the farm association that was founded by the ruling Socialist Unity Party (SED) in the 1950s as the instrument of collectivization, to the Farmers Association of the German Democratic Republic. They have been attempting to build themselves up as the only representation for agriculture—with the same old program. They intend that the LPG will survive, that large-scale agriculture will remain the dominant form in East Germany. Nothing is to change in the German Democratic Republic (G.D.R.), only the word "private" was to be inscribed on everything.

Gerd Winzer, who was elected in the afternoon as president of the VDL, expressed in his speech the disappointment of farmers in the following words: "It must not be, I thought at that time, that the quiet revolution should pass over agriculture without leaving a trace. I began to look around for people who thought the same as I, and found some here and there. Our conviction was, we have to take matters into our hands, waiting would ruin everything." Thus, at the beginning of the year, they began, moving slowly, to call the association into existence. At the founding conference for all of East

Germany, there were already organizations in every state, as well as district and local associations.

Winzer discussed the most recent history of the G.D.R. He described how forced collectivization led to many tragedies. Thousands of farmers were forced off the land to avoid ending up in the prisons of the communists. Agriculture was thus robbed of its most capable individuals. Farmers were forced into the LPGs, where they had to work like hired hands under the leadership of political cadre who often knew nothing about agriculture. East German agriculture, which before the war was among the most productive in Europe, was devastated and is today the picture of misery.

Farmers not only had to bring their land, their cattle, and all their buildings and machinery into the LPG; they even had to pay for their forced entry. In total, the capital (called the investment contribution) that farmers had to bring into the LPG was 5,000-7,000 marks per hectare. Farmers received no interest on this capital, received no rent on their land, and the buildings that the LPG used were not maintained. Barns were used until the roofs fell in on the cattle and were then abandoned. Today, farmers are literally standing in the ruins: Their fields are in bad condition, access roads have been destroyed, and so forth.

Winzer urgently warned in his speech against hanging on to present structures. Cartelization and concentration are the greatest danger since the LPGs offer a profitable object for Western corporations. "Here, in one fell swoop, they could gain control of 6,000 or more hectares. If a Western corporation can't do that, it will take them years and they will spend millions on trials." The second possibility is that the LPGs "will turn themselves into corporations and then take action against their own members like wolves in sheep's clothing." Additionally, the LPGs are not competitive: "An LPG with 6,000 hectares must pay at least 1.2-1.5 million deutsche-marks (DM) in rent. Over the 30 years that they used the land without compensation, that comes to DM45 million. With that, things can be managed, and yet the LPG couldn't do it," he said, referring to the miserable agricultural condition that two-thirds of the LPGs are in.

## Property must be restored

The most urgent demand of the association is the immediate and total restitution of property. In so doing, the many debts that burden the LPGs must not be portioned out among the farmers. "We entered without debts, and we want out without debts," Winzer said, to the applause of his listeners. Members who wish to leave on July 1 must be able to take this year's harvest with them since they also entered with the harvest. The LPG law must be immediately canceled, the national cooperatives broken up and dissolved. "We want a renaissance of free agricultural structures," he said.

The young president (Winzer is 35 years old) attacked the numerous attempts by LPG officers to save their "stolen property and their power." A favorite method now is to turn the LPGs into corporations. Agricultural workers (members who brought in no land) have to pay DM3,500 and farmers have to bring in seven hectares of land. A bank, however, would loan DM168,000 on the seven hectares. "Landowners are thus to bring in 96 times what those who bring in no land have to pay. That is simply fraud."

Return of the land and the buildings is the foundation of free farms. The LPGs have to refund the investment contributions and additionally pay a lump sum amount per hectare and per year as rent. These amounts will come to hundreds of thousands of marks even for small farms, and will be a welcome assistance in starting up for private farms. "If these demands are met, then all the LPGs are bankrupt," Winzer said at the meeting. Further, he demanded from the government a reconstruction program for farms, a credit program, assistance with the development of machines and advisory groups, educational programs, and so forth. "The future of Germany can only be with free farmers having a maximum of 200-300 hectares of land. That is also an eminently important political question since, as Freiherr vom Stein earlier stated, whoever has land, ultimately has power."

Winzer's speech was unexpectedly interrupted by a visit from Prime Minister Lothar de Maiziere. In a brief greeting, he thanked the farmers for participating in the revolution, and because they had made sure "that during the revolution bread did not become scarce." With their votes in the elections they had, additionally, made clear that they wanted German unity. He encouraged the farmers "to join together their usually somewhat quiet voices" and to make their justified demands with pride.

## Germany's back single-farmer farms

The East German Agricultural Minister, Dr. Peter Pollak, said that his participation in the founding conference was not an exercise of duty: "I quite positively welcome the founding of this association." The shared statement of the two German governments on property "had essentially facilitated my presence here." Three days before, Bonn and East Berlin had agreed, after lengthy negotiations, that the post-1950 expropriation would be countermanded. This will create the founda-

tion for the restoration to owners of their rights. There was agreement that land and buildings must be given back. The goal of the governments is "a multiply structured agriculture based on agrarian freedom."

The governments intend "to comprehensively support single-farmer farms." The cooperatives would be required to return property and to support members in the construction of independent existences, he assured them. On questions of European Community (EC) market structures, the private farms are to be "placed on a fully equal basis" with the cooperatives. The association will be a "welcome partner" in the reform of agriculture. Understandably, there was a great sense of relief among the audience after this speech since, hitherto, the attitude of the government on this question has been extremely equivocal.

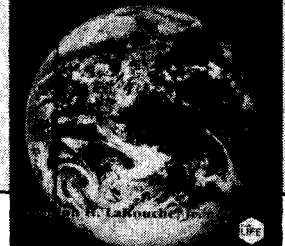
The vice chairman of the association, Ulrich Orling, was one of those who had to pay a high price for forced collectivization. Since his farm was over 100 hectares, he was attacked as a "large farmer," and thrown into prison by the communists. Orling recalled that the association very quickly formed in the states, and was already the target of attacks from opponents. He himself learned that painfully. The Farmers Union (DdGB) slandered him with absurd accusations. Orling was forced to answer with a lawsuit, and decid-

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ed, because of this controversy, to withdraw his application for the presidency.

He put forward, as one of the most important tasks of the association, "to clarify the value of land to individuals." Orling calculated the debts of the LPGs as on the average DM2,500 per hectare. The widespread tactic of the LPGs, to pay out the investment contributions in the weeks before the currency union (higher amounts are converted at only a 1:2 ratio) "are for us only a payment on account since free availability determines property, and that only begins on July 2." The surplus of workers in agriculture should be deployed in a focused way for improvement of infrastructure, the Han-over-Berlin railroad should be built more quickly and improved, and more roads are urgently needed, Orling said.

### Schiller Institute made this possible

The Schiller Institute, a policy think-tank founded in 1984 by Helga Zepp-LaRouche, has vigorously supported the development of the association from the beginning. How important this support was and is, was made clear in many speeches. The vice chairman of the Thuringian state association, Heinrich Beier, interrupted his speech to say, "I would like to use this opportunity to sincerely thank the Schiller Institute for what you have done for us. The association could not exist without that and your publications." Peter Orling also expressed his thanks in similar words.

Rosa Tennenbaum of the Schiller Institute appealed in her speech to the association not to simply submit to EC guidelines, but also to defend the interests of the members in this matter. There is every reason to think that the G.D.R. will take extensive acreage out of cultivation and slaughter up to a million cattle while the supply situation grows worse on the borders of the G.D.R. The agricultural policy of the EC should be changed, and this association could do much on this, since it is "not corrupted," she said.

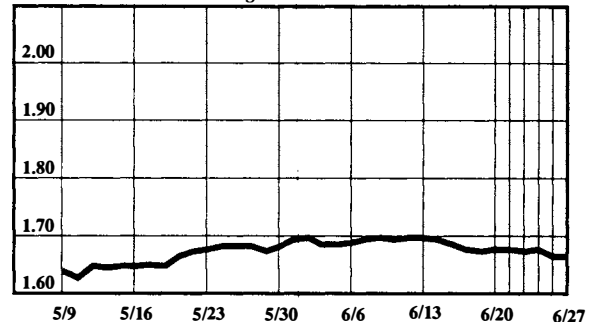
The mood of the participants was militant. In the discussion, the demand was made that the goal of the association must be to eliminate the VdgB. One member related how his 44-hectare farm had been completely ruined by the LPG. The LPG law created a foolish license for the cooperatives, but on July 1 "when the law is abolished we can finally put a check on them." Some months ago, he filed a suit against the SED party and the government with the superior public prosecutor of the G.D.R. "because of coercion and extortion according to Paragraph 129 and Paragraph 127 of the penal code" committed against him during the forced collectivization of 1960. He still has not received an answer.

Despite opposition and all the intimidation, there is a broad movement for private agriculture in the G.D.R. Forty years of suppression and terror have only made the wish for independent activity in free and personal responsibility more urgent. "We want to be what we always were," Heinrich Beier summarized the desire of those present: "We want to be free farmers."

## Currency Rates

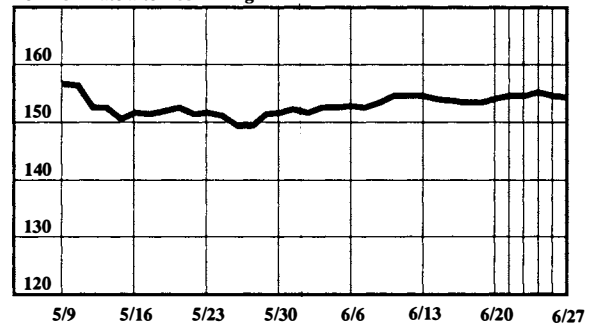
### The dollar in deutschemarks

New York late afternoon fixing



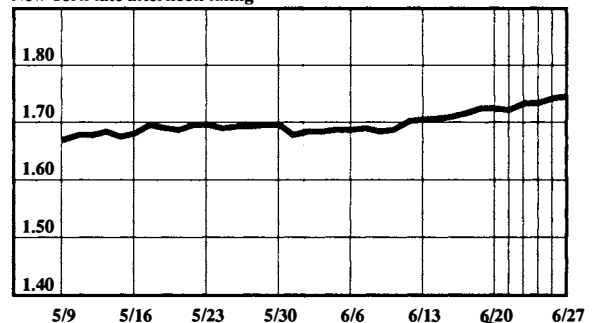
### The dollar in yen

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