

## Agriculture by Suzanne Rose

### Farmers oppose free trade

*A delegation of farmers from the U.S. warned Mexican farmers that free trade has "sent us to hell."*

**A**gricultural free trade, the Bush administration's answer to the international bankers' demand for more usury tribute to shore up the collapsing financial system, by slashing world agriculture income, is meeting significant opposition from farmers around the world. Its North American incarnation, the proposed North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) among Canada, the United States, and Mexico, has been under attack from American and Canadian farm leaders who traveled to a conference in Mexico the week of Nov. 18. Farmers around the world have mounted demonstrations against the conclusion of a free trade agreement on agriculture among the members of the U.N.-sponsored General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT).

The Mexico City daily newspaper *La Jornada* reports that a delegation of American farmers and farm leaders held a press conference in Mexico City to denounce free trade, after attending a conference in Mexico City called "Trinational Encounter on Agriculture." They met with Mexican farmers, who will lose their farms as a result of President Carlos Salinas de Gortari's commitment to turn over the Mexican economy to the international bankers and grain cartels at the request of the U.S. government, under NAFTA.

Salinas intends to allow private bankers and cartels to buy up the peasant landholdings which have been guaranteed by the Mexican Constitution since 1917. Up to 20 million Mexican peasants will be displaced,

from a combination of privatization and the flooding of the country with food grown more cheaply in the U.S., once import barriers are removed under the proposed NAFTA.

Kansas Farmer's Union President Ivan Wyatt traveled to meet these farmers in their homes. Wyatt said he was very moved by meeting these farmers personally, and stressed that it was important for Americans to realize that these were real people who would lose their livelihood if Mexican free trade reforms are implemented.

At the press conference, the farm leaders, including delegations from Kansas, Oklahoma, Idaho, and Canada, described the agricultural crisis and warned Mexicans, "If our agricultural sector is being presented as the model to follow in Europe or Mexico, you'd better realize that in the U.S., small and medium-sized farmers are being destroyed. Our business is a disaster; they've sent us to hell."

One example U.S. farmers gave of how the cartels control production as a result of free trade, was the following: "They give [the farmer] 3.2¢ on the dollar for a bushel of wheat, but in the supermarket, that bread costs \$1.29. That's what we get for all our work; the rest is paid to the middleman and the transnational company."

In Europe and Asia, the negotiations for an agricultural free trade agreement under GATT, led by the United States, which seeks to slash world agricultural production and income, have met mounting opposition from farmers. About 400,000 farmers

demonstrated in Rome on Nov. 23. They called for the replacement of the Italian agriculture minister and threatened to bring down the government if it continued to support GATT and European Community proposals for reducing agricultural price supports and removing the country's protection against cheap imports. A European-wide mobilization is expected at the EC summit which begins in Maastricht, The Netherlands, on Dec. 10.

Hoping to slow the momentum of French farm resistance to free trade, which has continued since the mobilization of 200,000 farmers in Paris on Oct. 30, the Mitterrand government unveiled a plan for \$178 million in agricultural subsidies to ease the transition to the U.S. agricultural system demanded by the officials of GATT. The GATT demands are under negotiation now by EC ministers who are trying to "reform" the Common Agriculture Policy of the EC to please the bankers. The farmer will be put on a government dole in return for allowing his prices to be cut so that the cartels can buy from him more cheaply.

French farmers have been maintaining a resistance while their leaders negotiate with the government, by maintaining checkpoints in vans to keep out illegally imported cheap food. They were able to pressure the government to send 100 metric tons of meat to Moscow and the Russian Federation in exchange for oil, an action which dramatizes the real food shortages which exist in the former Soviet Union and around the world, contrary to the free trade propaganda that "surpluses" must be eliminated by cutting production and incomes.

On Nov. 26, an estimated 18,000 South Korean farmers, students, and their allies rallied in Seoul to oppose government imports of foreign rice under the proposed GATT agreement.