

EIRFeature

World food summit told: Free market economics is murder

by Marcia Merry Baker

On Nov. 13-17 in Rome, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization hosted the World Summit on Food Security, attended by about 10,000 people, representing 86 governments, hundreds of private organizations, and some 4,000 media. From the reports at the event, the vast scope of today's food shortages and hunger was made clear. The FAO estimates that 800 million people in the world are going hungry. In addition, the need for emergency food relief in Central Africa, underlines the urgency of mobilizing both food production and short-term aid.

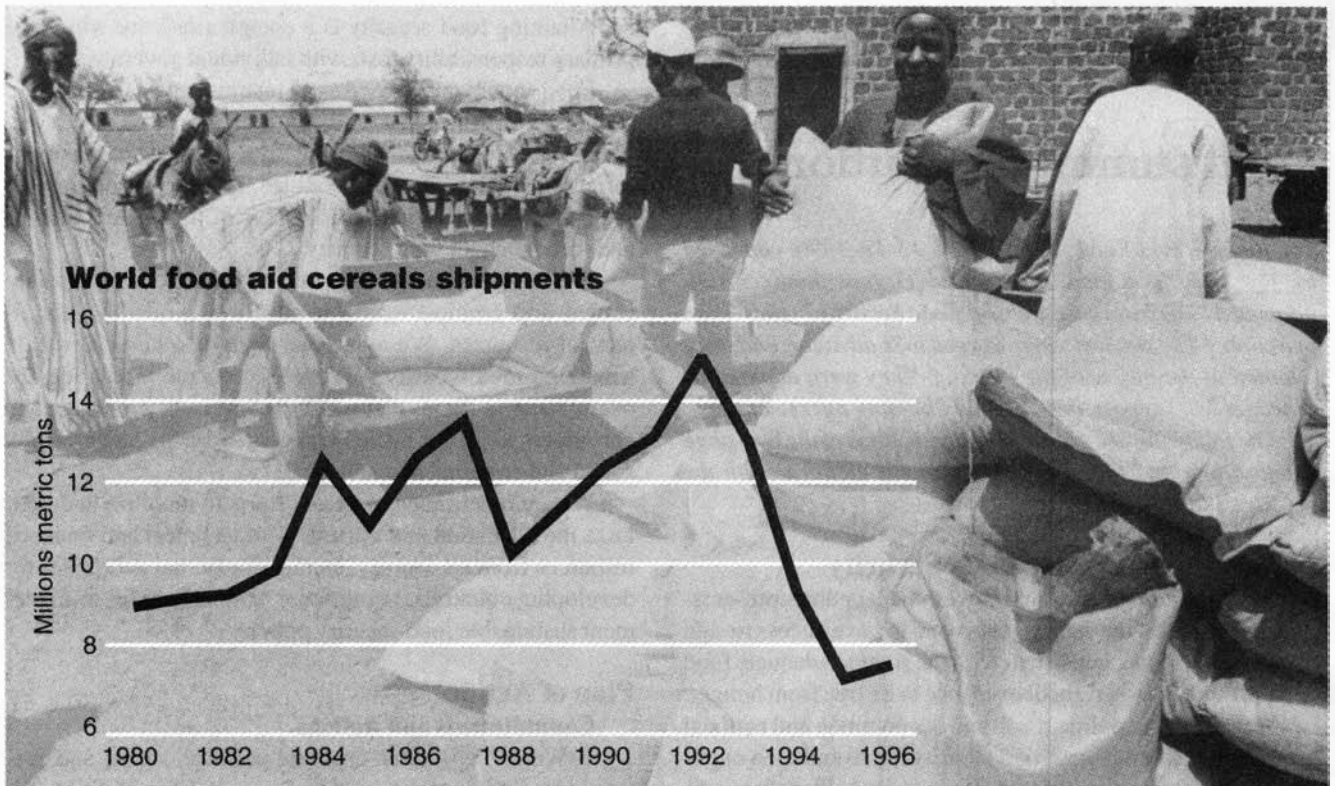
Yet the lines were drawn, with two sides to the question, does every person have a right to eat?

At pre-summit speeches in Rome on Nov. 12, even before the official opening, Pope John Paul II, and FAO director Jacques Diouf, who is from Senegal, stressed both the moral necessity, and the availability of resources, for the task of relieving hunger, and defending life and economic dignity.

The opposition to this idea of the "right to eat," was put forth by the "right to free markets" ideology, represented in Rome by the free trade planks in the official UN FAO "Rome Declaration" and Action Plan, which were prepared in advance of the summit, and adopted by acclamation of the attending governments. These documents, and also the official "Country Paper" submitted by the United States, reflect the demands of the food cartel mega-companies now cashing in on growing scarcity of commodities, for profit and political control, over and above the right of any nation-state, or person, to produce and consume food.

Politically, and financially, these cartels are interlinked with mostly London-centered interests. The next occasion for furthering their "markets-based economics" agenda, is the World Trade Organization first ministerial conference in Singapore on Dec. 9-14, where 123 nations will be represented.

In fact, continuing the campaign for "market-based" economic policies—giving over power to these cartels to plunder, as the world financial system itself is blowing out, and as physical economies break down—amounts to a murder decree.



For example, the annual amount of world food aid of grains for 1996 is likely to be only 7.5 million tons—down by *half* from past levels of 13-15 million tons a year; yet there are more people who need help. Why is no more food aid forthcoming? The explanation, in accepted free trade talk, is that the United States and other nations that are sources for food exports, have switched to the “market-based” policy of no longer keeping food stocks for public uses (emergencies, humanitarian needs, and so on).

And what is said to the poor and hungry? “Market economics” tells nations to cut and stabilize their population, in order to reduce hunger. Thus, murder.

The problem is not overpopulation

On Nov. 12, Pope John Paul II denounced this view in a pre-summit gathering in Rome, stressing that solutions can be devised to end hunger. “The specter of hunger and malnutrition is truly an offense against the Creator’s image in every human being. This is especially so when hunger is the consequence of the misuse of resources . . . or when it results from the rigid application of the profit principle to the detriment of solidarity and cooperation for the benefit of all who make up the human family.”

In particular, the pontiff attacked the argument that a growing population causes poverty and hunger by exhausting resources. He said, “Demography alone does not explain the inadequate distribution of food resources. We must put aside the sophist’s view that when there are many, one is con-

demned to be poor. A numerous population can become the source of development because it implies the exchange and demand of goods. It would be illusory to believe that an arbitrary stabilization of the world population, or even its reduction, could solve the problem of hunger directly.”

The fact that the means exist for feeding a growing population was shown a few weeks before the Rome summit, by a “World Food Prize” symposium, “Food Security for the 21st Century,” on Oct. 19 in Des Moines, Iowa, which brought together individuals involved in leading past Green Revolutions, and planning future breakthroughs. A new “super rice” promises yield increases of 25%.

In Iowa, former World Bank President Robert McNamara even spoke of the potential for 8 billion people in 25 years. FAO director Jacques Diouf participated in the Iowa discussions. Then, back in Rome, Diouf singled out China for praise, saying that the nation has 22% of the world’s people, and 7% of the world’s arable land, but the “will and capacity of the government” to invest in food production shows you can make a “miracle.” In Rome, Diouf stressed emergency aid to Africa.

In this feature, we review U.S. and cartel policies causing scarcity and suffering, in contrast to the potential to feed billions, shown by the promise for new Green Revolutions. We also look at the strategic crisis of food shortages in Russia and the CIS nations. In a future issue, we will look at the farm sector breakdown in Australia and New Zealand—once source nations for food surpluses.

Food summit resolutions

The Rome World Food Summit, Nov. 13-17, 1996, convened by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), adopted a "Declaration on World Food Security," and "Plan of Action." The two texts were agreed to in advance, and were adopted at the outset of the meeting. They were adopted as "pledges" of support, not as legally binding agreements.

The following are excerpts of key sections of the two-page Declaration, and the seven commitments elaborated in the 30-page Plan of Action.

Declaration on World Food Security

We, the Heads of State and Government or our representatives . . . reaffirm the right of everyone to have access to safe and nutritious food, consistent with the right to adequate food and the fundamental right of everyone to be free from hunger.

We pledge our political will and our common and national commitment to achieving food security for all and to an ongoing effort to eradicate hunger in all countries, with an immediate view to reducing the number of undernourished people to half their present level no later than 2015.

We consider it intolerable that more than 800 million people throughout the world, and particularly in developing countries, do not have enough food to meet their basic nutritional needs. This situation is unacceptable. . . . The problems of hunger and food insecurity have global dimensions and are likely to persist, and even increase dramatically in some regions, unless urgent, determined and concerted action is taken, given the anticipated increase in the world's population and the stress on natural resources.

We reaffirm that a peaceful, stable, and enabling political, social, and economic environment is the essential foundation which will enable States to give adequate priority to food security and poverty eradication. Democracy, promotion and protection of all human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the right to development, and the full and equal participation of men and women are essential for achieving sustainable food security for all.

Poverty is a major cause of food insecurity and sustainable progress in poverty eradication is critical to improve access to food. Conflict, terrorism, corruption, and environmental degradation also contribute significantly to food insecurity. Increased food production, including staple food, must be undertaken. This should happen within the framework of sustainable management of natural resources, elimination of unsustainable patterns of consumption and production, particularly in industrialized countries, and early stabilization of the world population. . . .

Attaining food security is a complex task for which the primary responsibility rests with individual governments. . . .

Food should not be used as an instrument for political and economic pressure. We reaffirm the importance of international cooperation and solidarity as well as the necessity of refraining from unilateral measures, not in accordance with the international law and the Charter of the United Nations and that endanger food security. . . .

We must encourage generation of employment and incomes, and promote equitable access to productive and financial resources. We agree that trade is a key element in achieving food security. We agree to pursue food trade and overall trade policies that will encourage our producers and consumers to utilize available resources in an economically sound and sustainable manner. . . .

We are determined to make efforts to mobilize and optimize the allocation and utilization of technical and financial resources from all sources, including external debt relief for developing countries, to reinforce national actions to implement sustainable food security policies.

Plan of Action

Commitments and Actions

1. We will ensure an enabling political, social, and economic environment designed to create the best conditions for the eradication of poverty and for durable peace, based on full and equal participation of women and men, which is most conducive to achieving sustainable food security for all.

2. We will implement policies aimed at eradicating poverty and inequality and improving physical and economic access by all, at all times, to sufficient, nutritionally adequate and safe food and its effective utilization.

3. We will pursue participatory and sustainable food, agriculture, fisheries, forestry and rural development policies and practices . . . which are essential to adequate and reliable food supplies at the household, national, regional and global levels, and combat pests, drought and desertification, considering the multifunctional character of agriculture.

4. We will strive to ensure that food, agricultural trade and overall trade policies are conducive to fostering food security for all through a fair and market-oriented world trade system.

5. We will endeavor to prevent and be prepared for natural disasters and man-made emergencies and to meet transitory and emergency food requirements in ways that encourage recovery, rehabilitation, development, and a capacity to satisfy future needs.

6. We will promote optimal allocation and use of public and private investments to foster human resources, sustainable food, agriculture, fisheries and forestry systems, and rural development. . . .

7. We will implement, monitor, and follow up this Plan of Action at all levels in cooperation with the international community.