

## The long arm of FEMA: a 13-state dictatorship

by Kathy Burdman

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has set up a financial dictatorship over the dozens of disaster zones now proliferating across the United States. The FEMA operation is modeled on the austerity policies of the International Monetary Fund, which has reduced the populations of Asia and Africa to starvation through its stringent control over international credit.

Documents uncovered from recent congressional testimony on FEMA operations in the flood-and-hurricane-stricken U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico reveal that FEMA, like the IMF, exercises strict "conditionality" over all economic programs in disaster and potential disaster areas. Cities and states must carry out whatever economic austerity measures FEMA dictates "as a condition for any federal loan or grant" by FEMA. If FEMA's conditions are not met, relief funds are withheld and the population is left to fend for itself.

### Where FEMA operates

FEMA is applying this economic straitjacket in each of the dozen states into which it has moved during the past few weeks. With President Carter's declaration May 23 making the entire state of Washington a Federal Emergency Area in the wake of the Mount St. Helena volcano eruption, FEMA has taken effective control over an entire state government for the first time since it was established in April 1979.

Speaking of Robert Stevens, the FEMA official who

has been appointed Federal Coordinating Officer for Washington State, a FEMA source said yesterday, "He has sole and total federal authority in the area. Under federal law PL-93-288, the President has appointed him with total control over all federal activities. He can ask anyone to do anything, go anywhere, requisition anything, military-style. If he wants a C-140 transport plane, he gets it. If he tells some general to get the hell out of there, the general gets the hell out. He has very centralized control."

During the past few weeks, FEMA has extended its long arm nationwide. FEMA's complete control over the U.S. Air Force, Marine, and National Guard processing of the more than 80,000 Cuban refugees flooding into Key West, Florida has been extended to the military sites to which FEMA is relocating the refugees—areas as farflung as Ft. Indiantown Gap, Pennsylvania; Ft. Chaffee, Arkansas; and Ft. McCoy, Wisconsin. During this same period, FEMA has taken control over Niagara County in upstate New York's Buffalo region, site of the Love Canal chemical spill controversy; Cameron County, Louisiana, site of the Lake Charles floods; as well as tornado areas in Michigan and Missouri. The Carter administration has declared all of these "Federal Disaster Areas."

FEMA Director John Macy, Jr., in an interview with the *Washington Star* May 26, used what he called this "convergence of a number of major disasters" to call for

an increase in FEMA's annual budget from its current congressional allocation of \$120 million in fiscal 1980, to over \$725 million. FEMA "has called for two supplemental appropriations to handle the calamities," the *Star* reports.

### 'Contingent upon receipt'

FEMA's close coordination with the National Guard in all disaster areas, which has included joint FEMA/Guard operations also in the Cuban refugee case, makes especially plain the military character of FEMA's economic demands.

FEMA's conditionality policy is spelled out in a series of letters and documents written by Brigadier General Joseph E. Burke, Territorial Coordinating Officer of the Virgin Islands National Guard, as part of the 1979 "Disaster Mitigation Plan" for the Virgin Islands, submitted to early May House Appropriations Committee hearings. As the appended letters make clear, a "Hazard Mitigation Task Force" was set up under FEMA and the National Guard which wrote an entire economic program for the Virgin Islands. FEMA had to be satisfied that the Islands' economy was made safe for disasters before they occurred.

This meant that a whole program for "safe land use," "construction practices," and the general economy of the islands such as the location of industry, had to be submitted for FEMA's approval. As the documents state, "The full disbursement of disaster funds by FEMA is contingent upon receipt" of these plans to FEMA's specifications.

Other documents submitted to the House Appropriations Committee at the time by U.S. Resident Commissioner of Puerto Rico Baltasar Corrada make clear that in return for a mere \$38 million in federal disaster assistance aid due Puerto Rico, wracked by Hurricanes David and Frederick during past months, Puerto Rico has enacted a similar program, "complying with all the administrative requirements to obtain the necessary funds."

FEMA Director Macy, in his *Washington Star* interview, also explained that FEMA reserves the right to withhold disaster aid from areas whose economy it does not wish rebuilt, much as the IMF has withheld all international financing of food and vital necessities, as well as industrial reconstruction aid, from countries such as Cambodia, Zaire, and scores of others whose populations have been left to die. The center city ghetto of Miami, razed in the recent race riots, will not be rebuilt, FEMA has decided; just as the inner cities of Detroit, Watts, Los Angeles, and Harlem, New York have been deliberately left to die after the riots of the 1960s. The Miami inner city "will not qualify for designation as a disaster area," Macy stated.

## Thousands relocated by FEMA's latest eruptions

**Cuban refugee relocation:** Over 80,000 Cuban refugees, at the rate of 2,000-3,000 per day during the month of May, have been arriving at Fort Walton Beach and other U.S. military bases near Key West Florida, from which they have been flown as far west as Ft. McCoy near LaCrosse, Wisconsin.

Tom Casey has been appointed Federal Coordinator and is in Miami with a huge team of FEMA workers. This team includes a large number of "FEMA Reservists," a source said, "volunteers who have been recruited by FEMA before to work on emergencies and like it. We recruit these people through CETA programs, through state employment offices—anywhere, as long as they're bilingual."

The "FEMA Reservists" are the likely agitators who have caused a mass outbreak of riots in every camp, foreshadowing the need to eventually bring FEMA control into entire areas of Florida, Arkansas, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin to "maintain order."

**Volcano in Washington:** In Washington FEMA head Robert Stevens has total control. Stevens was hurriedly moved up to Washington from his post in San Francisco, where his California FEMA team not so coincidentally had just completed during April a full-scale simulation of a massive 8.3 Richter-scale earthquake in San Francisco and Los Angeles and entire populations relocated to the surrounding areas. Stevens may soon get control over areas of Idaho and Montana where ash is spreading.

In Washington, FEMA has complete control over all the operations of the U.S. Geological Survey, the Department of Transportation, the Department of Agriculture, and the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

**New York's Love Canal:** In Niagara County, New York, FEMA Region II, New York State Director Rita Meyninger, who ran the New York City transit strike this spring, has been appointed federal coordinator for the Love Canal disaster.

Love Canal, where the residents assert that the Hooker Chemical Company dumped carcinogenic chemical wastes, was one of the earliest sites of FEMA's relocation efforts. FEMA relocated the 239 families closest to Love Canal early last year. Up to 2,000 families may eventually be relocated.