

# John Block looks to a growth policy for U.S. agriculture

by Graham Lowry

John Block, President-elect Ronald Reagan's nominee for secretary of agriculture, announced at the Senate Agriculture Committee's confirmation hearing yesterday that his priority will be to lower interest rates to save American agriculture.

"Priority number one is to do what I can to improve the profitability of farming," the 45-year-old Illinois director of agriculture told the committee. "We have to get inflation under control and also interest rates. Nothing can be done that is legal that can return 20 percent," Block observed. "President Reagan plans to bring down both inflation and interest rates."

Block also voiced his opposition to the embargo on grain sales to the Soviet Union, emphasizing that "food can be an instrument of peace." Declaring his commitment to "develop our export markets," Block emphasized the benefits of improving the economies of Third World nations. "History has shown that as we help countries develop and industrialize and become more self-sufficient, they become more affluent and better customers. Some of our best customers now are countries we have helped develop."

Throughout his testimony, Block demonstrated that his policy outlook for U.S. agriculture runs directly counter to that of the Carter administration and its Agriculture Secretary Bob Berglund. On the question of federal support for research in agricultural mechanization, which Berglund had moved to virtually eliminate, Block declared his support for it and added pointedly, "During my visit to China, I saw how most people are on the land. Without mechanization we would be in the same place today."

Block repeatedly emphasized that his cabinet role would be to represent aggressively the interests of agriculture as an integral part of the U.S. economy as a whole, rejecting the notion of mediating an imagined "farmer vs. consumer" conflict. In his opening statement to the committee, Block stressed that the Department of Agriculture should be encouraging exports and productivity, and that agricultural exports are as beneficial to the steel worker in Pittsburgh and the auto worker in Detroit as they are to farmers.

"I strongly support the role of secretary in serving as a strong advocate of the agriculture industry," Block told the senators. "This is the best way to serve the consumers. The objectives are the same in the long run."

## LaRouche testimony

Testimony in support of Block's nomination was offered by the National Democratic Policy Committee, the Fusion Energy Foundation, and the American Agriculture Movement.

Lyndon LaRouche, chairman of the advisory board of the NDPC, urged that John Block's appointment be confirmed and also that "the Senate exercise its duty and authority to advise the Executive Branch" by recommending to the incoming administration "a return to the twice-proven policy of fostering orderly marketing designed to ensure parity prices" to farmers.

LaRouche emphasized that a return to parity-price policies was essential "if we wish to maintain adequate food supplies for all of our citizens." He added that the fact that past price-support policies "have been sometimes grossly mismanaged is not proof that we need to repeat such mismanagement. Get more leading farmers into the Department of Agriculture, and the management of marketing programs will improve considerably by itself."

"We need not be intimidated by the bogeyman of burgeoning warehouses of rotting food," he asserted. If we energetically market those surpluses in excess of our strategic-reserve requirements, and if we improve consultation between government and farmers on marketing matters, the role of U.S. agriculture in a hungry world will lead to an orderly flow of product from farm to consumer.

"I do not envisage the use of a 'food weapon' in the negative sense of that term, but as a means which, properly used, can help to develop other nations into sovereign states with moral world-outlooks which will benefit our posterity. . . . For us in that great modern republican tradition of St. Augustine and Dante Alighieri, the general overcoming of the demands of necessity for nations and peoples generally can occur only through the fruits of continuing progress in science and technology."

American Agriculture Movement President Marvin Meek told the committee that "the American farm sector is more unified in this selection than any other because of Mr. Block's commitment to producers." Strongly endorsing expanded exports and parity pricing, Meek also blasted Federal Reserve Chairman Paul Volcker's interest rate policy. "Current interest rates will destroy the economy," Meek said. "If it requires a bill from the Senate to get control over the Federal Reserve, then so be it."