

U.S. farmers demand emergency action

by Marcia Merry

Amid forced auctions and land foreclosures across the farm-belt, thousands of farmers are gathering at state capitals and local meetings to protest agriculture's collapse and to call for emergency action. The rate of farm shutdowns has caused a decline in food production which is already approaching the level of a security threat to the United States and its allies.

News reports and Agriculture Department announcements about "surpluses" are a hoax orchestrated by Cargill and the other cartel companies. As of last summer, corn feedgrain stocks were at their lowest level in 17 years. In key states like Nebraska, the fall seeding of winter wheat was down by 19% from last year. Neither farm income nor credit for this spring's corn planting is available to ensure proper stock build-up.

In Shreveport, Louisiana, 20 farm-bankruptcy actions are being filed per day. Throughout the farm belt, land values have dropped by as much as 50%—in some places 75%. Bank examiners have directed that land collateral be devalued, thus precipitating call-ins of farm loans. In Kentucky, Federal Land Bank officials are roving farm to farm to examine collateral. Nine Production Credit Associations—part of the federal farm credit system—have gone bankrupt, an unprecedented development.

Actions of some kind to temporarily halt farmland foreclosures are before seven state legislatures. Tom Olsen, president of a Nebraska farm bank and representative of the Independent Bankers Association, is sounding the alarm and calling for emergency measures.

However, Minnesota's Governor Perpich and Agriculture Commissioner Jim Nicholls are promoting a 120-day moratorium on farm foreclosures. Farmers would get a reprieve of 60 days on debt payment—possibly enough to allow them to plant; the banks would be paid with state tax money. The remaining 60-days debt would be added on to the farmers' principal, adding to the crushing burden. This amounts to a "one last crop" cartel maneuver.

On Inauguration Day, farm rallies will take place in Bismarck, North Dakota, Des Moines, Iowa, Minneapolis, Minnesota, and other cities. A several-day protest action will begin in front of the Chicago Board of Trade. More demonstrations and rallies are planned for Oklahoma, Louisiana,

and Iowa. Earlier this month, 750 farmers and demonstrators rallied at Lincoln, the capital of Nebraska.

There are three outlooks behind the farm protest actions. First, some farmers are acting out of simple desperation. The scope of collapse is much worse than the Great Depression, but they don't know what to do.

Second, there is a heavily funded drive by the Eastern Establishment and its Minneapolis-based front groups to herd farmers into dead-end protest actions, demoralizing them while shutdowns proceed.

Finally, there is a mobilization led by farmers in the newly formed Schiller Institute International Food Commission, established by 55 farmers from 21 states at a meeting in Richmond, Virginia Jan. 13. Plans include coordinated state, national, and international action to expose the cartel gameplan: To eliminate the independent family farmer and concentrate food output in vertically integrated production operations plus small acreage "moonlighting" farms, establishing cartel power to manipulate food scarcities globally. These farmers are demanding federal emergency measures for agriculture and the economy as a whole, as part of crash development of the Strategic Defense Initiative (beam) technologies.

However, the Ford Foundation, the Stern Foundation, and others are funneling money against effective farm organizing through such groups as the Nebraska Center for Rural Affairs. A similar group operates in Iowa called the Iowa Farm Unity Coalition. New groups include Ground Swell in Minnesota and "Survival Committees" in many parts of the farmbelt. There are many well-meaning farmers in these groups, including in leadership positions. However, the well-funded thrust is to stress "legal action only" or "local farm issues only"—isolating farmers from both the real causes of their plight and civil rights, labor, and other layers fighting for national interests. One wing of the operation encourages violence and terrorism.

Fred Huenefeld, a farm representative in Monroe, Louisiana, has been part of the Schiller Institute farm organizing drive in the south. Huenefeld and Reverend Martin, a black leader in northern Louisiana, organized a bus of 38 people to participate in the huge Martin Luther King Day rally in Washington, D.C. Jan. 15 (see article, page 50). The contingent personally visited the Louisiana congressional delegation offices on Capitol Hill. The link-up of white and black, farm and civil rights activists has put Democratic Sens. Russell Long and J. Bennett Johnston on the spot on the questions of both the Strategic Defense Initiative and the 1985 Farm Bill.

Huenefeld, once associated with the George Wallace movement, now typifies in practice the endorsement by Governor Wallace of the Schiller Institute's "Declaration of Inalienable Rights of Man" in honor of Martin Luther King. On Jan. 18, Huenefeld held a press briefing to expose the policy of Cargill. He and Reverend Martin are planning a local civil rights march for the Strategic Defense Initiative by the end of the month.