

Policy of 'food destocking' leads to famine in whole regions

by Marcia Merry

In 1986, the policy of food "destocking" was implemented in the United States and the European Community as a supposed way to improve income for farmers by eliminating non-existent "surpluses." In terms of its own logic, the policy is insane and immoral: The only reason there appear to be "surpluses" is that both world food trade and national domestic consumption of key commodities—meat and milk—are declining.

The reality is that the world desperately needs this food. But productive farms and farm families themselves are going out of operation on a scale that guarantees drastic decreases in food output in the near future. To propose more "destocking" in 1987 is criminal. Yet, as of December, that perspective was adopted in Brussels on a broad scale. In Washington, new farm bills will be introduced in the incoming session of Congress in January proposing the same policy. The following is a summary picture of the real state of world food supplies, and the need for expanded world food output and an agriculture productivity drive.

Over 1986, famine spread in Africa, took thousands of lives in Indonesia, China, Bangladesh, and other points in Asia, and beset many regions in South America. In the case of Africa, the genocidal food shortages are the result of years of suppressive economic policies imposed by the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, to inhibit development of the infrastructure required for agricultural productivity. The 1986 locust plague, on top of recent drought conditions, is just more deadly proof of the unnecessary destruction of productivity and productive potential on the continent. After growing in the 1960s, African food output per capita has declined for the past 15 years.

In Southeast Asia, famine hit in specific locations as a result of the combination of natural disasters and economic policies that have jeopardized local food output potential. For example, mass-scale logging and deforestation in Indonesia has resulted in flash-flooding, ruining crops. There is a less determined, long-term effect on weather patterns to be reckoned with.

Supply and need: the global gap

However, before surveying these regions in detail, it is important to understand the global gap in food needs and

food supplies. There is a myth that food is being produced in sufficient quantities worldwide were it only "distributed" properly. While it is true that food is inequitably distributed, it is not true that sufficient quantities of food are being produced relative to per capita needs for a quality diet. The current world population requires triple the food output now produced.

The brutal fact is, the year-end reports about "record crops" and "surpluses" are just propaganda on behalf of the point of view of those favoring depopulation.

According to the estimates of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, about 1.65 billion metric tons of grains were produced in 1986, up fractionally from 1.64 billion tons the year previous. This works out to about 13 bushels of grain per person for the 5 billion people now on Earth.

What is required for a healthy diet, is at least 24 bushels of grain per person—some to be eaten directly as cereals, and the bulk to be fed to livestock to produce the meat, milk, eggs, and similar animal protein foods required. By simple calculation, 3 billion tons of grain should be produced annually. In addition, another billion tons should be produced as both a reserve and to count for necessary stocks-in-pipeline, and for losses due to spoilage, pests, transport, and processing.

Therefore, we are running short about 2.4 billion tons of grain a year. The increase in the carry-over grain stocks that has been occurring temporarily in the last few years, because world food trade is declining, is only a passing phenomenon, and does not constitute a huge grain surplus as it is misrepresented by U.S. media.

According to USDA figures, year-end grain stocks worldwide are about 385 million tons. Last year at this time, there were about 317.5 million tons. Most of the stocks are stored in the United States. Of the world stock of 385 million tons, 225.2 million tons are in the United States. This is nothing compared to immediate food needs around the world, or even compared to the need for increased meat and milk output in the United States.

The two factors contributing to the current pile-up of grain in the United States is the collapse in grain exports, and secondly, the drastic fall in cattle and hog numbers. Over the last few years, the world grain tonnage traded annually has

dropped from 210 million tons to a projected 165 million tons for the current trade year. Most of that decline has been in the U.S. export share.

In the meantime, so many farmers have gone out of production or cut back their output that the national U.S. cattle and hog inventory is at the lowest level in 20 years. This represents a huge loss in domestic utilization of soybeans, corn, and other feedgrains.

Famine situations

What these figures signify is that the world food supply is being marginalized, relative to real requirements, to the point of guaranteed spread of famine. Each famine situation in 1986 proves the point.

In Southeast Asia, famine resulted when food supplies were knocked out by a drought, or post-drought effects—floods and insects, which hit a zone extending from north of the Indonesian forests, through Thailand, part of Laos, and Guangxi province in China. The change in the weather pattern produced unprecedented typhoons in the Philippines and Vietnam. The lower Brahmaputra River valley flooded, hitting northern Bangladesh. In Indonesia, there was massive flooding on the island of Sumatra.

Only in northeastern Thailand was food aid quickly made available; the government could mobilize stocks because Thailand is a food exporting nation. In the other nations, there is extreme deprivation and starvation.

As of mid-November, Sumatra was devastated. The combination of rains, and land stripped by illegal logging, produced landslides that destroyed entire villages. Up to 20,000 flood victims were stranded. The rate of food relief ran at only 3 tons of rice a day, when 10 tons were needed for survival. The rice and coffee crops were heavily damaged.

In Bangladesh, where famine claimed 24,000 lives in 1974, relief agencies report that 20,000 children are facing severe malnutrition. At least eight people died from hunger in November in the flood region.

However, the most serious situation may be in China. Here, ecological decline is forcing the wholesale movement of peoples in desperate conditions.

From 1979 to 1983, Chinese agricultural output increased markedly after Premier Deng lifted the communal restrictions, and control of land reverted back to the peasants. However, a diversification out of grain and into more profitable specialty crops ensued, including flowers, fruits, and vegetables.

Whereas in 1985, the Chinese press boasted that China had literally run out of storage space for the bin-busting harvest, in October of this year, the Chinese press reports said that millions of rural Chinese are "having trouble feeding themselves."

Severe drought has ruined grain and other crops in 17 of the nation's 29 provinces—many of them the most populated regions. Yao Shaoyu, head of the Ministry of Civil Affairs Relief Bureau, reported that China "needs about 5 million

tons of grain as assistance." The United Nations reports China as a food deficit country.

People have been streaming into the cities, for lack of food in the countryside. This process began at least three years ago, but now has reached catastrophic proportions. For example, police estimate that the number of "temporary residents"—migrants—in Beijing has averaged 660,000 per month since May of this year. Although the official report is that Beijing now has an itinerant population of 1 million, the number is likely far greater. According to *China Daily* Oct. 24, city authorities are tightening their control over the migrants, to prevent an influx of beggars and criminals who "pose a serious threat to social order." Other cities—Shanghai, Canton, and Nanking especially—are in the same situation.

The point to be made is that there is no safety in a "bumper harvest." Health and food supply are assured only by the soundness of the agriculture infrastructure—farm inputs and productivity, storage, shipping, and processing.

Look at Henan province—a leading grainbelt region. This year, grain production dropped by no less than 1 million tons. Next year's prospects are grim because of a shortage of funds, fertilizer, and diesel fuel. In 1983, there was a "record harvest" of 29.04 million tons, but there was not the infrastructure to sustain and build up this output potential further. In 1984, the harvest dropped by 100,000 tons. In 1985, the harvest dropped 1.5 million tons. Henan is southwest of Beijing, which itself is suffering extreme drought. At one point in 1986, there was open discussion of temporarily moving the capital south.

The output statistics for Bangladesh show the same difficulty.

While rice harvests for 1985-86 were up over 1984-85 by 550 thousand tons, imports fell by 650 thousand tons. Therefore, the food actually available to the population fell. During the same time period, both wheat output and wheat imports declined. Therefore, the decrease in total food stocks was precipitous. When the floods hit, there were no stocks for food relief.

This process of marginalization of food supply has proceeded to such an extent in Africa that food shortages exist on a genocidal scale. A report published this fall by the United Nations, whose agencies are ever bent on depopulation, "projects" that food output will continue to decrease in Africa for the next 20 years.

In this context, the plans now being implemented to shut down large percentages of food-output capability in North America and Western Europe are murderous, and consciously so. A report given to the U.S. Department of Agriculture Outlook Conference in December of this year by Professor D. Gale Johnson, co-author of a Trilateral Commission policy document on agriculture, said, "There is no doubt we have too many resources engaged in agriculture in the United States, Japan, and the European Economic Community. Agriculture must be downsized in industrial countries."