

Agriculture by Marcia Merry

Patrick Leahy's roadshow

His committee toured the farmbelt to hear of the crisis first hand, and is now calling for exactly what the food cartel wants.

Sen. Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.) took his Senate Agriculture Committee on a five-state swing through the Midwest Feb. 9-11, to hear views on the farm crisis and what should be done.

The five-member group stayed one night at farmers' homes, and one night at local businessmen's households, instead of hotels, in order to get even more of an "earful" direct from the farmers and their friends.

At the conclusion of the trip, Senator Leahy said, "In my 13 years in the Senate, no series of hearings has begun to have the impact on me personally of the hearings we've had in the last three days."

Give us a break! It was all nothing but one more exercise in "taking opinions," and then enacting one or another variant of whatever the international grain-cartel companies dictate.

The tour covered Minnesota, North Dakota, Nebraska, Iowa, and South Dakota—states chosen largely because of the severity of the economic crisis there. The senators heard from over 50 witnesses—farmers, teachers, equipment dealers, pastors, farm wives, bankers, and grain traders. The information presented at the hearings documents how devastating the farm shutdown crisis has become.

At the first night's hearing at the Farmers Livestock Exchange in Bismarck, North Dakota, Leahy said that last year, 65,700 family farmers were driven off the land—more than 1,000 a week. North Dakota Gov. George Sinner held up a long computer print-out of the number of foreclosed or liquidated farms. "In Dickey County, that

amounts to 22,000 acres. The personal agony is true. It's everywhere." He asked for help on farm debt. "Restructuring of farm debts makes sense. No one gains by liquidations and foreclosures."

North Dakota Lt. Gov. Ruth Meiers told committee members the Congress must pass legislation to improve farm conditions in this country. "Federal cuts are proposed when farmers are dependent on the government for continued support."

Earlier in the day, Leahy chaired a panel in Minnesota, on the floor of the Grain Exchange in Minneapolis-St. Paul. Conflicting testimony was presented from various farm spokesmen, all of whom adhered to the current myth promoted by the grain-cartel interests: There is a grain glut in the world, and U.S. farmers are suffering from overproduction. Minnesota Gov. Rudy Perpich spoke in favor of the newly introduced legislation of Sen. Tom Harkin (D-Iowa) that calls for mandatory production controls and export reduction.

Oposing this was Al Christopherson, a vice-president of the Minnesota Farm Bureau, who said, "It's wishful to think strict government controls will assure higher farm prices." But Christopherson had no alternative except to hope for a pick-up in exports to help farm income. Leahy had to pound the gavel to restore order between the opposing sides.

The platform was ultimately used to advantage by a food cartel spokesman—Burton Joseph, a Minneapolis-based grain trader notorious for his

long career in special dealings with the Soviets. Joseph not only supported the Harkin bill's mandatory production controls, but called for a two-tier pricing mechanism, where grain for domestic use is set at a high price, and grain for export is sold at a "dumping" rate.

The real issues, of course, were sidestepped. Leahy and the other panel members, mostly Democrats, got to take a lot of cheap shots at the administration's farm policy, and proceeded to advance something as bad, and probably worse. The Harkin bill mandates deliberate starvation for millions abroad, and dire poverty with attendant malnutrition and disease at home. In the name of "saving the family farmer," it mandates a 35% reduction in food output through scarcity, and high prices on what remains.

Leahy also took testimony from a radical pastor, who said that federal expenditures on defense were the problem for farmers. According to Charlotte Reif, a pastor from Guthrie County, Iowa, "The government has spent money on things it can't afford and we're being bankrupted by arms manufacturers."

Leahy's road show was a hoax. What is required is a package of war-time-style production measures—low-interest credit, a freeze on farm debt, and a foreign policy of strengthening the economies of our friends, allies, and trading partners.

On Feb. 11, during the Senate committee tour, corn futures fell to their lowest level in 15 years. The contract for March delivery on the Chicago Board of Trade fell 4¢ to close at \$1.48½ per bushel, the lowest since 1978—because of what the trade likes to call "plentiful supplies and dwindling demand."

People are starving, and these jokers talk of "dwindling demand."