

African locust plague now threatens Europe

by Carol White

In the summer of 1986, the world learned with horror, that swarms of locusts and grasshoppers were overrunning the continent of Africa. After years of drought, predictably enough, the otherwise welcome rains created the ideal conditions for these insects to breed in large numbers. Due to the deliberate decision by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) to write off Africa, the infrastructure of the locust watch had been disbanded a decade before, as an unwarranted expense. Still, it was possible to stop the disaster.

The President of Senegal rejected the FAO's proposed minimal spraying program, and demanded widescale spraying by large DC-7 planes in his country. This was done by an American company (with U.S. government cooperation) and was entirely successful. Indeed, Senegal was the only African country not to have a recurrence of the plague in 1987.

But elsewhere, the FAO prevailed, and only small-scale spraying was permitted. The rule was not to spray the grasslands where the swarms breed, because that would "harm the environment"—but then, a glance at FAO literature shows that it does not approve of Africans raising cattle and eating meat and milk products, anyway. The potential for disaster became worse.

The problem was compounded by the proliferation of small wars in the area, closing off the borders of infested countries such as Ethiopia. Lastly, the United States and certain other European nations prohibited the use of dieldrin, an insecticide which is cheaper than malathion and which does not disintegrate as rapidly.

The issue of large-scale spraying

Despite the demonstrated success of using large planes to spray the swarming insects, this method was rejected last year. The prevailing wisdom of the so-called experts who are running the coordinated campaign against the locusts, is that large-scale spraying would destroy the natural predator of the locust. This view is dismissed by American entomologists

such as the well known consultant on environmental issues, Richard Main, who told *EIR* that the main natural enemy of locusts are funguses, which are not effected by the insecticides used to kill off the locusts.

T&G Aviation of Chandler, Arizona, the company that did the large-scale spraying in 1986 (and was in Africa this past year flying smaller planes) has two of their four DC-7s fueled and ready to fly to Africa immediately. While they have called around to drum up business for their services, to date they have found no government willing to hire them, despite the fact that the locust swarms are more threatening now than they were two years ago.

As a point of comparison, using DC-7s allowed T&G to spray a 2-million-acre area in Senegal, over a period of 16 working days. Planes currently spraying in Morocco can only cover 62,500 acres per day, despite the fact that the Moroccan government estimates that without doubling the amount of acres sprayed per day, they have no hope of controlling the spread of the locusts.

In 1986, *EIR* demanded that large-scale spraying be undertaken everywhere. We also cooperated in a research project that established the feasibility of using pulsed electromagnetic radiation to destroy the swarming locusts and grasshoppers. Appropriate generators, which are both cheap and portable, could easily have been made available for this effort. (We will publish more information about this proposal next week.)

In 1987, *EIR* interviewed leading members of the FAO and spoke to the U.S. State Department, demanding that action be taken to keep the grasshoppers and locusts from becoming endemic in the area, ready to go out of control at the first favorable break in climatic conditions. They refused to recognize that failure to use the relatively less dangerous situation in 1987 to take the necessary measures to eradicate the plague, was laying the stage for the present calamitous picture. At that time, *EIR* interviewed Lukas Brader (which interview is published below), the head of the FAO locust office, which is now sounding an alarm. He adamantly defended FAO's sabotage of an effective spraying program.

The question of dieldrin

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has prohibited the use of dieldrin in the United States. Whatever the merits of this decision, which we would contest, in an abridgement of the sovereignty of other countries, the United States has threatened to refuse assistance to any country which does not accept the U.S. ban.

The problem with dieldrin, used in a temperate region, is that it will stay on the ground in an active form for as long as three months. However, "persistence" of the chemical is an advantage in tropical conditions, where insecticides such as malathion may only be sprayed in the early morning hours, since they disintegrate in a two-hour period in a hot moist

climate. Malathion (if it has not been overheated) is considerably more effective than dieldrin when it is sprayed in droplet form on swarming locusts; however, it is also from 10 to 100 times more expensive. Furthermore, it is obviously far less effective as a bait to the just-hatched locust, still in the hopper rather than flying stage.

A balanced program would probably call for using both kinds of insecticide. With satellite surveillance, it is easy to predict, within a two-week period, when a batch of locust eggs will hatch (this depends upon local climatic conditions, heat and moisture). Dieldrin can be laid in traps in these areas. Since there is no need to use a highly concentrated dose, there is danger neither to wild game nor livestock. Even were some birds to be adversely affected by the insecticide, swarms of locusts will denude an area to the point that no food remains for any living thing.

This year the locust plague has come again with even

greater force. Some estimates are that as many as one-half billion people will die of famine if the locusts are not quickly brought under control.

The insect swarms are now about to move out of Africa into Malta and Sicily, and threaten the mainlands of Greece and Turkey as well as the countries of Asia. As God visited the plagues on Egypt, no one will be spared now unless this evil is reversed.

On March 27, Lyndon LaRouche called for a crash program, using every available method—spraying, electromagnetic devices, and so on—to save Africa and prevent the swarms from overrunning southern Europe as well. He also warned that should he become President of the United States, he will call for a Nuremberg proceeding to bring the criminals at FAO and elsewhere, responsible for this devastation, before the bar of justice. For every African who dies, he says, there is a Greenie who should be hanged for murder.

Documentation

On March 27-28, the French newspaper Le Monde featured front-page coverage of the locust plague in Africa, under the headline, "Green Light for the Locusts: North Africa Invaded, Sicily Threatened," by Yvonne Rebeyrol.

Pilgrim locusts (*Schistocerca gregaria*) are threatening West Africa, North Africa, and perhaps even the south of Europe. At the beginning of summer 1987, they swarmed in Eritrea and Tigre, two Ethiopian provinces in rebellion against Ad-dis-Ababa rule. By July 1987, they had arrived in southern Sudan, which is also the site of serious troubles. By August, they had arrived in Chad, but, north of the 16th parallel, no treatment against them was authorized. In August and September, the pilgrim locusts reproduced themselves massively, in particular in the mountain ranges of Ennedi and Tibesti, which are also inaccessible zones. At the end of September and the beginning of October, they arrived in Niger, where the authorities were quickly overwhelmed. In November and December, they arrived in Morocco via southern Algeria, and in Mauritania over the mountain regions of the south Sahara. . . .

During this month, new swarms have arrived in Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia. The insects are at the frontiers of Libya, and are swarming toward Malta and the south of Sicily. . . .

These formidable insects are now capable of spreading over 52 countries of Africa and western Asia, where they threaten more than 500 million with famine.

The point of departure of this present crisis is, certainly,

the conjuncture, since 1985, of unusually favorable climatic factors for the pilgrim crickets. But this current development is due to two human factors: on the one hand, the multiplication of war zones, rendered inaccessible to any counter-measures. . . . On the other hand, is the recent ban on the use of dieldrin.

The tragedy is that the use of dieldrin has been forbidden, the United States and the countries of northern Europe being its most ferocious adversaries. The manufacture of dieldrin was stopped several years ago, and certain of these countries have threatened to review all their cooperation and assistance to the infested states, were the latter to use the stocks of dieldrin existing in several countries. This ban, according to French specialists . . . doubtless derives from a good intention, but it is unrealistic. Authorized insecticides are only effective for several days. Their utilization therefore requires repeated treatments (and is therefore more costly) and, most important, spraying the entire infested zone. To be sure to cover the entire surface, the insecticide is spread by strips which overlap partially. This means that double doses are often spread on 20% of the treated zone. After such operations, the insects have all disappeared over vast areas, but normal life cannot come back the following year [as it can with dieldrin].

For the moment, no one can say how the invasion of pilgrim locusts is going to proceed. The situation is such that only an exceptional drought could stop the propagation of the plague. But then, the cultures of the zones threatened by the pilgrim locusts would be destroyed.