

Agriculture by Marcia Merry

Madigan is swept into USDA

Lauded as a "compromiser," he is expected to continue Yeutter's plans to feudalize American farming.

The March 5 Senate confirmation hearing on Rep. Edward Madigan (R-Ill.) as secretary of agriculture was a shoo-in procedure—part of an ongoing operation to transform the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) into a bureaucracy to enforce neo-feudal policies in the farm belt.

Instead of using the hearing as the occasion for reviewing the USDA's role in the current crisis of U.S. farming and food supplies, the Senate Agriculture Committee staged a love-in. Madigan was their only witness. They gave a unanimous voice vote of approval, which amounts to tacit support for the policies of outgoing Secretary of Agriculture Clayton Yeutter.

Known among farmers as "the taxi driver," Madigan (who ran his dad's cab company in Lincoln, Illinois), is expected to steer the very same disastrous course as Yeutter.

In his two years at the USDA, Yeutter campaigned internationally for the food cartel companies to be given free rein to underpay farmers, control import and export policies, and impose genocidal food scarcities. Yeutter never says this outright, but uses the rhetoric of "free trade"—the same propaganda as used by the old, imperialist British East India Company. As U.S. Special Trade Representative, Yeutter led the charge for "free trade" in the Uruguay Round of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). In collaboration, the Department of Justice has condoned mergers and buyouts by the cartel companies that are in total violation of all anti-trust laws.

Madigan was chosen for agricul-

ture secretary by President Bush because his record shows that he won't offer any resistance to the cartels' policy. Bush has given high praise to Madigan as a "compromiser."

At present, the USDA will administer cuts of \$14 billion in farm programs over the next five years, cuts that arose from the 1990 budget reconciliation law. Further cuts can be expected.

These cuts come on top of a situation of cartel-imposed low farm prices. According to the USDA's own statistics, there are sharp price drops. Each year, in January, the USDA calculates what would be a parity, or fair price for a list of farm commodities, based on desired incomes and purchasing power of farmers from a point early this century. Every commodity is way below parity, constituting a clear and immediate danger to the national food supply:

- Wheat is \$2.32 a bushel, which is 30% of the parity price of \$7.34.

- Rice is \$6.33 per hundredweight; which is 30% of the parity price of \$21.30.

- Corn is \$2.22 a bushel, which is 40% of the parity price of \$5.59.

- Milk is \$10.40 to 11.80 per hundredweight, which is 43% of the parity price of \$26.40.

- Wool is \$0.382 a pound, which is 12% of the parity price of \$3.31.

Just these few prices for vital food and fiber products show the disastrous state of agriculture. However, the USDA priority programs are for "conservation"—the cover term for creating a web of regulations and land grab schemes to dispossess family farmers.

Yeutter has mooted that the tradi-

tional USDA extension services, intended originally to spread new scientific practices and improve living standards, should be phased out, in line with his GATT goal to cut "subsidies" to agriculture.

The USDA-run Farmers Home Administration (FmHA), mandated to be the lender of last resort to farmers, is no longer making loans, and is implementing a go-slow policy on providing backing for commercial lenders to make loans to farmers.

Also, the USDA is cutting the number of local branch offices of the Agriculture Stabilization and Conservation Service offices through which commodity price assistance programs are administered. Though dictatorial and arbitrary, the ASCS offices have nominally served as income-support mechanisms.

The consequences of all these cuts are bankruptcies, deep impoverishment, and misery on thousands of American family farms.

The answer of the USDA? Yeutter is gleefully administering "Resource Conservation and Development Areas" (RC&Ds). On Feb. 4 he announced the establishment of 15 new RC&Ds encompassing 110 counties in 14 states, bringing the national total to 209. He said the purpose of this scheme was to work "with local leaders in these areas to help them expand economic opportunities and improve community resources" In the context of the low farm prices, and elimination of USDA farm income programs, the RC&Ds will coerce people to adjust to poverty and serfdom, in the name of "protecting the environment."

Madigan will fit right in. Instead of emergency measures for farmers, he specialized in working for passage of pseudo-environmental legislation—the administration's clean air and clean water bills.