

Agriculture by Suzanne Rose

Dunkel woos farmers for GATT

International farm groups heard calls for support for "the landscape" and for the cartels, rather than for farmers.

The International Federation of Agricultural Producers (IFAP) held its biannual conference in Quebec City, starting May 25. The featured speaker, before 300 delegates from leading farmer organizations from 55 countries, was Arthur Dunkel, secretary general of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT).

Dunkel is the U.N. bureaucrat responsible for ensuring the completion of the "Uruguay Round" of trade "reforms." He and his Anglo-American backers are attempting to wipe out national protection and subsidy of agriculture, as the first item on their incompetent "free trade" agenda. This strategy cannot succeed as long as significant resistance to it remains among farm organizations. Dunkel's job was therefore to convince the delegates to accept his program, known as the "Dunkel draft," as the basis for a GATT agreement on agriculture.

The "Dunkel draft" was presented to world governments in March, in an attempt to resolve the impasse in negotiations that developed when European farmers forced their governments to resist huge cuts in producer income proposed by the U.S. negotiators.

Dunkel's text, which is widely believed to represent the U.S. position, as well as the interests of the multinational grain cartels, emphasizes cutting the income of farmers and reducing world food "surpluses." But there are no surpluses! Over the past five years, world grain output has plunged. Even during the conference, news broke of the U.S. government's

inability to supply flour and other foodstuffs to programs for the needy.

Nevertheless, Dunkel attempted to present his program as a *fait accompli*. "The draft final agreement sets the scene for the conclusion of the round," he said. He characterized the only obstacles as problems in "political perception," meaning the continental European governments' reluctance to accept U.S. demands for reduction in agricultural output. This reluctance is based in part on pressures from farmers, and in part on the desperate food needs in the former Soviet bloc and elsewhere.

Dunkel represented himself as a "party above the fray," who was engaging in a dialogue with the conference participants. He attempted to persuade them that eliminating support for agricultural prices would benefit farmers. Under the "Dunkel draft," he said, payments could still go to farmers for such things as environmental protection and "adapting to structural adjustment." Farmers could continue to be compensated, he said, as long as this was not related to production. Such payments make it possible, he said, "for governments to directly support farmers in all their functions beyond agricultural production proper. The right it confers on them, for example to protect the landscape and the environment, is a first, a premier. It encourages a progressive switch from policies that support prices to policies that support people, namely the rural community, which plays such an essential political and social role in every society." How

there could be a rural community without farmers, he did not explain.

Why would farm leaders invite the instrument of their demise into their midst? Many have been brainwashed into sharing Dunkel's stated concern for "overproduction." Despite the fact that free trade policies already enacted in the U.S. have caused wheat production to decline by 28% over the last decade, and that European wheat exports would be cut in half under the Dunkel draft, delegates from the U.S. and Canada expressed concern that the Dunkel draft would disrupt national "supply management" programs and lead to surpluses. The Canadians pressed for an exception for their marketing boards on the grounds that the boards help to limit production. U.S. Farmers Union President Leland Swenson, who is also a vice president of IFAP, argued that eliminating price supports would cause farmers to produce too much.

The IFAP format was not designed to develop policy in the interests of producers. In fact, it does not even take positions on issues at its meetings. The IFAP conferences only discuss policy "issues" developed by the group's secretariat in Geneva.

There was no debate on whether GATT actually would benefit farmers. According to one report, the central discussion among involved the supposed benefits of GATT to underdeveloped nations. The argument was that although it may harm producers in the advanced nations to allow cheap food imports from developing economies, they must accept this hardship so that the developing nations get their chance to grow.

The reality is that no one benefits from such a policy except the cartels, which are thereby allowed unrestricted access to national economies, and the banks, which get paid from the earnings of the Third World exports.