
Striking European Dairy Farmers

'We Don't Want Money; We Want a Policy!'

by Karel Vereycken

PARIS, Sept. 24—On Sept. 10, some 400 dairy farmers representing the eight main milk producing countries of Europe (Germany, France, Italy, Belgium, Luxemburg, Netherlands, Austria, and Switzerland) kicked off, in Paris, a European “milk strike” to protest falling prices and last year’s decision, by the European Union, to de-regulate the markets.

Two weeks later, the strike keeps growing; 80,000 dairy farmers have participated, at least once, in the strike. While farmers keep milking their cows, the milk is not being delivered to the milk-processing industry. Instead, farmers pour out millions of fresh liters of milk onto their land as fertilizer, or organize free milk distributions to hungry people. The milk processors, of course, pretend the strike has no effect on their production, while secretly, they bring in milk from Eastern Europe and, according to some, even a ship of milk from Spain!

But this has failed, so far, to demoralize the strikers. Similar to the mass revolt against the bail-out policies and the fraudulent “health reform” of President Obama, that has been rocking the United States, the scope of the European milk strike has been under-reported, blacked-out, and even ignored by the mainstream media.

Some highlights:

Sept. 12: A picture of hundreds of Belgian farmers, Walloons and Flemish united, pouring more than 2 million liters of milk into their fields in Ciney, appeared on the front page of the *International Herald Tribune*.

Sept. 15: French Agricultural Minister Bruno Le Maire had to be protected by the gendarmerie, when several hundred furious farmers blocked the entrance to a major agricultural fair in Rennes. Demonstrators called for his resignation, singing: “Oh, dairy farmers, rise, rise!”

Sept. 16: German farmers dumped 9,000 liters of milk at the door of the Ministry in Bonn.

Sept. 17: The French Association of Independent Milk Producers (APLI), which leads the strike in



European Milk Board/Arnaud Hendriks

Dairy farmers are protesting across Europe, against plummeting milk prices. These farmers are dumping milk in front of the EU Commission headquarters in Brussels, Sept. 21.

France, reported that over 40% of French milk farmers are participating in the strike.

Sept. 21: According to the Belgian press agency Belga, over 80,000 milk farmers participated in a European-wide day of action, a *Journée blanche*, or “white day,” throwing away some 25 million liters of milk. The same day, in Brussels, farmers set up an artificial milk fountain in front of offices of the EU Commission.

Sept. 22: French farmers distributed some 22,000 liters of milk to the poorest people of Paris, at the symbolic Place de la République. Socialist leader Ségolène Royal called on the Sarkozy government to come up with a solution.

Sept. 23: Italian farmers distributed free milk to Deputies of Parliament in Rome. Italy produces 1 billion liters of milk yearly, of which 40% comes from

Lombardy—but the country has to import 1.5 billion liters to satisfy domestic demand!

What's at Stake

In 1984, the EU adopted a policy of quotas to regulate rising milk production. As was clearly established under President Franklin Roosevelt's Secretary of Agriculture Henry A. Wallace, free trade and markets alone cannot guarantee food security, not for one country, nor for the planet. While quotas fixed limits on production, they also secured both a decent price for the producer, and an acceptable price for the consumer.

However, during the recent French presidency of the EU, the British- and Swedish-backed free-trade maniac, EU Farm Commissioner Mariann Fischer Boel, who demagogically took as a pretext the "food riots" that impacted world opinion in March 2008, rammed through the decision to end the regulated quota system between then and 2015.

To prepare such a "transition," a yearly increase of 1% on production quotas, was agreed to. The immediate result was a 30-50% drop in milk prices for the dairy farmer! In January 2008, a ton (1,000 liters) of milk was still priced at EU378. In January 2009, the price fell to EU325, but collapsed even more brutally to only EU205/ton one month later. After protest actions and demonstrations in France, the leading farm union, FNSEA, tried to "settle" the conflict by arranging a price of EU265/ton.

However, anybody familiar with farming knows that the minimum cost for producing that milk is at least EU310/ton! Other estimates, which integrate higher prices of animal feed, fuel, energy, and fertilizer, estimate production costs between EU400, and even EU450/ton. Of course, such low prices mean a fast track towards bankruptcy for many milk farmers, and hit especially hard an new generation of young farmers who have returned to the profession, and incurred huge debts in order to build up extra capacity.

Since the outbreak of the crisis, France and Germany have come up with a common proposal for financial aid for dairy farmers to help them ... to give up their profession! The proposal is already supported by 20 of the 27 EU member states. The "aid" is mainly an offer of EU250 million in loans at 3% interest; not surprisingly, it has received a cold reception from farmers already up to their ears in debt.

In France, an increasing pattern of suicides is being reported in the poorest farm areas of the country. Four

dairy farmers took their lives last week alone, and many other deaths are simply reported as unrelated to the destruction of their livelihood. As former Agricultural Minister Michel Barnier observed in 2008 (without showing much resistance afterwards), "If you suppress all the tools that make market regulation possible, the CAP [Common Agricultural Policy] itself is dismantled."

The British Imperial Scheme

In reality, the not-so-secret British Imperial scheme is to destroy entirely, in the name of free trade, the food-growing activities of France, Italy, the Benelux, and Germany. Therefore, for the British, the quota system, one of the last remains of the CAP, must go. Full outsourcing of farming and fishing outside the EU would, of course, be "much better for the EU consumer"... and the British Empire. Already now, vast quantities of powdered milk are imported into the EU from New Zealand, Australia, Canada, and other Commonwealth countries.

While, up till now, with the CAP, the EU has bought up every liter of milk not sold to private operators, and maintained some inventory of powdered milk and butter, the new "zero inventory" policy has other consequences. Now, the president of the European federation of food banks, Jean-Marie Delmelle, wrote, in *La Revue Politique et Parlementaire*, that the EU (which normally gives vast surpluses of milk, pasta, rice, etc., to food banks), "in 2009, since surpluses are now nearly nonexistent, buys food from supermarkets, to redistribute it, via member states, to food banks." This shows how fanatically ideological its free trade policies are!

The old farm unions, which have "sold out" the farmers to the food cartels, the retail industry, and corrupt governments, are increasingly discredited. New unions are created every day and gaining unprecedented support. "Desperation is pushing more and more producers to join the movement," said European Milk Board (EMB) chief Romuald Schaber, whose organization represents about a third of European milk producers. Politicians "must act at once" to address the plight of 100,000 farmers, he said. As a French demonstrator shouted: "We don't need money, we need a policy!"

If an immediate return to the quota system is required to save the farmers from extinction, a full reorganization in bankruptcy of the entire financial system is required, such as proposed by Lyndon LaRouche in the U.S. and Jacques Cheminade in France. Mankind's survival depends on agriculture. And that survival is not at all safe, if food remains in the hands of the British Empire!