

Drought, Food Scarcity Threaten Mexico

by Cynthia R. Rush

March 11—Mexican authorities are sounding the alarm that severe drought and resulting food scarcity threaten the country in the short term, contrary to the lying assertion that the drought “was over,” made at the end of last year by José Luis Luege Tamargo, the agent of the British monarchy’s Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF), who headed up the National Water Commission (CONAGUA) in the Felipe Calderón Administration.

Currently, drought afflicts 37% of Mexico’s national territory, jeopardizing cattle and agricultural production, especially in the central and northern parts of the nation. According to Felipe Arrequín Cortés, CONAGUA’S general technical deputy director, it is very likely that the drought will expand this year, just as occurred in 2009 and 2011.

President Enrique Peña Nieto has announced a National Program Against Drought, and has ordered aggressive preventive and proactive measures as well as the creation of early-warning systems, aimed particularly at reducing the population’s suffering. The new CONAGUA head, Dr. David Korenfeld, reports that the President has created an Inter-Sectoral Commission on the Drought, under his direct supervision, which includes the ministries of Economics, Agriculture, Education, Energy, Health, National Defense, and Social Development, among others. This body will determine and monitor actions and projects to be undertaken to both prevent and mitigate drought.

This is a welcome change from the “Let the market decide” policies of the Calderón government, and Luege Tamargo’s insane insistence that farmers and ranchers learn how to ration “scarce resources.”

Absent plans to build such crucial infrastructure as the North West Hydraulic Plan (PHLINO), and the related North American Water and Power Alliance (NAWAPA), however, the government’s plan to address the drought with palliative measures is inade-

quate, at best. At least 170 of Mexico’s most important dams are at an average of 56% of their capacity, which is 14% of the historic average.

The drought, which devastated northern Mexico in 2011 and 2012, has already intensified in this region. Eduardo Espronceda Galina, head of the Tamaulipas Federation of Rural Property Owners, reported Feb. 4 that the state’s severe drought has affected more than 10,000 farmers and ranchers, forcing the latter to sell their herds at very low prices; at least 100,000 animals have been sold so far this year.

In Nuevo León, water levels in dams are at the lowest in 15 years. CONAGUA specialist Doroteo Treviño warns that should the crisis continue, the state would be forced back to a situation like that of September of 1998, when the state’s dams had no more than 212 million cubic meters of water.

Exacerbating the situation is the fact that several southern states are now also at risk, including Chiapas, Veracruz, and Tabasco, as well as the Valley of Mexico, in the nation’s central region, where the low water level of dams has provoked a “yellow alert.” Rainfall for April is expected to be very low, and 2013’s national rainfall is expected to be 30% *below* the historical average.

Peña Nieto has also launched a National Crusade Against Hunger, an attempt to address the disaster wrought by decades of murderous globalization, which have decimated productive family farms, while *increasing* Mexico’s food exports, as well as domestic hunger and poverty. According to recent reports, only two out of every ten Mexicans *are not considered to be poor*. One in five Mexicans, 22 million people, experience hunger, a number equal to the combined populations of Chihuahua, Jalisco, Guerrero, and the Federal District (the capital), or all of the country’s rural inhabitants. These are families which may spend all their income on food, yet still can’t buy enough nutritious food to adequately feed themselves.

New Agriculture Secretary Ricardo Aguilar Castillo made the obvious point at the end of January that in order for Mexico to combat hunger, it must “first produce food,” and expressed regret that farmers have no access to credit or subsidies. He especially pointed to price volatility, which has placed basic staples out of reach of much of the population. “Today,” he said, “we import more food than we produce.”