

Japan protects its internal food supply

by Kathy Wolfe

The Bush administration and the British bankers who run the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade negotiations announced in early December that, if Japan will not open its internal rice market to foreign dumping, then it will be blamed for the collapse of GATT. While Japanese newspapers have been floating rumors that the new government of Prime Minister Kiichi Miyazawa will cave in and open the rice markets, so far, Miyazawa has stood firm.

U.S. Special Trade Representative Carla Hills visited Japan late last month and bluntly told Miyazawa and others in their meetings: "If Japan finds itself unable to negotiate in agriculture, then I think Japan stands in large measure to be blamed for causing the Uruguay Round [of GATT talks] to fail."

European Commissioner Frans Andriessen also visited Tokyo on Nov. 25, and upped the pressure. He told Prime Minister Miyazawa, "We insist that all parties accept tariffication, including Japan," referring to a GATT program whereby Japan would open the rice markets, but would at first charge tariffs to cushion the blow to its farmers, then gradually lift the tariffs to allow in a flood of foreign rice.

'No more concessions'

Reality showed its face in the streets of Tokyo, where more than 8,000 Japanese farmers protested outside Parliament during Andriessen's visit. Yoshitaka Mashima of the Japan National Farmers Organization told the rally, "Japan has made enough concessions." Farmers wore green costumes resembling vegetables, imprinted with the demand, "Ban Rice Imports." Others carried an angry scarecrow. "Japan is already importing beans, wheat and other products," said demonstrator Eijiro Shimada. "If rice is next, that will be a serious matter."

Both Prime Minister Miyazawa and his new Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries Minister Masami Tanabu, continue to back rice self-sufficiency for Japan. A Miyazawa spokesman told the press on Nov. 27, "There is no change in our longstanding policy." Tanabu told the Parliament on Dec. 3, "There will be no change in Japan's basic negotiating stance of maintaining self-sufficiency in rice. . . . It is im-

possible to accept." On Dec. 5, the Agricultural Trade Committee of Miyazawa's Liberal Democratic Party formally rejected the idea of opening up rice imports.

The Japanese government "food security" program has long maintained a ban on rice imports to protect domestic growers, and more importantly, to protect domestic consumers. The rice program is Japan's last line of defense, since the GATT bankers have already forced the country to open up the rest of its agricultural market: Japan now imports 50% of its food and is the world's largest net food importer.

Food is an extremely emotional issue in a country where a generation nearly starved to death after the war. "Right after the war, I still remember there was nothing for us to eat," said LDP parliamentarian Kosuke Hori at a debate recently. "Many Japanese still share that feeling."

Two systems

Since the Bush administration in Washington does not want to increase industrial production, the only way they can compete with Japan, they figure, is to destroy Japan's economy the way they have destroyed that of the United States.

Since 1971, Washington has systematically allowed the British and Swiss grain cartels such as Cargill and André to take over U.S. agriculture, by flooding the U.S. with temporarily cheap imports. This reduced the number of U.S. farmers from 2 million in 1971 to under 800,000; Cargill and the other cartels simply bought up U.S. farmland, as farmers went bankrupt. The global banks and the grain and food cartels they own have one thing in mind: world food control. They want to use a selected series of food wars, to flood every national market with cheap produce, bankrupt domestic farmers, and depress land prices so cartel agents can buy up the farmland cheap.

Japan, by contrast, has a competent national farm policy, because it treats agriculture as part of its sovereign right to ensure food for its people. A national food supply is the cheapest—and most secure—source of food for a nation. The Japanese ban on rice imports is necessary, because, although its rice farmers are the world's most mechanized and most productive, Japan's small land area makes production in scale difficult. Plots are tiny, land prices are astronomical, and, as a result, the internal rice distribution system is extremely fragmented. Thus, prices are inevitably higher than for foreign rice, and justifiably so. Dr. Fumio Egaitsu, professor of agriculture at Tokyo University, estimates that opening the rice market would reduce domestic production from the current 10 million tons a year to under 2 million tons.

Rice is not only the staple food of Japan, but also is used in many civil and religious ceremonies. Dependency upon the U.S. or some international cartel's rice plantation worked by slave labor in Southeast Asia, would put Japan at the mercy of every whim of the Bush administration.