

Destruction of World Agriculture Fuels Farmer Revolt

July 7 (IPS) — The small farmer and farm laborer population of France and Italy is in open revolt. Staring financial ruin in the face, hog breeders, fruitgrowers, wheatgrowers and farm laborers (Italy's *braccianti*) have begun to take vigorous action in a surge of farmer rebellion which we can expect to see erupting shortly in the U.S. and Canada. As the General Secretary of the small but increasingly significant Communist Party-dominated French peasant movement declared last week: "We are on the eve of big peasant movements."

Fueling the growing rebellion is the calculated destruction of agricultural production as Rockefeller chokes credit to that crucial sector to consolidate his rule over a fascist zero-growth world economy. Small farmers are trapped in a three-way bind between skyrocketing operating costs, plummeting farm commodity prices and hostile creditors.

A Risky Business

Rockefeller is taking a risk: the explosive farmer rebellion is a double-edged sword. To date farmer militance has taken the "natural" course of anarchic crop and livestock destruction coupled with protectionist demands for trade restrictions and import bans. In impotently pitting themselves against the peasantry and working class of every other country, French, Italian or U.S. farmers make themselves ready game for organization along fascist lines. The danger of this suicidal course is accentuated by the habitual adaptation of Europe's Communist and Socialist parties to such parochial instinctual responses on the part of Europe's substantial peasant population.

But this is not inevitable. What is required to head off the farmers' leap into the arms of Rockefeller fascism is the decisive programmatic intervention of conscious working class forces. In Europe and North America, the Labor Committees are intervening to win peasant forces to a united front fight for a moratorium on farm debt based on a program for expanded production and international trade. After this week there will be no Farm Association, farmer bulletin, or agricultural publication in North America which has not received a full briefing on how Rockefeller has set farmers up for 1929-style destruction and what can be done about it.

European agriculture has been blasted wide open. The peasant population — accustomed to subsidization, albeit minimal or uneven, since 1967 through the European Common Market's (EEC) elaborate Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) system of intra-European

price supports and trade agreements — have been thrown to their own devices.

In reality, last year's successive monetary crises tore the EEC's CAP to shreds and constituted the opening salvos against European farmers, blows which have brought them to their current plight.

In these circumstances, gestures like that of the delegation of wheat farmers from the Mezzogiorno, who went to EEC Commission President Ortolini to appeal for EEC pressure on the bankrupt Italian government to make good on CAP price support payments, amount to nothing.

The Farmers' Predicament

The predicament of French hog breeders is typical of that facing other farmers — both in Europe and the U.S. Bouyed by the speculation-fed inflation of commodity prices last year, they incurred unprecedented debts to expand their production in the current period. Now, as Rockefeller deliberately cuts credit worldwide, corporate and banker speculators are selling their claims to agricultural commodity stocks for a song in a mad scramble for cash to cover their own debts. The resulting catastrophic reduction in wholesale farm prices comes on the heels of the year-long coordinated attack on working class incomes which has already cut demand for food — especially meat. In these straits, farmers have only one place to turn to keep themselves afloat — their local or regional bank's loan department. Yet that is precisely where the finishing touches of the Rockefeller policy for agriculture are administered in the form of absolutely prohibitive interest rates if not a flat "No" from the financial officer on duty.

French Farmers Run Amok

In France, where agricultural debt increased by 43.5 per cent from 1972 to 1973 as compared to an increase of 19 per cent for the economy as a whole, and where at the same time farm revenue is expected to drop by seven billion francs in 1974, wine growers, wheat and vegetable farmers as well as livestock breeders are up in arms.

Last week hog breeders gathered in Steenvorde in the north of France to bar the Lille-Dunkerque highway where cheaper hogs imported from the Low Countries enter France. Incoming hogs on a truck from Belgium were butchered on the spot by the enraged peasants. In Macon, 250 farmers' union delegates demonstrated in front of the Morey Company, unleashing 70 imported

pigs on the president's property. Similarly in Moribihan, hog breeders who were refused an audience by Agricultural Minister Bonnet released ten pigs onto the ministerial lawns. In Southwestern France, fruitgrowers, after threatening "to destroy all the Spanish peaches they find," blocked a highway in Vaucluse county causing a 40-mile long traffic jam. Fruitgrowers are claiming that the government has "stabbed them in the back" by acceding to the EEC Commission's negotiation of preferential agreements with Mediterranean countries. Winegrowers, fearful that they will have no place to store their next harvest because the last one is still filling their storage facilities, have issued an ultimatum to the French government backed by the threat of "different forms of action."

PCI Throws Small Farmers To the Fascists

The disastrous implications of the Communist and Socialist parties' penchant for disciplined tailing of any local movement is most dramatically revealed in Italy.

Last week unionized farm laborers, or *braccianti*, currently on strike over the renewal of their national contract, staged a demonstration numbering 600,000 in Rome to protest the 12 per cent pay raise offered by the farmer associations — a demonstration which had the support of the metalworkers (FLM) and other trade unionists. Anxious to prove their support for the *braccianti*, the Italian Communist Party (PCI) daily *Unita* published an editorial blast against the giant farmers associations, a blast necessarily aimed at the small peasant landholders as well. Lacking any coherent notion of what to do in the crisis the PCI finds itself advocating warfare on the part of farm laborers against small peasant landowners, whom it otherwise tails

assiduously.

When the PCI is not actively aiding the small peasant's consolidation as a fascist force — as in their hysterical mimicking of livestock breeders' demands for import restrictions at the Verona Agricultural Fair in mid-March — they are forcing the peasantry into the arms of the fascists by pitting the farm laborers against them.

A North American Dust Bowl

The political problems and potential of massive farmer revolt will soon face the North American working class movement as well. Right now U.S. agriculture hangs on the verge of depression-style collapse that will strangle food production and transform entire farm areas into "dust bowl" wastelands.

With a projected \$12 billion increase in farm debt during 1974 — primarily short-term — interest payments alone will amount to \$75 billion. Even with record 1973-level cash receipts these payments barely could be met. With commodity prices plunging, millions of farmers do not have a chance. Already in 1974, U.S. farm income has declined by 15 per cent.

American farmers have been forced to mortgage everything they own to stay afloat at a time when according to a spokesman for David Rockefeller's Chase Manhattan, the bank's noose-tight credit policies are designed explicitly to collapse and consolidate the two and a half million farm units into 300,000 units by the end of the decade.

The point was driven home in an IPS interview with the agricultural expert of a midwestern regional bank servicing the farm belt. Blaming "farm problems" on the farmers themselves, he added: "Banks are not charitable institutions, you know."

Livestock Industry Collapses; Meat to Disappear Soon

June 30, (IPS) — In a matter of weeks meat, poultry and dairy products will have all but disappeared from grocers'

inflation and vanishing credit has routed and nearly destroyed entire sectors of world agriculture, particularly livestock and dairy production. Double-digit inflation and decimated real incomes are now forcing both farmers and workers of the capitalist nations toward Brazilian-like diets, while most of the underdeveloped countries face near or actual starvation.

The Labor Committees' campaign for an immediate united front around an Italian debt moratorium and related plans to feed Italy's working class is our only defense against this genocide. [See IPS No. 8]

Following in the footsteps of Italy, where meat was recently declared a taxable luxury and where importation of livestock has been barred, many countries are throwing up protectionist measures, slamming the door shut to any livestock imports. Japan has actually halted beef importation while the U.S. threatens import