

Hunger winter could imperil new republics

by Denise Henderson

A debate has broken out in the press of the former Soviet Union on the question of whether or not the republics (particularly the Russian Federation), in light of the drought conditions in some parts of that region, will be able to survive the winter without experiencing a devastating famine or hunger winter. All during the summer, the Soviet press has been filled with alarm about the lack of machinery and manpower to bring in the harvest.

On Aug. 26, the chairman of the Russian Federation's Supreme Economic Council was asked on Radio Rossii, "If the worst happens, will Russia be able to feed itself . . . if many republics leave the Union and if the economic links are broken?"

Bocharov's reply presented a stark reality. "For the next year or six months," he said, "it is physically impossible because the economy as a whole is so integrated within a single economic space that Russia would not be able to feed itself. We do not have sufficient resources, including hard currency resources, although Russia, in this respect, is the richest. We need . . . to continue to be integrated. . . . Without deliveries from those republics, we will not be able to implement deliveries to the extreme north regions and to some other regions of Russia, where the bread situation is already extremely difficult today."

'Enough of scaring'

On the same day, however, an *Izvestia* journalist who regularly writes on agricultural affairs insisted that the country could make it in the coming months. "Hard times do await us, unless we ourselves, and I stress this word—*ourselves*, do not really seriously and without delay, and all together (I have in mind the center, the republics, and the remote rural areas) tend to the question of our daily bread.

" . . . No 'emergency measures' for bringing in the harvest will help or can help," Gavrichkin continued. "The path to a solution of all problems, including the food problem, is not such 'emergencies,' but an understanding of the situation, and accord, without which joint actions are impossible."

Gavrichkin emphasized, "If we succeed in helping the countryside today, there will of course not be an abundance of food, but neither will there be a dearth, and what's more,

there will not be famine. Enough of scaring and being scared. It is better that we get to work on our good earth, which after all, no matter how scarce things were, has not betrayed us." He went on to insist, "The prognosis is that we will obtain 190-195 million tons of grain appears likely to come true. That is approximately the same level of harvest we had during the first three years of the five year plan, and nobody at that time, as I recall, was hollering about famine. Why is there such a panic today?"

The credit issue

The panic however may be well justified. There are no new credits readily forthcoming from the west for food, with the exception of Germany. And the new Union does not have the hard currency which was available to the Soviet Union during its 1980s oil boom for purchase of agricultural foodstuffs. Thus, the debate over the harvest may have this other aspect to it: At a time when hard currency is scarce, and needed for the import of other consumer goods, why waste it on food imports?

Yet even such a debate is improperly focused. Credit to the Russians should not be considered a *net loss* by any western banker, but rather as representing a potential gain in terms of providing additional agricultural productivity for the world. The issue for the west—and the Russians—is both a short-term and a longer-term perspective to remove the constant threat of famine by improving infrastructure in the breadbaskets of the Russian Republic and of Ukraine.

The Russians need first and foremost to be integrated into the LaRouche Productive Triangle program, which would mean extensions of the high-speed rail system to Kiev and Moscow, with branch-lines extending outward from there. Indeed, the optimum plan for improving agricultural infrastructure would include not only high-speed transport to the cities, but also irradiation facilities to prevent spoilage of fruit, grain, and vegetables. About 10-40% of the crops which are now spoiled or fed to livestock could be saved through irradiation.

The former Soviet Union is at a branching point in many respects, not the least of which is agricultural policy. An exchange program several months ago allowed Russian, Ukrainian, and other farmers to come to Germany and to begin to learn modern western farming techniques. There are tens of thousands of former "collectivists" from each republic who want to reestablish the family farm system now. With the help of the west, such a program would be another path to "peace through development."

The danger is, however, that if such a development policy is not carried out, the former Soviet Union, like the rest of the world, will divide itself into a "North" and a "South," or a "First World" and a "Third World" as one astute observer warned *EIR* several months ago. Should such a scenario develop, the world will see the tragedy of Yugoslavia repeated on a grander—and much more destructive—scale.