

## Agriculture by Marcia Merry

### French farmers rally against GATT

*President Mitterrand is caught between Anglo-American demands for subservience, and farmers raising hell.*

Over 250,000 French farmers and supporters staged a protest in Paris on Sept. 29 against low farm prices, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), and the dumping of eastern European food on the French market. Protesters marched through the streets with huge banners, and manned stands throughout the city, giving out wine, cheese, bread, and fresh produce to dramatize the fact that the government is permitting the ruin of French agriculture.

The Paris demonstration is the largest of many protest actions that have begun this fall in Europe. There was a 10,000-person demonstration in Munich, Germany on Sept. 22. On Sept. 27, there was a large protest rally of farmers in the state of Lower Saxony.

Parallel to the demonstrations in Europe, U.S. dairy farmers have been holding protest meetings in the dairy belt states, conferring on strategies against the ruinously low farm milk prices. In Australia, earlier this year, wheat growers pulled down the gates of the U.S. military installation near Perth, to protest low wheat prices, and the insolence of the U.S. government. In Canada, members of Parliament officially "put questions" before Prime Minister Brian Mulroney on Sept. 24 over the embattled state of dairy farmers in their districts.

The fighting mood shown by farmers is the most visible expression of disgust with the bullying by the United States, Britain, and their flunkies in Ottawa and Canberra, who are demanding that the 109 member nations of GATT conclude a global treaty soon, allowing Anglo-Ameri-

can private banking and commodity interests "free market" rights to loot farmers and consumers anywhere.

The GATT talks are resuming this fall for completing the "Uruguay Round" for global "free trade" in agriculture. Under fierce U.S. pressure, European Community (EC) Agriculture Commissioner Ray MacSharry has put forward a plan calling for 15-35% reductions in farm prices for the 12 EC member nations, where farmers number about 10 million. Cuts in the EC's Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) and the GATT will mean mass extermination of these farms. For example, it is projected that the proposals would eliminate 50% of France's 700,000 full-time farmers by the end of the 1990s.

This destruction of European farm potential is the goal of Anglo-American interests who see any independent potential of the European Community as a political and financial threat. The Anglo-Americans are right now consolidating their grip over grain and meat output in the U.S., Canada, and Australia for schemes of worldwide food control.

French President François Mitterrand is caught in the middle of this power play. He went along with the Bush-Thatcher policy for war in the Persian Gulf; will he now collaborate with the Anglo-Americans in destroying his own nation? In the weeks preceding the Paris rally, Mitterrand and fellow government representatives had to cancel many engagements in the countryside, for fear of receiving salvos of rotten fruit and manure. Budget Minister Michel Charasse re-

fused to open a fair because of feared farmer reprisals. At the Sept. 29 Paris demonstration, the head of the French National Assembly, Laurent Fabius, was pelted with rotten eggs.

The United States was roundly denounced in a speech at the Paris rally by Raymond Lacombe, head of the National Federation of Farming Unions (FNSEA), the largest farm organization in France. Lacombe criticized "the brutal attacks from the United States," which wants to "control the food weapon." He scored "this hesitant Europe," which proposes nothing but a lowering of farm prices. He denounced the proposed system of "direct aid" to farmers, with which the government wants to replace the current compensation mechanisms. He said that direct aid would transform farmers into "functionaries waiting in line before their municipality to receive some meagre subsidies."

Lacombe denounced the free trade system "which seeks to become hegemonic throughout the planet—that of unbridled liberalism, exclusions, and imbalances." He attacked the "scandal of men and women who continue to be hungry, while farmers of the advanced countries are prevented from producing."

Lacombe counseled the farmer to understand, "The battle which is starting will not be easy. . . . We will need all our energy to counter the American offensive, stop the attempt to liquidate the Common Agriculture Policy, and obtain from our governments the decisions which will allow us to fortify our enterprises."

In contrast, Budget Minister Charasse has ridiculed the farmers as disrespectful of "the norms of democracy." In September, when Charasse announced a supposed farm aid package of \$8.8 million for livestock producers, the farm groups labeled it inconsequential.