

## FOOD &amp; LAND

# Conflict of interest over food

Since the early '70s farm policy has become inextricably linked to foreign policy, energy policy and domestic economics.

By Martin Brown  
*Pacific News Service*

The nationwide "farm strike" by the fledgling American Agriculture movement bears all the signs of a desperate political gesture without much economic threat, unless it be to the farmers themselves. The strike may, however, make people aware that farmers and the Department of Agriculture are no longer the sole masters of farm policy.

Since the early '70s farm policy has become more and more a matter of food policy, inextricably linked with foreign policy, energy policy and domestic economics. Policy making has become the concern of a wide variety of competing interest groups, and it is no longer possible for activists from the farm sector alone to destabilize it.

The slogan of the American Agriculture movement—"100 percent parity"—is more a political gesture than a real goal. The real intent of the activist farmers is more likely encompassed in legislation proposed by Sens. Robert Dole (R-Kan) and Herman Talmadge (D-Ga.) that would tie farm support payments to the rate of inflation of farm production costs. This would result in farmers always receiving at least their cost of production.

## Victims of own policies

Yet even this proposal has met heavy opposition from non-farm interests in Congress. Critics argue that those farmers in

the most desperate financial shape today—the approximately 10 percent of all farmers who make up the hard-core of the American Agriculture movement—are victims of the very farm policies they are promoting.

These farmers are the ones who over-invested in response to the high prices of the early 1970s. Thus, they are burdened today by an inflated cost of production—as high as \$4.75 per bushel of wheat—because of the high price of newly acquired land and machinery. They are also under heavy pressure to pay off the large debts they incurred in making new investments.

More conservative or well-established wheat farmers, with more equity in land, better credit and lower production costs—as low as \$2.00 a bushel—on the other hand, will have an easier time riding out the price slump.

Some critics argue that the farm bill signed by Carter earlier this year, guaranteeing farmers 60 percent parity, already gives too much to farmers. It provides for government loans and a minimum price of wheat—currently set at \$2.90—to farmers who agree to keep a portion of their land out of production or their wheat off the market. The intended result is a reduction in wheat output to stop the price slide.

Del Gardner, director of the Giannini Foundation of Agricultural Economics at the University of California, estimates the cost to the taxpayer under the current program for surplus storage and direct payments to growers at \$6-\$10 billion for 1978. And, says Gardner, "If we continue to stimulate further increases in output, the stockpile will be enormous."

Charles Schultz, Carter's economic advisor, warned against a support program like the current one in a 1971 study for the Brookings Institution. He argued that price support programs provide disproportionate benefits to large farmers, and drive up the price of farmland in relation to farm income.

"In the long run," Schultz concluded, "farm subsidy programs, related as they

are to the production of farm commodities, tend to benefit farmers chiefly in their role as landowners and not in their role as farm operators."

## Food and diplomacy.

In the foreign policy realm there is concern that the kinds of farm support programs promoted by American Agriculture could wreck efforts to use food as a tool for international stability.

In a recent issue of the influential journal *Foreign Policy*, Swarthmore College political science professor Raymond Hopkins argues that "America's responsibility for managing global food supplies is inescapable [and] can be a source of strength for our foreign policy." Yet, he claims, "considerable pressure from narrow domestic interests" has undercut the efforts of diplomats attempting to use food for foreign policy objectives.

Referring to a World Bank study that estimated some 1.2 to 1.3 billion underfed people in the developing nations, Hopkins warns that "the degradation of life, loss of human resources and potential for violence represented by this situation can be ignored only at great peril to human values and long-term world stability."

For Hopkins and other foreign policy planners, "desirable policy changes" means the establishment of an international grain reserve with administrative mechanisms to guarantee reasonable but stable prices and a reliable supply to domestic and international markets.

Fred Sanderson, staff economist at the Brookings Institution and head of the State department's food policy office, worries that the wheat acreage set aside in the Carter program, if combined with unusually bad weather next year, could drastically undercut foreign policy goals. "The world remains as vulnerable to crop failure as it was in 1972," says Sanderson.

## Disarray among farmers.

Efforts by farmers in the American Agriculture movement to win federal inter-

vention on their behalf are made even more unlikely by the disarray among farm organizations. A united front of all farm organizations might have a chance of generating action, but no such front exists.

Fred Herringer, president of the powerful California Farm Bureau Federation, for instance, says his organization is against any "intervention into the free market." He contends that too high a support price for wheat could price American wheat out of the international market and result in an accumulation of unsalable wheat stocks.

"We would rather see the price of wheat drop this year and let the surplus supplies be sold off for animal feed," says Herringer. "That way, the farmer will have higher prices next year. The real return to the grower will be higher over the five-to-ten-year period without government interventions into the free market."

The National Farmers Organization (NFO), heavily represented among Midwestern wheat growers, on the other hand, generally favors the current Carter program. NFO president Charles Frazier says, "It all depends on how the wheat farmers respond. If at least 75-90 percent of the producers participate in the acreage set-aside, then the current downward price trend will be halted, but not reversed. Wheat supplies will still be adequate for next year and consumers won't suffer."

In fact, only the small National Farmers Union (NFU) has taken a position similar to that of the American Agriculture movement, advocating substantial increases in the level of federal loan payments.

Martin Brown is a post-graduate research economist in the Department of Agriculture and Resource Economics at the University of California-Berkeley, and a fellow of the Third Century America project. He is co-author of an upcoming Environmental Protection Agency report on food quality standards and pesticide use.

# Congress unlikely to help farmers

By Elizabeth Wehr  
*Congressional Quarterly*

WASHINGTON—Chances seem next to nonexistent that Congress will reopen the troublesome question of federal farm price supports, as striking farmers want them to do.

Publicly, key members of Congress express sympathy with hard-pressed wheat farmers who called a national strike Dec. 14. But privately they give the farmers little chance of success, unless strike sentiment runs far broader and deeper than has been evidenced so far.

The strike has spurred a flurry of bills and an outbreak of political jitters among members from farm states who face election contests in less than 12 months. But the prevailing feeling is that it would take dramatic supermarket shortages and price hikes—predicted for January by the strike organizers—to force members to even reconsider support levels set for the next four years by the 1977 farm bill.

Even then political realities pretty well foreclose chances of farmers getting more aid than Congress voted this year.

"Even in the Senate, where every senator has some interest in agriculture, the odds are formidable," said Senate Agriculture committee chairman Herman E. Talmadge (D-Ga.). In the House, "which is overwhelmingly weighted in the favor of urban special interests, the situation is virtually impossible."

Any move to raise farm prices would also run smack into strenuous objections from President Carter, who threatened

to veto the \$12-billion-a-year farm bill last year because it would "bust the budget."

Outnumbered farm-state members had to recruit urban colleagues to their cause to get the bill through Congress. Urban members traded votes for long-sought changes in the food stamp program.

Most of the bills that have been introduced in response to farmer discontent are simple one- or two-page calls for "the maintenance of farm income and purchasing power," as one bill phrases it—with no provisions for achieving it.

Carter's response to the strike call was to announce that the administration would push for better crop and disaster insurance programs for farmers next year. Agriculture Secretary Bob Bergland said he supported the strike, but that the government shouldn't "guarantee the kinds of profits that some people are demanding."

What the striking farmers say they want is "100 percent parity" in farm prices—a claim that has produced economic forecasts that can only add to the farmers' political difficulties. The conventional parity formula, used for more than three decades to calculate the level of federal farm price supports, sought to reproduce the purchasing power of farmers in 1910-1914—a relatively prosperous time.

Using this formula, Chase Econometric Associates of Philadelphia has predicted that 100 percent of parity would add 38 cents to the price of a pound of hamburger, add 18 to 20 percent overall to exist-

Continued on page 8.



Farmers in the American Agriculture movement have not committed themselves to the conventional definition of "parity," which everyone admits would lead to skyrocketing prices, but the ambiguity of the term has led to confusion and loss of support in Congress.



## NUCLEAR POWER

## Jury frees anti-nuke protestors

The first line of defense for the occupiers was a "choice of evils" law. They argued that nuclear power was the more dangerous evil.

**By Norman Solomon**  
**P**ORTLAND—Ninety-six anti-nuclear occupiers were acquitted by an Oregon jury Dec. 16 after expert witnesses testified that the nation's largest operating nuclear power plant is an "imminent danger" to human life.

The historic not-guilty verdict came after three days of testimony on the dangers of nuclear power.

A total of about 200 protesters have been arrested and charged with trespassing for civil disobedience at the Trojan nuclear power plant, located 40 miles northwest of Portland on the Columbia River.

The 96 defendants had announced their intention to "put nuclear power on trial" as the state attempted its first prosecution of anti-nuclear protesters, who blocked the Trojan gates in August and November.

A spokesperson for Portland General Electric Company, main owners of the Trojan plant, said the utility was "disap-

pointed" by the verdict. A PGE vice president had sat next to the district attorney to assist the prosecution throughout the trial.

The six-member jury deliberated about five hours before returning the unanimous not-guilty verdict. Although Columbia County has a reputation for being solidly pro-nuclear, several jurors said after the trial that the evidence presented during the trial had convinced them that nuclear power is dangerous.

Testimony in defense of the occupiers included appearances by expert scientists and former state officials.

Dr. Ernest Sternglass, who has studied the effects of routine low-level radiation from nuclear power plants, testified that his analysis of official Oregon state government data links operation of the Trojan plant with increased readings of radioactive strontium 90 in milk produced nearby, and higher proportions of infant mortality closer to the nuclear plant.

Dr. Rosalie Bertell, a senior cancer researcher at the Roswell Park Memorial Institute for Cancer Research in Buffalo, N.Y., told the jury about studies that show increases in cancer rates among people living nearest to nuclear power plants.

A former director of the Oregon Department of Energy, Lon Topaz, said the Trojan plant is an "imminent danger" to human life and should be immediately shut down and decommissioned. He said his doubts about nuclear energy began to grow while he was the state's energy director from June 1975 to October 1976, causing a feeling that "this was a technology that had gotten ahead of the abil-

ity of human beings to control it."

As the first occupiers going to trial for anti-nuclear protests at Trojan, the 96 defendants implemented the Trojan Decommissioning Alliance's determination to put nuclear power on trial by making use of a state "choice of evils" law, similar to statutes known as "competing harms" or "law of necessity" in other states.

They were able to put on expert testimony about the dangers of nuclear power, contending that refusal to leave plant property was necessary and justified in order to prevent continuation of the far greater wrong posed by the Trojan plant.

After the defense rested, district court Judge James Mason told the jury to disregard all the testimony they had heard on the deadly hazards of nuclear power. Mason said the jury could not consider the "choice of evils" statute in reaching their decision.

Several jurors later said they had been angered by the judge's order at the close of the trial that they ignore the testimony of the dangers of nuclear plants. They also said that the testimony had turned them against nuclear power—and that a straw poll they took among themselves showed that if the "choice of evils" defense had not been ruled out by the judge's instructions, they would have reached a not-guilty verdict "in five minutes."

In closing arguments the defense urged jurors to "follow your conscience" in reaching a verdict. Since the judge had prohibited any mention of nuclear power in closing arguments, a defense attorney made use of a contingency plan approved

by defendants for utilization if the judge ruled out "choice of evils" at the end of the defense case—the argument that protesters had been arrested within a railroad track right-of-way and therefore the utility had not proved it had a right to order them off the property in front of the gates.

Over 100 Trojan occupiers remain to be tried, and District Attorney Martin Sells says that next time it's going to be different. "I'm not satisfied with the results of the first trial, and I think it could lead to a breakdown of law and order if it's not rectified," Sells said five days after the verdict.

As a columnist for the liberal *Willamette Week* noted: "Sells apparently was so intent on doing the utilities a favor by rebutting the protesters anti-nuclear witnesses that he failed to nail down to the jury's satisfaction the one case he had—criminal trespass."

A week earlier, in its first issue after the trial, the *Willamette Week* for the first time endorsed permanent shutdown of the Trojan plant.

The state's largest circulation black newspaper, the *Portland Observer*, meanwhile editorialized that, "as long as any doubt exists, nuclear reactors should be considered dangerous and other methods of generating electricity should be used."

The pro-nuclear *Daily Oregonian*—part of the Newhouse chain—responded to the trial with an editorial denouncing the Trojan Decommissioning Alliance and anti-nuclear protestors everywhere.

**Norman Solomon is a free-lance writer in Oregon and a member of the Trojan Decommissioning Alliance.**



## Ken Cockrel

*Continued from page 5.*

don't like to generate (to say it bluntly) bullshit expectations about what people can look for from someone being elected to the Detroit City Council.

*But many folks will be hoping—or fearing—that Cockrel's going to "do a number" on the council.*

There are people who are going to be suspicious of me. But I think we do bring something affirmative to the council.

We have shown a capacity to mobilize the community in a way that isn't reproduced by the other people on the council. That capacity can be brought to bear on some programs to benefit the community. In particular, I have my own view of the narcotics problem and feel that a mobilization can be developed around that.

What I'm able to do in the Council is going to be dependent upon what we're able to do in the community, just as what we're able to do in court was influenced by our ability to generate support for alternative approaches to legal problems in the community from which the juries came.

Whether I can or cannot, for example, advance programs of self-policing. ... Are we in a situation where we've got an organizational infrastructure that makes it politically possible to do what we are trying to do? Maybe yes. I'm committed to try.

But to generalize: we are studying the

concept of municipalization, the concept of the city being the insurer of last resort, the concept of the city being the provider of last resort to people who are incapacitated by dint of age, physical condition, etc., because cities are what they are—places where you dump the people that are incapacitated, the older, the younger, the weaker, the sicker. I don't want to sound like a social worker, but that's all the city government is: a service dispensing institution. It really is. *You've been called a number of things during your career in Detroit. I wonder if you'd care to comment on your general ideological perspective and its relationship to this campaign?*

What makes this campaign of interest, among other things, is the synthesis of a socialist political perspective and the electoral process. ... Marxist, I'm called; socialist, I'm called. And I am. That means I'm a person who has done some study and has come to accept Marxism as an analytical construct that is useful in attempting to understand the present and make some projections about the future. We say that the capitalist system is beyond salvation through reform or internal reconstitution. We want to supplant that system with a system that is organized to produce not for profit but to meet the needs of those who do the producing. I'm committed to that and that's what I comprehend to be socialism.

It's not an abstract proposition for us. Daddy was a worker. I don't romanticize

the business of being a worker. The only thing one really gets from working is tired.

*How do you think folks now perceive you and the movement you represent?*

I think that we have an identification with the extraparlimentary opposition in this country and we also have had an identification with self-defense. When people look at us they see us as persons who stood up for our right to fight, and that right to fight has been exercised by some people in some very volatile ways

in the community. We've supported that successfully, whether it's Madelyn Fletcher or Hayward Brown.

So I know that a lot of people think of us as being kind of basic in another way than just wanting to do well and hoping that we can get people to pass laws and resolutions and so forth.

I think people see us as fighting consciously and deliberately at the most effective level we can, knowing that the persons against whom we fight don't always play by the rules.

## Congress and farmers

*Continued from page 7.*

ing retail food prices, push inflation "close to double-digit levels" and slash agricultural exports, among other things.

The American Agricultural Movement, organizer of the farm strike, steers clear of the historical definition of parity, although the word has become their rallying cry. According to strike leader Bud Bitner, the farmers want "parity as it's defined in the dictionary—fairness."

The farmers want Congress to enact a minimum farm price law, like the minimum wage law. The price law would make it illegal to buy or sell farm products at less than 100 percent of parity, calculated under a new formula. That formula would take into account the costs of production and would include a "reasonable return for our investment and labor

—about 8 percent," according to Bitner.

"We're not wanting a government subsidy," Bitner stressed. This scheme would damp down the broad fluctuations of commodities markets and protect consumers from the costly effects of those fluctuations, the striking farmers contend.

Under the proposed statute, "we'd still have to produce, we'd still have to be efficient," but the profits of commodities dealers and other middlemen who now "get more than their fair share" would be cut, Bitner said.

If Congress won't act—as appears likely—Bitner promised that farmers themselves would organize "and set their own prices." But if they cannot organize a strike effective enough to pressure Congress into action in the first place, some observers doubt they could succeed in setting their own prices either.

**Recommended readings in American agriculture (see page 14):**

- Food First: Beyond the Myth of Scarcity**, by Frances Moore Lappe, Joseph Collins, with Cary Fowler (Houghton, Mifflin, 1977).
- Toward a National Food Policy**, by Joe Belden with Gregg Corte, Exploratory Project for Economic Alternatives, 2000 P St. NW, Washington, DC 20036.
- Food for People, Not for Profit**, ed., Catherine Lerza and Michael Jacobson (Ballantine Books, 1975).
- Eat Your Heart Out**, by John Hightower (Vintage Books, 1975).
- Rural America: A Voice for Small Town and Rural People** (periodical): Dupont Circle Building, Washington, DC 20036.
- Annals** (American Academy of Political and Social Science), Jan. 1977: issue devoted to "The New Rural America": 3937 Chestnut St., Philadelphia, PA 19104.
- Southern Exposure** (periodical), especially Fall 1974 issue, "Our Promised Land": P.O. Box 230, Chapel Hill, NC 27514.