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## Canadians urge grassroots solidarity

by Terry Pugh

REGINA, SASKATCHEWAN—The National Farmers Union (NFU) of Canada is not about to adapt to an unjust policy which displaces farm families and undermines rural communities while enhancing the economic and political power of multinational agribusiness corporations.

This message was delivered by the President of the nation-wide grassroots farm organization during his closing address to the NFU convention here on January 13. Wayne Easter, re-elected to his seventh term as NFU President, said the Canadian government's 'market-oriented' agricultural policy is taking the country in the wrong direction.

"The market-oriented ideology downplays human needs and gives multinationals more control over the economy," he said. "It is vital that this centralization of power be challenged, and a new vision for rural Canada be implemented."

The NFU convention resolved to strengthen the organization "at the local, community level" as a means of countering the corporate agenda. "It is the local level where people need to be empowered so they can regain their dignity and control over their own lives," said Easter. "Individual and community empowerment is the essential foundation for building positive social change. People have the power that comes from knowledge, experience and past

successes. Our greatest challenge is to cultivate a radical spirit of hope in rural Canada that can pull people out of their despair and instill in them a vision worth fighting for."

He warned that the farm movement can expect "serious opposition" from those who benefit from rural communities' destruction. "We've seen the lengths to which big business will go in implementing their right-wing agenda," he said, alluding to the massive advertising campaign launched by major corporations in favor of the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement (FTA) during a federal election campaign last November. A total of \$40 million was injected by the corporate sector into advertising for the federal Conservative Party's re-election.

Easter also noted that Minnesota Agriculture Commissioner Jim Nichols was unable to speak at the NFU convention due to political pressure from Cargill and other corporations. "Mr. Nichols has been one of the key figures talking about global consequences of U.S. farm policy," stated Easter. "He has taken on the international grain trade by pointing out that American policies benefit the corporate sector at the expense of farmers around the world. As a result, the companies have turned up the heat in the Minnesota legislature and the media. Nichols was obliged to deal with the political realities of having spoken out on behalf of farmers and remain in Minnesota."

### Free trade hurts farmers

Economist John Warnock, author of *Free Trade and the New Right Agenda*, told NFU delegates the FTA constitutes a convenient political cover for Prime Minister Brian Mulroney's implementation of a harsh, neo-conservative agenda. "The FTA provides the federal government with a vehicle for cutting social programs, health and environmental standards, and farm programs without being accountable. By allowing the so-called 'market economy' to dictate social standards and working conditions under the guise of investment decisions by large corporations, the government can avoid responsibility for unpopular consequences," he said.

Warnock said the push for increased international trade and the dismantling of tariffs



Wayne Easter, President of the National Farmers Union of Canada. Photo: Terry Pugh.

was an attempt to enhance the flow of capital on a global basis and restore high profit rates. By taking advantage of countries with dictatorial political systems that repress workers and farmers, have few environmental regulations and exempt corporations from taxes, big business plans to restore

profits, but at the expense of people and the environment.

### NFU reviews structure

Delegates decided to continue an internal review process launched last fall to evaluate the structure and direction of the NFU. *Cont. on pg. 2*

## Everybody talks about the weather, but what they're saying is revolutionary

by Jeremy Brecher

It started as a typical conversation about the weather. "Awfully hot," I said. "I talk with old-timers who can't remember anything like it in 60, 70 years," my milkman responded.

Then he continued: "It's probably this 'greenhouse effect.' If you ask me, it's a warning. All the poisons we're putting into the air and the water—if we don't get our act together, we're going to make the earth a place that people can't

live on."

As a historian, I'm always on the lookout for subtle signs of deep changes in social outlook. When a milkman's small talk shifts from local weather to the global biosphere, I felt I was witnessing the opening shot of the second ecological revolution.

The first ecological revolution was based on a popular recognition of the links between the different aspects of the micro-environment: that

you cannot poison the bugs without also killing the birds. That realization spawned a popular movement involving millions of people which has now reached everywhere, even the Soviet bloc and the Third World. The result has been an array of environmental legislation in dozens of countries.

The second ecological revolution grows out of a recognition of the links of the macro-environment. *Cont. on pg. 3*

## Bad advice threatens FmHA borrowers

ST. PAUL, MN—Nationally recognized lawyers, who successfully stopped thousands of Farmers Home Administration (FmHA) farm foreclosures, denounced as "false" and "misleading" recent advice offered to financially distressed farmers by *Acres U.S.A.*, a monthly tabloid published in Kansas City, Mo., by Charles Walters. *Acres* was also accused of promoting various bogus legal schemes and of supporting racist and anti-semitic literature.

In its January 1989 publication, *Acres* advised FmHA borrowers to ignore government application forms for debt restructuring. "There is only one bit of valid advice for the recent

The unsigned *Acres* editorial assailed the advice offered to farmers by Willie Nelson, Farm Aid and the Farmers Legal Action Group (FLAG) of St. Paul, Mn. The *Acres* attack focuses on a letter sent by Nelson in November 1988 to 83,000 FmHA borrowers who had been notified by the federal agency of its intent to begin debt-collection actions.

### Legal action urged

"*Acres* is lying to America's farmers, plain and simple," said Jim Massey, an attorney and executive director of FLAG. "Their advice, if followed, is guaranteed to result in unnecessary loss of thousands of

it" to their detriment."

Massey is the lead attorney in *Coleman v. Lyng*, the national class action suit brought on behalf of 250,000 FmHA borrowers. The *Coleman* case halted 78,000 FmHA foreclosures in 1987, and has stopped FmHA from seizing \$1.5 billion in farm proceeds from its borrowers. FLAG attorneys have sued FmHA and Farm Credit System lenders on numerous occasions, winning important rights for farmers. They have also produced and sold nearly 100,000 publications to assist farmers. They have given legal workshops on more than 150 occasions in 32 states.

*Acres* is also distributing a

lawyer who was permanently disbarred in December, 1987.

Although the *Acres* editorial asserted that farmer will "sign away their rights" by submitting applications for loan servicing and debt restructuring, legal experts disagree. "The claim that farmers will lose rights under the *Coleman* case if they receive and sign the FmHA application for loan restructuring is absolutely false," says Lynn Hayes, FLAG litigation director. "These forms were approved by Judge Van Sickle of the *Coleman* case, and the injunction was lifted two months ago," Hayes continued. "In any event, the application form does not con-

tant new restructuring programs," explained FLAG attorney Randi Roth. "If farmers refuse to receive these certified letters, as *Acres* advises, they are certain to face loan acceleration and foreclosure."

Farmers who have taken *Acres* advice, and have now missed the government's 45-day deadline to apply for loan restructuring, should contact an attorney, according to FLAG attorneys. "They may have a legal claim against *Acres* or Williams for providing them with false and misleading advice," says Massey.

In recent years *Acres* has commented favorably on a variety of financial and legal scams and published inter-

# Salvadorans return home to the land

by John Donaghy

In the midst of a civil war, thousands of peasants are returning to their land in El Salvador. In the face of governmental opposition, new communities, seeds of peace, are being constructed in war zones.

The Salvadoran civil war has its roots in the maldistribution of land and power in that country. The best land, used for export crops, is controlled by a small oligarchy, often called the Fourteen Families. Efforts of peasants, allied with church and union groups, to gain access to land in the 1970s were met with violent repression. A civil war began in earnest in 1980. Since then about 70,000 civilians have been killed, most by government troops or army-related death squads.

## 1,700,000 displaced

The war has also created massive dislocation: 700,000 internally displaced persons and over a million external refugees. Moreover, the Salvadoran army's strategy is to depopulate the countryside, forcibly relocating peasants whom they consider to be supporters of the guerillas.

Salvadoran peasants have a deep attachment to their land. So, starting in 1985, the displaced within El Salvador have organized themselves to return to the land. Some returned in small groups, but soon they organized large community repopulations. More than twenty communities have moved back to the land and established themselves as cooperatives. Usually, they return to lands which have not been planted for years and to towns which have been reduced to rubble by bombings. The results of these efforts are impressive. In June, 1987, I visited the repopulated com-

munity of El Barillo, whose 500 members had in one year established a functioning cooperative which expected to be nearly self-sufficient within the year.

Over 22,000 Salvadorans fled to Honduras after army massacres in their villages. After seven years in U.N.-sponsored camps, many of the refugees decided to return home, even though the war continues. 4,313 Salvadoran refugees left the Mesa Grande, Honduras camp on October 10, 1987, to return to four bombed-out villages in rural El Salvador. They have rebuilt them with the help of church and humanitarian agencies. However, the army has frequently turned back or delayed shipments of food and humanitarian supplies for these communities. Despite these tactics, two other groups have left the Mesa Grande camp and successfully returned to El Salvador: 1,200 refugees in August, 1988, and 800 more in November.

These repopulations are nonviolent efforts to reclaim the land from the war, undertaken by people who return to their lands with virtually nothing except a strong sense of community and a desire to reclaim their land for peace.

## Cooperatives need support

They are developing new forms of rural community life. They function as cooperatives, often combining communally-worked land with provision for small family plots. Education of the young, together with literacy programs for adults, are priorities. Furthermore, they take special care of the weakest. For example, in Santa Marta, repopulated in October, 1987, the first houses were constructed for widows, orphans, and the sick.

As part of a U.S. religious delegation, I accompanied the August repatriation from Mesa Grande. Two days before they were set to leave the camp, Salvadoran authorities had not agreed to let them return to their chosen sites in El Salvador. Yet, by virtue of their organization and tenacity, the refugees obtained all their demands except one: our delegation was not allowed to enter El Salvador. Salvadoran religious leaders, though, did see that they arrived safely. Staying behind in Honduras, our delegation, however, was able to begin raising money for a tractor for one of the communities as a sign of our continuing support.

These experiments in rural cooperatives need support of North Americans. Knowing that the U.S. government sends one million dollars daily to El Salvador, these communities seek an end to all U.S. aid for the war as a first step toward peace. They also can use political and financial support. Efforts to aid them are being coordinated in North America by the GOING HOME/SHARE Foundation, Box 24 - Cardinal Station, Washington D.C. 20064; 202-635-5540.

John Donaghy is a lay minister at St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic Church of Ames, Iowa.



El Salvadoran peasants have been returning to their land since 1985 amidst civil war and government opposition. 20 communities have been re-established through cooperatives. Photo: John Donaghy

# Global environmental crisis looms

Cont. from pg. 1

environment: that cutting rain forests in Costa Rica or burning coal in Gdansk may contribute to crop failures in Iowa and tree death in the Black Forest. This realization promises to bring about a second wave of environmentalism with its prime characteristic being its commitment to international solutions.

## Global solutions needed

Recent environmental disasters are teaching us that the world's air and water cut across national boundaries as surely as DDT cuts across species boundaries. The radioactive cloud that rose above Chernobyl did not stop at the Soviet border but circled the globe. The acid rain that rises from U.S. smokestacks kills the forests of Canada. The cocktail of chemical poisons released by a warehouse fire in Switzerland flowed down the Rhine into Germany and Holland. The "greenhouse effect" resulting from burning too much fuel worldwide causes droughts in many parts of the world and the heat wave my milkman so clearly perceives as a warning.

That warning is already evident to many and is rapidly becoming evident to many more: damage to the global environment threatens the basic conditions on which life depends and poses a clear and present danger that requires a global response.

Why aren't governments

and politicians racing to meet this looming threat? The disturbing answer is that the measures we need to protect the global ecosphere will reduce the power of the world's most powerful institutions. National governments will have to accept international controls. Corporations will have to forego opportunities to make money at the expense of the environment. Military establishments will have to abandon programs that threaten the air and water. Beyond that, virtually everyone will have to adjust to substantial change—though not necessarily deterioration in lifestyle.

The first ecological revolution began as a popular movement. It didn't wait for leadership from politicians. In fact, it imposed its own agenda on governments and economics, an agenda that ultimately limited the ability of political and corporate officials to pursue their interests at the expense of the environment.

The second ecological revolution will similarly have to impose its agenda on governments and businesses. It will have to say that preserving the conditions for human life is simply more important than increasing national power or private wealth. And it will have to act globally—with international petition drives, worldwide demonstrations and boycotts, and direct action campaigns against polluting countries and corporations.

A baby step toward inter-

national responsibility was taken last year when, in the face of mounting popular concern, more than 40 nations agreed to protect the ozone layer by limiting the use of chlorofluorocarbons. The next logical step would be a binding international agreement to protect the atmosphere by limiting the production of the "greenhouse gases" that raise the earth's temperature.

The prime ministers of Canada and Norway recently called for such an agreement. But William A. Nitze, U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Environment, Health and Natural Resources, responded that it would be "premature at the current moment to contemplate an international agreement that sets targets for greenhouse gases."

Premature? Then when will it become timely - how many crop failures, heat waves, and environmental disasters from now? In the meantime, how does Mr. Hanson propose to protect us from the clear and present danger that degradation of the global environment poses to our security? Does he believe it is something that the free market or greater military strength can solve? How long does he think people will ignore something as close as the air they breathe and as insistent as the weather?

The words of my milkman bear a warning for political and business leaders: There is more to the second ecological revolution than hot air.

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