

By Diana Johnstone

PARIS

LAST MONTH, AS STARVING ETHIOPIAN children crowded the television screens, their main French benefactors, an organization of worldwide trouble-shooting medical men called *Medicins sans frontieres* (MSF), led a new ideological campaign in Paris against "Third Worldism."

The MSF, whose title points up the fact that they refuse to be stopped by national boundaries in their quest to succor Afghan guerrillas, boat people or famine victims, launched a new *Fondation Liberté sans Frontieres* to discuss such problems as human rights with the same spirit of internationalist free enterprise. The new Foundation's first act was a well-attended colloquium entitled "Third Worldism in Question," which set out to demolish left-wing criticisms of existing North-South relations as the aberrations of yet another foolish "-ism."

Doctors are the human face of modern technology and their humanitarian image is the best short argument for the free access of the West to poor countries. Thus the *Fondation LSF* thus emerged as a strong propaganda vehicle for the right-wing in its current bid to profit from Francois Mitterrand's weakness, disastrous conditions in the Third World and Ronald Reagan's success in establishing the ideological hegemony of free market liberalism.

The colloquium papers accused Third Worldism (usually considered a marginal or dissident position in North-South relations) of actually inspiring "many of the principles governing North-South cooperation" and thereby bringing about "a catastrophic situation in the field of economic development as well as human rights." Named as guilty of Third Worldist "catastrophism" were writers René Dumont, Susan George and Frances Moore-Lappé, who have all criticized existing agricultural patterns and practices as leading to Third World famine. This amounts to the surprising claim that the catastrophic state of the Third World is the fault of the very people who have been predicting the catastrophe in the hope of averting it.

Gerard Chaliand can claim to have pioneered the critique of Third Worldism with his 1976 book, *Revolution in the Third World*. Chaliand, who had written admiring studies of national liberation struggles in Vietnam and Guinea-Bissau, concluded that utopia was not at hand in a world regulated by the relationship of forces, and moved into the booming field of "strategy," which looks at the Third World from another angle.

There are different kinds of Third Worldism. The kind Chaliand turned away from in the '70s was the idealization of armed struggle that tended to see the Vietnamese and Cubans as vanguards of a world Communist revolution. That Third Worldism was largely demolished in Europe by the wars among the Chinese, Vietnamese and Cambodians. The Third Worldism under attack at the Paris colloquium was something else.

Guilt trip.

Two years ago Peter Bruckner launched a much more scornful and comprehensive broadside with a book entitled *Le Sanglot de l'Homme Blanc* (the white man's "sobbing," as opposed to "burden") debunking Third Worldism as an unwholesome guilt trip in the Christian tradition. Bruckner's argument is a complicated and erudite version of the elementary moral dilemma that tends to fascinate 13-year-olds: isn't generosity just a form of selfishness if it affords satisfaction? Isn't plain selfishness then better because it is less hypocritical?

Chaliand and Bruckner were among the speakers at the Third Worldism colloquium. But it was France's most enthusiastic propagandist for an American-led Free World, Jean Francois Revel, who pointed out the real target when he described the Brandt Commission Report as an "example of Third Worldism in its purest form." The real target—because it is felt

as a real political alternative in Europe—is the approach to the Third World symbolized by former West German Chancellor Willy Brandt's proposal to shift a portion of public expenditure from arms to development based on Third World needs.

The debate is important in so far as it may influence French public opinion and policy in a field where there are many decisions to be made. Jean-Pierre Cot, who was Mitterrand's first minister of cooperation until he ran afoul of certain vested interests in Francophone Africa, has suggested in a recent book that relations with the Third World may be the only area where France can act independently of the U.S. "In East-West relations, the situation is blocked. Yalta is there," he argues, and

Peter Bauer, an economist who reassured everyone that development funds are "no problem: people who can use capital productivity will always get it. They can borrow it at home or abroad."

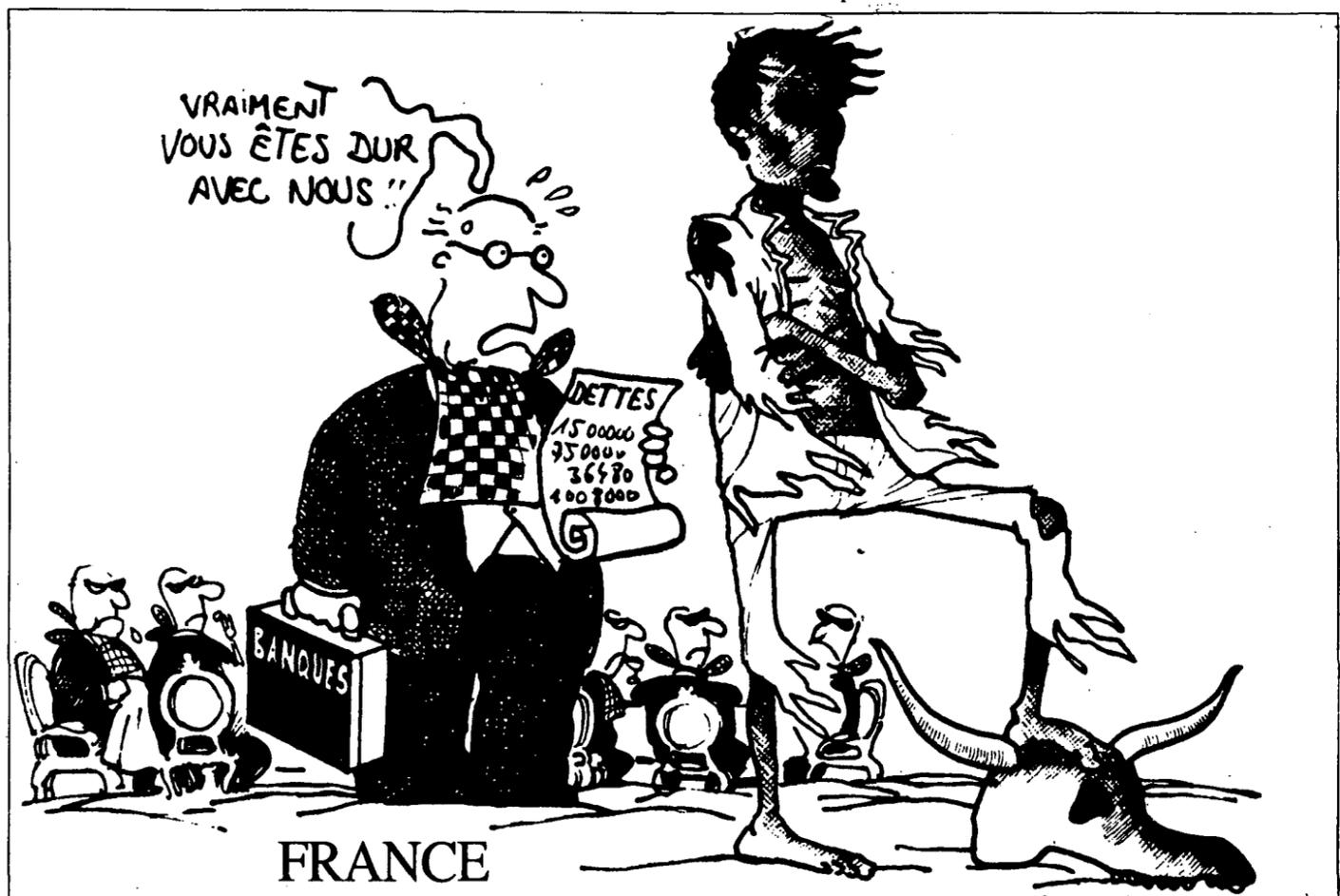
Another note was sounded by demographer Alfred Sauvy, who warned that European populations were aging, as life expectancy increased and birthrates declined, and this was what had led to the decline of Greece, Rome and Venice. This was all the more serious, he said, because a wave of immigration from the other side of the Mediterranean, where populations are exploding, was to be expected in 20 to 30 years.

The next day, another bilingual colloquium opened at the Sorbonne, this one spon-

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lian tradition" that French conservatives ("liberals") want to project onto the U.S., hoping it will save them. Pfaff said it was "a trifle frivolous" even to try to relate U.S. liberalism to France, and suggested that the "rise of liberalism in France is a matter of the exhaustion of the left rather than the vitality of something new." Pfaff attributes this exhaustion to the fundamental success of socialism in Europe, which has "fulfilled its mission."

Three American missionaries of Reaganism were there to preach the gospel. U.S. Ambassador Evan Galbraith radiated

According to this cartoon, "Third Worldism" is guilty of suggesting non-payment of debts.



New offensive against "Third Worldism"

changes can be only very small and gradual.

But the South is where things are moving. Cot defends Social Democratic Third Worldism as a hard-headed political approach based on this analysis: the only way Europe can get out of its economic crisis is by developing North-South relations. Cot urges that France play a role in "consolidating nonalignment" in the Third World and gave as an example the French offer to sweep U.S. mines from Nicaraguan ports.

The attack on Third Worldism would attempt to reduce even that margin of independence. Part of the French right believes it can best defend its interests by attaching France to the Reagan approach to the Third World, with its stress on free enterprise and rapid deployment forces.

Certainly, with People's China turning toward capitalism and famine ravaging Ethiopia, whose all too standard military dictatorship proclaims itself "Communist," the time seems ripe to attack left-wing approaches to the Third World. In domestic affairs, the left is already on the defensive. A recent poll showed only 32 percent of French people describing themselves as on the left, compared to 42 percent in 1981, and today place themselves on the right.

René Dumont, ecological candidate for president in 1974, stood up in the audience at the colloquium and announced that after years of study, he had finally found out who was responsible for famine: himself! The colloquium, he said, was a political operation by "a new right in disguise."

Several senior French civil servants at the colloquium chortled in delight at the extreme free-market statements of the eccentric Hungarian-born guest speaker Lord

sored by New York University and devoted to an examination of what has become of ideologies today. French participants had obviously gathered mainly to celebrate the death of Marxism (again) and the triumph of liberalism (in its economic sense, Lord-Peter-Bauer-style) and had called in their Anglo-Saxon cousins to help. But since the Anglo-Saxon cousins this time around were not Hungarian but American, the mayonnaise did not exactly take.

Three American-style liberals were there to warn that the success of Reaganism had nothing to do with liberalism—not even economic liberalism—as understood by Europeans. Economist John Kenneth Galbraith attributed the current American prosperity to the Reagan administration's "return to Keynesian deficit financing at a level beyond any imagined before by the liberal left." Galbraith said he had trouble accepting the assumption that defense expenditures are not part of government spending. "As a conservative," he said, "I worry about the reduction of the government's role. Capitalism saved itself because regulation defused the 19th-century criticism. The welfare state has been conservative...."

Journalist Frances Fitzgerald told the French more than they wanted to know about the "moral majority" and the fundamentalist religious tradition that has resurfaced with Reaganism. In the fundamentalist view, she said, the world is not run by Hobbesian interests, but is a "battlefield between forces of good and forces of evil."

New York writer William Pfaff summed it up by reminding the French that what does not exist to any significant degree in the U.S. political spectrum is the "Toquevil-

confidence that Reagan's policies had found the simple answer to continuous economic growth. The main thing was to cut taxes and deregulate. "The snowball effect has begun," rejoiced Ambassador Galbraith, a former Morgan banker and *National Review* editor. "This will be the locomotive forcing statist governments in Europe to adopt liberal economic policy." Supply-side guru Jude Wannisky preached the relevance of his brand of economics for France, and even claimed that if supply-side ideas were applied to Africa, they could bring about an "end to global poverty."

Even more exotic to French ears than this radiant optimism was the crusading spirit of Joshua Muravchik of *Commentary*, who provided the surprising news that the "death blow to detente" came in 1973, when the Soviet Union encouraged the Arabs in the Mideast war. Muravchik acknowledged that we should not try to overthrow governments in Eastern Europe, because that could lead to war, but he suggested instead that we should overthrow Communist governments in other parts of the world, like Angola, where rebel groups are rising up. "This could be part of a new post-containment policy," he suggested, that would be "more militant about carrying the democratic creed to the world."

Jean-Pierre Cot, who is unusually familiar with the U.S., expressed alarm at Muravchik's "moral evangelism." It is something that "terrifies" Europeans, he said. Contradicting the prevailing assumption that liberalism is on the rise, Cot said that the crisis was squeezing out "liberal" tendencies in both the right and the left. The moral majority's campaign to reinstate prayers in the school and interfere in personal life is certainly not "liberal."

In France, Cot noted, the "liberal" strain of French socialism, the "second" or "liberal-libertarian" left (to which Cot has tended to belong) has been shoved aside, and "autogestion has disappeared from the vocabulary." The crisis, he said, is marked by the "disintegration of 'soft' ideologies."

By David Moberg

CHARITON, IOWA

OUTSIDE THE SMALL CORRUGATED steel central office of the Chariton Farm Machinery Auction, a warmly bundled knot of equipment dealers and a few farmers moved among the many rows of tractors, combines, grinders, cultivators and related paraphernalia of contemporary farming.

They were braving the arctic wind and snow to bid on the machinery. Much of it was offered for sale by other dealers or by farmers who needed to raise cash quickly to pay off loans or meet expenses. But nearly one-third may have come from farmers who were being driven out of business and

Disappearing Dreams

facing foreclosure. That included five tractors and a variety of other machinery that recently had belonged to Keith Schippers, a 39-year-old farmer from Prairie City, whose grandfather moved to a nearby Dutch community at the turn of the century.

Inside, auctioneer R.D. McWhirter, his curly hair bursting from beneath his cap, faced an angry, determined group of roughly 100 farmers and an equal number of United Auto Workers (UAW) members, many of them sometime employees of agricultural implement manufacturers. They were there to stop the sale of Schippers' equipment that had been repossessed by one of his lenders, the Production Credit Association. PCA is a government-chartered but now private and theoretically member-controlled bank that loans farmers money mainly to meet operating expenses until crops or livestock are sold.

McWhirter took the microphone. Nervously, he expressed an understanding of the protest but tried to put in a word for the lenders as well. "Mr. McWhirter," came a voice from the crowd, "you don't have to profit off the misery of others. You don't have to do the dirty work of the lenders. You're the middle guy." McWhirter tried to extend his sympathies to lenders and borrowers alike, but the chants of "Call PCA" grew louder and more insistent.

"All right, I will call PCA," he said. It was a quick call. "We have various farm and agricultural groups here that would like to have an answer to the Schippers sale," he told a PCA loan officer. "What would you suggest? Don't sell today? That will be good news."

There were cheers when McWhirter returned and pledged never to sell Schippers' equipment at public auction. Later that day, PCA officers—who claimed, not very convincingly, that they had not called off the sale because of the protest—gave Schippers another 15 days to come up with a workable plan. Whatever breathing space that gives Schippers, the protest highlighted the desperate plight of a growing number of medium and even large family farms. And it gave a boost to the burgeoning farm protests.

"What we have done here today is to take an extraordinarily strong step forward in the farm movement...of building a community of people on the land," protesters were told by David Ostendorf, a United Church of Christ minister who is a leading figure in the Iowa Farm Unity Coalition that had called the sale-stopper. "We have to give Iowa and the nation a message that we aren't going to take this any more."

And Schippers, after thanking McWhirter, told his backers, "We've got to change policies in Washington. We need a 1985 farm bill that will give us a chance to make money out here and get back on the land."

For several years most farmers throughout the Midwest and in many other parts

of the country have not been making money. More and more, they cannot even make payments on their debts, which now total \$225 billion nationwide. As land prices plummet, their equity vanishes, and skittish financial institutions grow increasingly reluctant to loan money—even the money needed to put crops in the ground this spring.

More of those institutions are joining the farmers themselves in a steady slide to the precipice: from December to January alone the number of banks in Iowa officially considered troubled climbed from 113 to 133. The federally chartered institutions—the Farmers Home Administration (FmHA), Production Credit Associations and the Land Bank—are also feeling the pinch: nationally, the number of delinquent loans

more than doubled from mid-1980 to mid-1984 to 35.4 percent. The dollar value of delinquent loans quintupled to 21.3 percent.

In the past two years the rate at which farms have been going out of business has doubled (roughly 3.6 percent last year, according to one bank survey). Formal bankruptcy rates have nearly quadrupled. Half of all PCA loans are now classified as substandard, doubtful or loss, according to Dan Levitas, an organizer for the Iowa Farm Unity Coalition.

Around 21 percent of Iowa farms now have so much debt in relation to their deflated assets—70 percent or more—that they are likely to fail this year, he said. Fifteen percent of Iowa farmers may not even get operating loans this spring. A recent survey by *Farm Journal* suggests that 42 percent of farmers in the north-central region are sliding toward insolvency and may not survive the next two to three years. By early 1986, the Farm Unity Coalition estimates, as many as 1,600 to 2,000 farms

in Iowa may fail.

Those grim statistics all assume that the present agricultural market and farm policies will not change significantly. But if the Reagan administration plan just submitted to Congress is adopted, the situation should worsen dramatically. The proposal from Agriculture Secretary John Block would quickly reduce price supports for major agricultural commodities as part of a "market-oriented" policy. According to a new projection of the effects of various farm policies by the Food and Agricultural Policy Research Institute, a market-oriented plan would reduce commodity prices by 15 to 20 percent. For wheat and corn, dollars earned per acre over variable costs would be halved. Since prices now are below the average cost of production, even

more farmers would be eliminated quickly. Even with current price supports and an expanded international market, prices would not rise enough to help.

"Block calls it a market-clearing policy," says Marty Strange, director of the Center for Rural Affairs in Nebraska. "I call it farmer-clearing. They plan to eliminate 20 to 25 percent of farmers. They expect it and don't plan to do anything about it."

If they do clear the farmers, banks and other financial institutions will find themselves stuck with vast quantities of land and machinery. Many banks in Iowa that have forced liquidation have found sales returning less than 50 cents for each dollar loaned. As a result, banks increasingly hold the land and rent it to other farmers. Meanwhile, land prices are likely to continue to plunge this year, according to most experts.

In Iowa, farmland already dropped in value 28 percent from 1981 to 1984. But renting the land does not recover the bank's money. More and more there is talk of a collapse of the entire farm credit system,

the equivalent of the failure of two Continental Banks, that could send disastrous shock waves through many major banks.

In future issues of *In These Times*, I will trace the roots of the crisis, the alternatives for public policy, the impact on small towns and rural life and the complex political upheaval that has been generated. There are six million farm residents in the U.S., and the vast majority of them are part-time small farmers who hold other jobs that often subsidize a losing farm operation. The farm crisis focuses not only on the 400,000 middle-sized farms but also increasingly on the 300,000 farms that gross more than \$100,000. These are the "family farms" of varied descriptions, but most involve an extended family who own (but increasingly also rent) the land that they farm.

The survival of these family farms is not simply a question of humanitarianism or nostalgia. Nor is it primarily an issue of bailing out the banking system. The question is what form of ownership and control society desires? Worker ownership and control is a longstanding ideal of Jeffersonian democracy that has found new support in recent years. When combined with a fair social regulation of production and price fluctuations, such dispersed ownership and operation of farms is vastly superior—economically and socially—to the alternative: increasing concentration of land ownership and corporate-style industrialized agriculture.

But the very "independence" that farmers cherish often leads them to support policies and politicians that would not only undermine their independence but their very existence. Confusion is as widespread as desperation. Most farmers hope against hope that they can hold on a little longer. A few, but a growing number, have begun to realize that mutual dependence and collective action may, ironically, save that independence and the farm.

At his peak, ruddy-faced Keith Schippers and his family farmed 927 acres of rolling land right on the dividing line between the rich fields of northern Iowa—the nation's number two agricultural state—and the hillier, less prosperous south. His problems began, he said, with a severe drought in 1977, which led him to borrow money to cover losses, followed by hail damage to



Marc Pokempner