

The Grain Game

America's amber waves of grain seem to be on their way to feeding the (Communist) world, a far better use for them than rotting away in heavily subsidized silos. The sale of almost 20 million bushels of wheat to China, plus the much larger \$750-million grain transaction with the Soviet Union announced in July, represent important breakthroughs in East-West trade.

Furthermore, Presidential aide Henry A. Kissinger was said yesterday to have made "significant progress" toward reaching broader trade agreements during his current visit to Moscow, with accords in the works that could amount to trade exchanges worth a billion dollars or more.

All this is to the good. Unfortunately, a seedier side of at least the Soviet grain sale may be coming into view, as the Administration seems once again to be operating on an assumption that, if the outcome is spectacular enough, the electorate will just not concern itself about possible special favors to special interests.

* * *

There seem to have been extraordinary windfall profits from the deal, going not to farmers but to a few dealers who managed to place grain futures orders before the scope of the Soviet purchase became known. In addition, two former officials of the Department of Agriculture, the men who had been directly responsible for grain negotiations with Moscow, left the Government a month before the transaction was concluded and promptly took up executive positions with exporters who now stand to profit.

There is as yet no proof of the ominous charges of Senator McGovern and others that the two officials possessed and carried specific inside information to their new employers. There is conflicting evidence on the question whether the stunning size of the Soviet purchase could have been known in Washington at the time they left their public posts. But Agriculture Secretary Butz has admitted that even last May the officials involved "felt that there would be a Russian sale down the road."

It is only proper that Congress follow two proposed lines of investigation. Representative Purcell, Democrat of Texas, opened hearings yesterday into the financial issues of the deal as it affects the farmers—specifically the matter of a special export subsidy granted for one week of heavy trading late last month at a cost to the taxpayer estimated at \$100 million.

At the same time, Representative Rosenthal, Democrat of New York, is raising important questions about the practice of public servants moving directly into private firms that stand to benefit from knowledge acquired in their official positions. Federal statutes are specific in regulating this, including imposing a one-year waiting period for private activities involving matters over which the former Government employe "was directly and substantially interested [or which were] under his official responsibility." This statute has seldom been adequately enforced, particularly in cases of former Pentagon employes moving into defense-related industries.

* * *

In this, as in previous instances, the Administration is showing serious disregard for the need for public disclosure of relevant facts. Secretary Butz seems to believe that a simple denial of impurity, coupled with denunciations of the Democratic Presidential candidate for even suggesting such a thing, is a sufficient assurance to the public. It is not.

Nor is it good enough to say that the Justice Department is investigating to see if there were any conflict-of-interest offenses—just as it is not good enough to let the Justice Department be the "impartial" investigator of alleged financial irregularities of the Committee to Re-elect the President, or of the clumsy break-in and eavesdropping at the Watergate offices of the Democratic National Committee.

Mr. Butz says it's "the name of the game" when some giant trading companies happened to make money out of the Soviet grain deal. It is reasonable now for Congressmen and voters to ask exactly what are the rules of the game which the Administration is playing with special interests and the public good.