

Club of Life calls for military-style mobilization to end African famine

by Mary Lalevée

The world's governments finally began to move during the month of October to send emergency food aid to Ethiopia, where more than 7 million people are faced with imminent starvation. The level of assistance, however, is far below the minimum required to reverse the holocaust facing that country and much of the rest of the African continent. Yet, according to a statement issued by the Club of Life on Oct. 31, the means are available to cope with the famine and drought—provided a mass international mobilization begins, “without counting the cost,” and provided that the evil influence of Malthusian, zero-growth doctrines is swiftly eliminated.

“Western governments’ policies towards Africa, determined up to now by the aims of the International Monetary Fund, must be changed,” the statement reads. “The continent must have the chance to stop the process of economic disintegration, through the implementation of great infrastructure projects and the use of modern technology such as nuclear energy. The first step towards that is an emergency food aid program, to end starvation in a period of weeks, and simultaneously to decisively increase agricultural production through improvements in infrastructure.”

In an *EIR* cover story dated Aug. 7, we described how a “military-style mobilization” could deliver the emergency food to Africa in time. J. Scott Morrison, former president of the international shipping organization Sea-Land, called for the use of self-contained, barge-carrying ships, loaded with food already bagged for easier inland delivery, as well as roll-on, roll-off ships, bringing in the maximum tonnage of food on loaded trucks to deliver it to its final destination. Floating piers could be built, just like the concrete piers towed during the Normandy landing in 1944 and installed after the beachhead was secured.

This program could start tomorrow: Governments can requisition the equipment and release food from existing massive stocks. The Club of Life will be campaigning internationally in the next weeks to achieve this.

The present situation in Ethiopia is just the leading edge of a process of ecological disintegration of Africa which can still be stopped, but could very soon become irreversible. Ten years of drought, with the last three years yielding no harvest whatsoever, has contributed to reducing one-fifth of the country's population to starvation. The country has been

kept in poverty by lack of investment, lack of industrial development, lack of irrigation, these added to civil-war conditions in the north of the country, and several years of “friendship” with the Soviet Union, forced upon Ethiopia by cynical Malthusians in the West, who refused that nation's requests for help after the revolution which overthrew Emperor Haile Selassie in 1974.

Ethiopian requests for aid, made repeatedly over the last year, were ignored by both East and West. For example in July, the Ethiopian government appealed for 900,000 tons of food; Western donors reduced that to 125,000 tons, saying that more could not be transported inside the country. In fact, as a report from the United Nations World Food Program stressed recently, the delivery of a mere 100,000 tons of food last March would have been enough to prevent the present crisis, avoiding what so-called experts have already accepted as inevitable, the death of one million Ethiopians by the end of the year.

The aid that began to come in October is still far from sufficient: The Ethiopian government estimates that 520,000 tons of grain are needed between now and next year's harvest, to save the 7.3 million people now at risk. However, this figure is calculated on the basis of giving every person only *half* the minimum ration required per person per day according to United Nations criteria. In reality, at least one million tons are needed as a minimum for bare survival. Pledged so far is a total of 120,000 tons. The United States is sending 50,000 tons.

The procedure for distribution of the food once it arrives at the port of Assab is hopelessly slow. The grain is bagged at the harbor by *hand and bucket*, then piled on planes which can transport only 20 tons each and flown to the inland distribution centers where hundreds of thousands of people are waiting. The centers have barbed wire fences around them, to keep starving thousands out, who watch in desperation as others are fed inside. A cynical British journalist described it as “just like Belsen, only here people are trying to get in.” About 30 planes are now involved in the airlift, including planes from Britain, the United States, East Germany, West Germany, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and South Yemen. The Soviet Union is reportedly sending 300 trucks and 24 helicopters to aid in the effort, after having pressured the Ethio-

pian government to refuse the Western offers of military planes.

The crisis in Ethiopia is, however, only part of the holocaust that is developing in Africa, where 21 nations are on the "critical" list. The three most severely affected outside Ethiopia are Chad, Mali, and Mauritania. Other countries in West Africa on the list are Senegal and Bourkina Faso (Upper Volta). Niger and Sudan are about to be put on the danger list. Somalia is on the list, too, and Kenya, further south. The list also includes Guinea and Guinea Bissau, Sao Tome and Principe, and, in southern Africa, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Tanzania, Zambia, Ruanda, and Burundi. Morocco is also affected.

Central Africa

In Chad, famine conditions have been reported from the Koumra (Moyen Chari) area, and the U.N. Disaster Relief Organization (UNDRO) reports that there are ominous indications of imminent famine in Tanajile and East Logone. Two-thirds of the country's 4.6 million population are threatened by famine. U.N. reports speak of at least 2,000 deaths from starvation, and the movement of 200,000 people from the countryside to the towns. There is a food deficit of 285,000 tons, but aid is restricted by the aid agencies to 100,000 tons—one-third of what is necessary—because of problems in getting it there. One report from Chad tells how people in the northeast of the country are starving, with thorns the only food available on the market. People buy them to eat the soft interiors. Farmers planted seeds four times this year, but the rains never came. There are severe health problems, with the cost of a health rehabilitation program estimated at \$300 million—which the government does not have.

In Zaire, despite a normal crop last year, the situation is nowhere near normal. The government has sought emergency aid for 185,000 drought-affected people in the region of Ituri. Zaire has implemented an austerity program on the IMF's insistence.

West Africa

In Mali, 2.5 million of the country's 7.7 million population are drought victims. The cereal deficit ranged from 30-90% in different parts of the country, and the fodder shortage was between 30% in the northwest and 100% in the northeast. The infant mortality rate is 150 per thousand, and in most camps visited by medical teams near Timbuktu, there were *no children under age one*. At least 50% of livestock have died in the regions of Ansong and Menaka, and in the Gao region, an estimated 300,000 drought victims are facing acute food shortages. More than 200,000 tons of food are needed for 1985 according to the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization.

In Mauritania, two-thirds of the 1.7 million population are affected by drought. Between 40 and 90% of livestock has been lost.

Senegal needs food aid for 1.1 million of its inhabitants,

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and drought has already killed 150,000 cattle. Peasants are arriving in the towns destitute. Prices of basic goods such as cooking oil have almost doubled as part of the IMF's loan conditions.

Boukina Faso is expected to need massive aid after an even lower harvest than last year.

Niger has also asked for food aid.

East Africa

Because of the lack of rain during the April/June season in the southern half of the region, countries which had escaped drought disaster last year have now been hit. In Kenya, this year's harvest is expected to be less than half the normal 2.7 million tons, and the UNDRO reports that 2 million Kenyans may require famine relief in 1985.

In Tanzania, about 1.9 million people are in urgent need of relief because of the extreme drought in the northern regions, and the government has appealed for 382,000 tons of emergency food aid.

In Somalia, up to 80% of the population is regarded as undernourished.

In Sudan, one million people in the regions of Darfur and northern Kordofan are in urgent need of relief aid. There are reports that 40,000 refugees have gathered around Khartoum.

Southern Africa

The total grain output of the six countries of the region is estimated at 10.2 million tons, compared to the last normal harvest (1981) of 22.5 million tons. Botswana faces a shortfall of 83% in its 1984 harvest, Lesotho 75%, Angola 50%, and Zimbabwe 35%. About 8.5 million people in the region are affected by drought, and at least 1.5 million are in need of food aid.

In Mozambique, about one million people in Tete and other northern provinces are affected by drought. In Botswana, 42% of the total population is suffering from malnutrition, and in Lesotho, over one million are undernourished. In Zimbabwe, 450,000 children are reported to be undernourished.