

Australia Dossier by Allen Douglas

Stalling on food aid

The Canberra government dithers, while millions of North Koreans are starving to death.

On June 13, in response to a report by Catherine Bertini of the UN World Food Program (WFP), that North Korea would run out of food stocks by June 20, Schiller Institute founder Helga Zepp LaRouche issued an emergency call to feed the millions starving in North Korea. Mrs. LaRouche identified Japan, Thailand, and Australia as three nations in close proximity which have surplus food stocks, and could immediately ship food to North Korea. The Schiller Institute's co-thinkers in Australia, the Citizens Electoral Council, swung into action with a high-powered mobilization to force the Australian government to act. While that has stirred up a blizzard of activity, partially reported below, and an important preliminary shift in the Australian government's official aid position vis-à-vis North Korea, no further government aid had been pledged, as *EIR* went to press.

At the time it received Mrs. LaRouche's call, the CEC had two organizers in Canberra, lobbying the federal parliament to act to stop the British-sponsored genocide in Zaire. They put the North Korean crisis at the top of their agenda, and conducted 20 meetings with federal members of parliament. Numerous MPs pledged to raise the matter with Minister for Foreign Affairs Alexander Downer; with the office of Prime Minister John Howard, who was out of the country at the time; or with acting Prime Minister Tim Fischer. Human Rights Subcommittee Chairman Peter Nugent reported that he had raised the matter with Downer personally (as did other MPs), and had requested AusAID, the government's aid agency, to brief him on the crisis.

The government's response was

not long in coming. Department of Foreign Affairs Korea desk officer Elisabeth Wetherell reported that, although Australia gave \$2.9 million indirectly via the WFP in the 1996-97 fiscal year, it wasn't planning any more aid, because it didn't "want to be seen to be supporting the D.P.R.K. [North Korean] government." A spokesman for Acting Prime Minister Fischer, who had the ultimate authority, along with Downer, to act, whined to this news service that Fischer would not act, because "there is still a large elite in North Korea that is siphoning off aid that is being delivered and that aid is in fact not percolating through to the communities"—a self-serving lie which numerous recent visitors to North Korea, including U.S. Rep. Tony Hall (D-Ohio), have refuted.

While the government stalled, the CEC continued to organize thousands of faxes and phone calls from its supporters, unions, Asian studies academics, aid organizations, and others, in order to break the logjam. In this context, the Maritime Union of Australia offered to locate ships to take the food to Korea, and to load them for free, while Australia's largest aid agency, CARE Australia, on June 24 sent out a press release entitled "North Korea Faces Worst Famine This Century." Aid workers expressed disappointment at the overtly political stance which the Australian and other governments were taking. CARE Australia's emergencies manager, Simon Williamson, who recently spent a month in North Korea monitoring the situation, charged in CARE's release, "The Western world is debating whether there is a famine in North Korea, and meanwhile people are starving behind

closed doors."

Williamson reported to the CEC that CARE plans to raise 50,000 metric tons of food to provide therapeutic aid to the weakened very elderly and very young of North Korea, and was negotiating arrangements with the Pyongyang government to allay any fears about where the food was going.

In response to all this, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade informed the CEC that AusAID had now decided to include North Korea in provisional allocations, for the new fiscal 1997-98 year. This means that, subject to the foreign minister's approval, for the first time North Korea would be included in the list of nations for which Australia specifically budgeted aid.

While most people responded extremely well to the CEC's call, some were distinguished by their swinishness, such as Governor General Sir William Deane, and the president of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, Sir Ronald Wilson. Deane and Wilson have both been screaming about the "genocide" they claim has been committed against Australian aborigines, but refused to lift a finger for the 5 million North Koreans presently starving to death. Another who refused to act was Opposition Leader Kim Beazley, the only MP who is a member of London's International Institute of Strategic Studies, which wants to break up China, and would therefore like to see chaos in the region. In addition, Labor MP Steven Dergavel on June 26 launched a hysterical attack against the CEC's organizing.

By contrast, Independent MP Pauline Hanson, whom the media (and Deane and Wilson) vilify for her stance against "multiculturalism," on July 11 issued a hard-hitting call for aid to North Korea, under the title, "Hanson: 'Australia, Feed North Korea NOW!'"