

# BIBLICAL ECONOMICS TODAY

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## PLANNED FAMINE IN ETHIOPIA

The major causes of famine are not difficult to determine. As I have pointed out in my *Productive Christians in an Age of Guilt-Manipulators* (third edition, 1985), the most important causes have little to do with the size of population, natural resources, or the severity of drought (see also Julian Simon and Herman Kahn, *The Resourceful Earth: A Response to "Global 2000,"* Basil Blackwell, 1984). The most significant causes of famine are entirely man-made—created either by socialist states or by gangsters (the difference between the two being mainly quantitative, not essential). Famines are primarily caused by:

1. War;
2. The prevention of cultivation or the willful destruction of crops;
3. Defective agriculture caused by communistic control of land;
4. Governmental interference by regulation or taxation;
5. Currency restrictions, including debasing the coin.

The most blatant recent example, certainly, is the famine in Ethiopia, which first received widespread attention in the fall of 1984. While some have attempted to blame capitalism and the West for this terrible mass starvation, the fact is that Ethiopia is virtually a textbook case of what unbridled socialism can accomplish. The famine has been caused by the collectivist Mengistu regime, which, in the name of socialist "equality," confiscates most of what its citizens produce—and then devotes billions (46% of the nation's GNP) to military spending in order to secure its bloody hold on the country. Socialism is, in effect, the politicization of every area of life, a condition which cannot be accomplished without numerous acts of violence and terror by the government against its people. Ethiopia is no exception: in fact, the severity of the famine has been deliberately increased by the state and used as a weapon to force the people into submission. It is, to a large degree, a *planned famine*—a calculated, intentional matter of government policy. Provident farmers who attempted to store food from good harvests for future seasons of drought have been charged with "capitalist accumulation" and executed for treason against socialist ideals. There is probably no nation on earth whose government is so slavishly devoted to the Soviet Union and its collectivist agricultural policies. And the socialistic program of "land reform" (i.e., confiscation of property) was specifically stated in a top secret government directive to be aimed at the destruction of the Christian Church (this document is

quoted in Appendix 5 of the third edition of *Productive Christians*). The watchword of the day seems to be: *Let them eat ideology!* Mengistu's socialist tyranny has triggered patriotic insurrections against his regime in at least twelve of Ethiopia's fourteen provinces. (For more information on the politics of famine in Ethiopia, write to Philip Nicolaides, Accuracy in Media, 1275 K Street, N.W., Suite 1150, Washington, D.C. 20005; and to the Ethiopian Hunger Watch Committee, P.O. Box 33766, Washington, D.C. 20033. On the effects of socialist policies in other African nations, see Karl Borgin and Kathleen Corbett, *The Destruction of a Continent: Africa and International Aid* [New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982]; and Geoffrey Wheatcroft, "The Anguish of Africa," *The New Republic* [January 9 & 16, 1983], pp. 18-23.)

On February 1, 1985, the Ethics and Public Policy Center sponsored a special White House Briefing on the subject of the Ethiopian famine. One of the most informative lectures was delivered by Yonas Deressa, Director of the Ethiopian Refugee Education and Relief Organization. We have obtained permission to reprint it in this issue.

David Chilton

## THE POLITICS OF FAMINE

by Yonas Deressa

Mengistu Haile Mariam—whose barbarity, cynicism, and cruelty competes for first place each day with the infamous brother dictators Stalin and Hitler and who has successfully adopted their Big Lie technique—gave a seven-hour speech on September 12, 1984 to celebrate a decade of his terrorization of the Ethiopian peoples. In that seven-hour speech, he continually congratulated himself and his terrorist regime for the economic miracle their brand of socialism purportedly performed for Ethiopia. Mengistu's fantasy and the Big Lie propaganda scheme aside, what is Ethiopia's reality today?

The economy of the country lies in total ruin. Eight million Ethiopians are starving. An exodus of farmers pouring into Addis Ababa and other cities of the nation is creating dislocations on immense scales. Two million Ethiopians—among whom can be counted the country's best educated—have been forced into exile. Civil wars rage in 12 of the country's 14 provinces. Ethiopia, which was once considered a potential bread basket for Africa, has now become international charity's basket-case itself. The country's immediate and long-range future is bleak. Such, then, is the achievement of

Mengistu Haile Mariam and his communist regime's "economic miracle." The results of Mengistu Haile Mariam's rule by terror have been displayed on television for the whole world to see.

While 300,000 children, women, and men perished from starvation during a single nine-month period in 1984 alone, Mengistu's Moscow-controlled communist regime clearly demonstrated its utter contempt for the Ethiopian peoples by spending 35 million British pounds for installing a color television system and millions of pounds for a whisky gala destined for the consumption of its minions and bureaucrats.

I am confident that I am expressing the feelings of millions of Ethiopians silenced by the Police State created by totalitarian communism inside the country and those of the exiled Ethiopian multitudes in conveying my deepest gratitude to the peoples of the United States, Western Europe and the free world in general and to their governments for responding in genuinely humanitarian ways to the mass tragedy. Without the generous food-aid provided on an emergency basis by these sources, at least three million Ethiopians more would have by now become victims of cruel death by starvation. Without the continued generosity of the United States, which to date has provided more than half of the food-aid and has more aid in the pipeline and the generous contributions of Western Europe and the Free World in general, 8 to 10 millions of Ethiopians would perish this year.

I would like to most particularly thank President Reagan of the United States for his compassionate response and the firm and decisive leadership he has provided in meeting the critical and urgent food needs of the starving millions of Ethiopians. I would like to also express my appreciation to the Congress of the United States and other prominent Americans for reaching out their hand of friendship to the Ethiopian peoples in these hours and days of their direst needs.

The British Broadcasting Corporation television news casts and America's TV networks have done admirable work in bringing dramatically to the attention of the Free World the mass tragedy in my country. The print media in the Free World have been equally moving in their reportage. It must be recognized that both the reportage and the powerfully evoked emotional responses have helped the starving millions. Our sincere appreciation and thanks go to them too.

Yet, the coverages have overlooked the fundamental causes that have brought my country to the present brink of destruction.

All aid that is channeled but *not* accompanied by a profound understanding of the root causes of Ethiopia's present disastrous reality will simply go down into a bottomless rat-hole and maintain the very causes which bear so large a share of the responsibility for the present situation.

### How the Famine Happened

What, then, are the root causes for the present famine which have brought into question the very survival of the Ethiopian peoples?

Ethiopia today is visited by three calamities: communism's collectivized folly, Soviet imperialism, and drought.

Traditionally, Ethiopian farmers have saved food in good years for the bad seasons that they know are bound to come. But according to the communist regime in Addis Ababa, saving food from good years has been called "hoarding" and has led inexorably to mass executions. Saving money from past harvests and reinvesting for more future production of food is called "capitalist accumulation" and a "crime against the people" and has proved perilous for enterprising souls. Earning an honest living transporting food is called "exploitation" and invariably has led to confiscation, imprisonment and/or execution. Thus saving, saving and re-investing, and making a livelihood from transporting food to

where it is needed are all punished by official extortion, and worse.

One need only recall Stalin's destruction of farmers in the Soviet Union through forced collectivization of agriculture and its continuing negative impact on Soviet society, where recovery from that ill conceived episode has proved insurmountable to this very day, in order to appraise the full dimensions of the havoc wreaked on Ethiopia's farmers by the communist regime's dogmatic replication of that policy.

Reasonable men and women do not dispute that drought is an act of God and/or nature. But it takes the wilful act of men and women to turn the acts of God into calamity. The spectre of extinction that is haunting the very survival of the Ethiopian peoples today must be seen in this perspective in order to understand how things have come to the present alarming situation.

While drought has played a significant role in the present devastating famine, the root cause of the raging mass starvation can be traced to the communist regime's superimposition of Stalinist models on the country. To wit: forced conscription of the young and able-bodied men from the country's farms; the obliteration of all self-directed initiatives and incentives in the country by looting and confiscating and expropriating industrial enterprises, agro-businesses, artisan shops and the like throughout the country; the burying of the remnant of hope for any kind of self-reliant endeavour by massive raids on individual and business bank accounts; all have directly contributed to the collapse of the economy.

The communist regime has wrought the most devastating and the most lasting havoc on the country's farms where 90% of the Ethiopian peoples live and make their livelihood. To gain the support of Ethiopia's farmers, it promised land reform under the emotive banner of "land to the tiller." But it adopted the opposite policy when it proclaimed in a decree that all farm lands were the property of the state and set out to forcibly herd Ethiopian farmers like cattle into collectives and associations of all manner and shape. Thus while it inexorably proclaimed that land reform was one of its major priorities, its policies in fact resulted more in severe disruptions and dislocations of peasant patterns and food and cash crop production than in real reforms. The communist regime and its Soviet mentors have failed utterly to provide the sort of agricultural set-up that can withstand droughts, as they have failed to provide even the most rudimentary transportation infrastructure that can deal with the need to move food urgently to parts of the country.

The communist regime has implemented other damaging policies based on its dogmatic Marxist-Leninist ideology concerning the nation's economy that have had rippling effects in the various branches of the economy. In a spate of decrees, it expropriated all real property and real estate, private houses, office buildings, apartment complexes and the like throughout the country's urban areas. The private sector in urban housing development was dealt an instantaneous death-blow. Merchants, traders, agro-business entrepreneurs, professionals such as lawyers, medical doctors, architects, engineers, managers, salaried employees in both government and the private sector and the like with real potential to invest were all forced to cease all such activities lest they be labeled exploiters.

Wedded to the most doctrinaire and dogmatic communist ideology, the regime and its Soviet backers have adopted a pricing policy which helps the town dwellers (no more than 15% of the country's population) rather than the farmers. They have failed to meet the need for sensible marketing systems involving small businessmen and working with the proven market forces.

The communist regime and its Soviet allies have done absolutely nothing throughout the ten-year period the regime has been in power to address the long-term effects of the drought on the country in order to prevent its recurrence.

Informed and independent observers of the unfolding tragedy have been warning for quite some time that two fundamental challenges have to be faced if the country is to become self-sustaining in food in the years to come. These two fundamental challenges are topsoil erosion which is steadily but surely expanding the geographical areas it is afflicting and the essential transport infrastructure needed to move food urgently from areas where there is a surplus to parts of the country where there is a dire need.

In the past when farmers worked the land to feed themselves and where possible to produce surpluses for sale on the open market, they endeavored to protect the viability of their land by planting new trees to replace those which they have cut down for fuel and for other uses. With the collectivization of agriculture and state ownership of all farm land, land simultaneously belonged to everyone and to no one in particular. The absence of any vested interest in protecting farm lands as an asset by those who in the abstract have been "defined" as owners—the human hordes thrown into the collectives—left the land defenseless and uncared for. Thus, for many years the loss of topsoil through soil erosion has been rendering hundreds of thousands of arable acreage useless. This process continues to devastate much of the land in the North of the country and its encroachment is steadily spreading southward.

### **The Effects of Legal Plunder**

Prior to the usurpation and intransigent monopolization of political power by the combination of ignorant soldiers and doctrinaire communists in Ethiopia, the country's farmers produced more than they consumed in order to supply themselves with cash. They planted cash crops such as coffee, oil seeds; they traded hides and skins to earn money; they bred cattle, sheep, goats, poultry to earn cash; they sold eggs, milk, cheese to raise cash. For in those days they had ample supplies of goods and services they could purchase within Ethiopia from both home-based light industries and from imports from abroad. Ethiopia's farmers had the time-tested incentives to produce and to produce evermore, even utilizing their traditional farming methods.

The communist regime's policy of pricing the farmers' products by fiat pulled the carpet from under their feet and killed their self-motivated propensity to produce. As a direct consequence of the workings of the dynamic market forces, Ethiopia's farmers had been producing surpluses in agricultural products whose exports had been giving the country's balance of payments positions and its foreign exchange reserves very solid foundations. Prior to the communists' catastrophic take-over, both Ethiopia's balance of payments positions and its foreign exchange reserves had been in the black, year in and year out. In 1973, the country had foreign exchange reserves of well over \$700 million dollars—no mean feat for a developing country that was not exporting strategic raw materials such as oil or metals.

The communist regime's policy of the state as an instrument for looting and arbitrary confiscation of private and business assets—euphemistically referred to as collectivization and state ownership of the means of production—dealt the death blow to agricultural production destined for export. Thus with an arbitrary and bureaucratic stroke of the pen, Addis Ababa's communists killed the geese that were laying the golden eggs.

Having squandered the country's foreign exchange reserves, Addis Ababa's "proud" rulers did what comes naturally to communists everywhere: they embarked on the time-tested endeavours of tapping Western guilt, self-flagellation, and self-recrimination, and proceeded to pass their hats around for the inevitable contributions to their coffers.

The communists further insured the destruction of Ethiopia's farmers by laying their heavy hand on them in ad-

ditionally discouraging ways. By forcing Ethiopian farmers to contribute their most prized possessions—cattle, sheep, goats—into the Stalinist collectives, they motivated the farmers to either slaughter and eat them or to drive them across the country's borders to neighbouring countries for sale. Just as drought has pulverized Ethiopian farmers' livestock in the North, the regime's policy of imposing collectivization of agriculture has equally, if not more, destroyed the farmers' most prized possessions of livestock.

Ethiopian farmers had prized highly their possessions of animals of burden—donkeys, mules, and horses. These were the animals of burden that, by and large, the farmers had been utilizing in the past as means of transport for the delivery of their surplus food for sale on the open market. The regime's policy of forcing farmers to deliver their animals of burden to the collective pool has in this instance also significantly contributed to the near-destruction of these animals as means of transport within the country in no less measure than the drought.

For the ever dwindling numbers of farmers in the South trying to bring their meagre produce to the market, the traditional marketplaces in the countryside have become places to dread. In the countryside where about 85% of the population earns its livelihood by tilling the land, farmers, individual artisans, craftsmen, and small merchants hold market-days on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays to trade their goods and produce either for cash or barter. The communist regime raids these marketplaces periodically to conscript the young and able-bodied men for its never-ending military campaigns of suppression within the country and to arrest for summary trials all who have sold their goods and produce at above the prices it has established by fiat. Such actions on the part of the regime have resulted in driving into neighbouring countries as refugees hundreds of thousands of men from the country's farms, artisan shops, and crafts.

The regime's spider-like, multiple oppressive hands have reached into the countryside in other ways as well to snatch the end product of the farmers' sweat and toil. The regime levies quotas in cash and in kind on the farmers it has forced into collectives for whatever campaign or project it can dream up to snatch from them. To wit: levies for the various and endless military campaigns of internal suppression; for the drought, even though the farmers themselves bear its full brunt; for roads, schools, and clinics that never get built; for taxes and the like endlessly.

Given the sort of transport infrastructure that can deal with the need to move food urgently to parts of the country; allowed a pricing policy which helps farmers rather than town dwellers; a concentration on food crops as much as on cash crops; sensible marketing systems involving small businessmen and working with market forces; Ethiopian farmers could amply feed themselves and need not uselessly perish from starvation. They need neither the oppressive weight of the government nor to be herded into collectives as cattle. Given normal rains, relatively free husbandry and the rudiments of commercial transport, Ethiopian farmers can not only feed themselves and city dwellers but can produce the necessary surplus in good years for the bad seasons that they know, from experience, are bound to come. It is the communist regime's collectivized folly and oppressive policies that have killed any remnant of hope for selfhelp for the farmers of the country. The consequences of the communist regime's agricultural policy have ushered in the present calamitous famine in Ethiopia whose impact and devastation have been displayed on television for the whole world to see.

### **Religious War**

Ethiopia is an ancient land whose peoples have been traditionally deeply religious. The communist regime has left no stone unturned in its inexorable drive to uproot the lives,

cultures and traditional values of the Ethiopian peoples. On the economic front, we have outlined in some detail the regime's operational policy as it has affected collectivized agriculture and expropriated light industries, agro-businesses, private and businesses bank accounts.

The communist regime has applied with equal measure its oppressive weight on the Ethiopian peoples to get them to abandon their belief in God and to substitute half-baked, Marxist-Leninist ideology in the form of dialectical and historical materialist secular theology. In the pursuit of this objective, it has launched the most ambitious and the most diabolical campaign to eradicate both Christian and Moslem religious beliefs in Ethiopia. A top-secret plan for the suppression of religion in Ethiopia in the form of a secret directive to the communist regime's political cadres which found its way out of the country in the hands of a patriot—published by the *Times*, on November 5th, 1984—succinctly outlines what concrete measures would be taken to eradicate both Christianity and Islam from Ethiopia. This diabolical, vile, and evil campaign has so alienated the Ethiopian peoples that it is often cited as one of the primary—if not the primary—reasons by those farmers who have abandoned their lands and have resorted to armed struggle to oppose what they have come to literally believe to be the rule of the devil himself. According to *The Observer* newspaper, Sunday November 18, 1984, "the first targets have been the Protestant Churches linked to Western Missions. The Churches have been knocked down and property seized." About 1,500 churches of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church have been closed and scientific socialism is being promoted in the schools. The communist regime has established total control of the Orthodox Churches.

#### Rewriting History

Although the BBC and America's TV networks exposé invaded Western drawingrooms with pictures of rows of bodies wrapped in dusty sackings whose imagery is fresh in the minds of most viewers, the fact is that the pulverizing famine has been ravaging Ethiopia on the present scale for the past four years. The communist regime in Addis Ababa and its Soviet accomplices have been playing down the magnitude of the devastation and its obliterating impact because of their awareness of what the famine in the early 70s in the province of Wallo—which claimed over 200,000 lives—did to the government of the late Emperor Haile Selassie.

While the whole world now knows about the effects of the famine in North Ethiopia that has turned the region into one gigantic wasteland, the Ethiopian peoples in the rest of the country and particularly in Addis Ababa know next to nothing about what is going on in their own country. Such news blackout is imposed on local media while on the other hand the communist regime's incessant and vaunted propaganda beats its drums daily about "Western imperialism," about its inverted reality that sees the free world, particularly the United States, as the source of all evil throughout the world, and about how the United States and Britain are the

enemies of mankind and the blood-suckers of humanity.

The communist regime has adopted what it considers a very clever ruse: its vaunted propaganda assaults the Ethiopian people with so much verbiage about the glorious achievements and progress of its "revolution from above," while simultaneously, its pleas to the rest of the world assert the magnitude of the food aid it says is absolutely essential. Its Soviet accomplices are equally silent about the catastrophic famine. Their press, radio, and television have very little to say about events in Ethiopia. Radio Moscow's Amharic program, beamed to Ethiopia, mentions next to nothing about the starvation ravaging the country. Reminiscent of what that great American lady and ambassador to the U.N. coined as the "Blame America" syndrome, both regimes blame the West and the United States in particular for not responding to Ethiopia's tragedy in a timely fashion in their international propaganda verbiage.

The regime in Addis Ababa and its Soviet backers are engaged in a great deception and cover-up into which they are trying to draw the Western press. This effort on their part has made some headway in that the Western press has picked up the regime's and the Soviets' line that help from the West and particularly the United States has not been timely and expeditious. All knowledgeable and informed men and women acknowledge that topsy-turvy international communism is rewriting the history of current events. This indeed is communist conspiracy on a grand scale!

The regime and its Soviet mentors relegated the mass tragedy in North Ethiopia to the back seat as a phenomenon deserving a secondary place on the order of their priorities for two primary reasons: (1) they were determined to prevent the spectacle of mass starvation impinging on the "glory and achievements" of their revolution from above during the celebration of the tenth anniversary of their rule by terror; (2) having failed to annihilate the armed resistances throughout the country through such military campaigns as the *Red Star of 1983* that was supposed to have been their "final solution" to opposition to their rule by terror, they set out to utilize the mass starvation as an instrument of policy to force submission to their rule.

One only need recall the policy of Stalin's regime in the twenties when the young Soviet Empire was undergoing the ravages of similar famine to comprehend the strategy his brainchildren in Addis Ababa have adopted in taking advantage of mass starvation as an instrument of policy to force submission to their rule. In the 1920s, Stalin's regime deliberately diverted generous American famine food aid elsewhere in order to let the famine in the Ukraine and Steppe country achieve the political objectives of his pacification-through-starvation program. The communist regime in Addis Ababa is engaged in a similar practice in order to starve the Ethiopian people into submission to its building of atheistic, totalitarian communism in the country.

Given this reality, all attempts by the Addis Ababa Marxist regime to blackmail the Free World into giving it control of the distribution of emergency food aid must be firmly resisted.