

Capitalist Barbarism in Africa

An incredible human tragedy has descended on the continent of Africa. Two belts of drought have devastated entire national populations. It is the worst famine in African history: 30 countries are officially listed as hungry - 300,000 have already died in Ethiopia, 200,000 in Mozambique, and another million may perish before the toll is over. Added to the starvation death-count are the associated diseases of influenza, measles, tuberculosis, smallpox and typhus. The refugee camps have no medicine in quantity to treat these maladies. Beyond those who succumb - mostly children - thousands more will suffer permanent disability - blindness, bone and mental deformities.

African nations of every political hue have been hit by gigantic food shortages. The most severe cases are those which are embroiled in domestic civil wars like Chad, Ethiopia, and Mozambique. On an average, African governments spend four times as much on armaments as they do on agricultural development. Why? Because every ruling class in the modern world of wage slavery can only remain in power by force of arms (against rival bourgeois factions internally or regionally).

Africa is a blighted land not merely because of the drought, but primarily because it is at the behest of the imperialist system of the two superpower blocs. The global crisis of world capitalism, its economic crisis which is being shunted onto the weakest components, it is this dilemma of market production and distribution which is solely responsible for the present human disaster in Africa.

Historically an underdeveloped-in-capital area, Africa has become more impoverished over the past decade. As these countries tried to "modernize", ie. convert to light industry and cash-crop exports, per capita food production steadily decreased since the late sixties, coinciding with the onset of permanent crisis in the metropolises. Food imports have doubled, 20% of African grain is now supplied by import, and \$3 billion a year is being paid out to major powers for bread alone. And still, over 100 million human beings, one quarter of the sub-Saharan African population, are hungry!

"Take off" is now a forgotten relic of American liberalism. During the 1980's the gross national product in Africa has stagnated, per capita income has declined, and the total foreign debt has skyrocketed from \$6 billion in 1970 to \$51 billion in 1982. The overwhelming poverty of Africa is the main condition leading to the current mass famine.

And what was the enlightened response of all the Western governments? Like all governing parties of the bourgeoisie, they hoped it would all go away, especially if no one knew about it:

At the World Bank meeting last September, France proposed a special aid program for Africa. "The Americans weren't interested, to say the least," recalls Dominique Brustel, an official of the French Ministry for Co-operation. "They blocked the funds." Critics of the Reagan administration charge that Ethiopia's status as a Soviet ally inhibited US relief. "The hungry kids are seen by some downtown as 'little commies', so the grain just sits there"...

(Newsweek, 26/11/84)

Then as global news of the famine gained publicity, the US saw room for political gamesmanship: the Agency for International Development earmarked 137,000 tons of grain for Ethiopia, Mauritania, Chad and Mozambique.

The political overtones, however, are loud and clear. "The word is out that the West delivers the food," boasts AID administrator M. Peter McPherson, who recently returned from Ethiopia. Other American officials still hope that US relief may represent "a threat to Soviet hegemony over Ethiopia" as one of them put it.

(Newsweek, ibid)

Simply put, the entire population of Africa is merely a human chessboard for the manoeuvres of the US and Russian imperialist blocs.

Let's examine some of the regimes of these African countries.

ETHIOPIA

It was during the last big famine ten years ago that Emperor Haile Selassie was deposed and replaced by a "marxist state" under Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam. As the economic crisis began to affect the Ethiopian food supply, Mengistu ignored advice from pragmatic western economists for food rationing and rural development. 46% of the country's GNP was sunk into military hardware coming from Russia. When the famine hit full force, Mengistu and his "marxist-leninist" party tried to cover it up, and now 6 million Ethiopians are facing a terrible food shortage.

KENYA

This is a typical African regime claiming a "mixed economy" which is nothing but a modified state-capitalism in a "progressive" disguise. The system originated by black national shyster Jomo Kenyatta inaugurated government controls over food production and value-exchange through state bureaucracies - the parastatals. Prices for all farming produce are fixed and purchased by the state, and then subsidized for the regime's urban population to insure that the ruling politicians are kept in power. Or as AID chief Peter McPherson puts it:

What you've had, in effect, is a tax on food growers by governments who are providing

artificially cheap food to relatively better off people living in the cities.

(Quoted from Glenn Frankel, Washington Post)

Kenya's small farmers then started cutting back on food crops, whose price had been devalued, in lieu of the supposedly more lucrative cash crops such as coffee and tea. Domestic food shortages have now reached crisis proportions, and the sad irony for the peasant food growers is that, with the saturation of the international markets for their cash crops, the bottom has also fallen out of pricing here. For the labouring classes of Africa, to bet on any sort of capitalist production is already to lose.

It should also be noted that the state capitalism of Kenyatta is the very same brand of "socialism" being peddled by Joe Waller (also known as Omali Yeshitela) and his "African People's Socialist Party" here in the US.

TANZANIA

Once the centrepiece of Africa's "great social experiment" led by the "progressive" Julius Nyerere, Tanzania, which received \$2 billion in loans from the World Bank since 1970, has lapsed into chronic dependency on emergency food shipments. As part of the New Frontier ideological banner of "take off", Western donors emphasized industrial development (Marx's Department II) at the expense of the farming sector (Department I), in a way that would bring a smile to the corpse of Joseph Stalin. Now the landscape of this East African country resembles a ghost-town - scattered remains of half-completed or abandoned factories, big farming machines, roadways and water-pumping stations are seen everywhere.

Tanzania's per capita food production has fallen 12% in the last decade. The production of cash crops - coffee, cotton and cashews - has fallen even more with the decline in world-market value of these commodities.

The Nyerere state held itself up as "a peaceful, voluntary transition to socialism" without forced collectivization along Soviet-bloc lines. As Western money flowed in - from \$51 million in 1970 to \$625 million in 1980 - this funding constituted two-thirds of Tanzania's entire development budget, a social-democratic house of cards. All of the advanced tech schemes for Tanzania collapsed during the seventies - the world crisis of capitalism erased any illusions about "progress".

Nyerere next launched a campaign for "basic human needs", the most important of which was "villagization" - nearly 90% of the rural population was relocated in 8,300 consolidated "self-help communities". This, too, proved to be a farming disaster. In 1976, the regime abolished the country's 2,500 co-operative unions and established state controlled corporations (the parastatals) with legal monopolies to supply peasants all farming credit, tools, fertilizers and seed. Again, this project failed as the parastatals ran up huge deficits due to the declining value of crops. The bureaucracies ate up most of Tanzania's surplus capital and by 1982 eleven crop-marketing boards had run up a \$200 million loss. So much for Nyerere's "peaceful socialism". As the World Bank, which had provided most of the easy-credit loans to Tanzania

concluded:

The lending experience shows that, due to overwhelming problems both internal and external to the parastatals (read the global decay of Capital), this assistance has had little if any positive impact.

ZIMBABWE

Another "marxist" country whose food supply has plummeted. With all of his "socialist" rhetoric, "national liberationist" Robert Mugabe was determined not to make the tinkering mistakes of his "progressive" African counterparts. Direct market farming was to remain in place.

The old Rhodesia contained a dual agricultural system - the big white-owned commercial estates and the tiny subsistence black peasant sites. Before "independence" in 1978, the white farms supplied more than 90% of market food and employed a quarter of a million black farm-labourers, 90% of whom earned less than \$30 a month! Dr. Mugabe's plan to fortify his hold on state-power was simple: the white farmers would continue with their private spreads and their wage-slaves, corn prices were increased by 40% to placate these landowners, and one of their own, Denis Norman, was appointed as Minister of Agriculture.

As John Laurie, president of the Commercial Farmers Union reports:

Obviously, we all have our complaints, but on the whole the government has been extremely responsive to our needs. The attention they have paid to agriculture has been first class.

The panacea for black peasants was a "land-reform" project: Mugabe gave access to credit, and built grain depots and tool distribution centres for small farmers. Ten acre parcels of unused land was doled out to landless peasants. But according to Washington Post writer Glenn Frankel:

The program, however, has fallen far short of projections due to lack of funds and, critics contend, lack of commitment on the part of the bureaucrats responsible for it. The goal of resettling 160,000 families by 1985 has long been abandoned - at best 30,000 families will have been aided. The budget for land acquisition, slashed from \$25 million to 6\$ million last year, has been further reduced to \$2 million in the 1985 budget. Nearly all of the resettled plots have gone to individual families rather than to the communal or cooperative schemes the government originally had advocated.

A recent study by Edgar Lockwood, representative of the American Friends Service Committee here, concludes that government efforts in agriculture, while well-meaning, naturally favour those who are better off and those who have land and property, not the poor and landless classes. Citing what he sees as the government's reluctance to push for collectivization and resettlement, Lockwood argues that Zimbabwe is on the road to a kind of state-led capitalism with socialist experimentation of the fringes. (No shit!)

Zimbabwe also remains vulnerable to the vagaries of the international market place. The huge corn surplus of 1981 revealed another harsh fact of Zimbabwe's relationship to the West - its lack of competitiveness. Given its relatively high

production costs, its landlocked position and the high costs and risks of African transport, Zimbabwe's grain often is not competitive. Agriculture Minister Norman estimates his country sold much of its 1981 surplus at a loss of \$10 or more per ton, a loss it cannot afford to repeat.

Finally, how about this for "socialist solidarity":

Zimbabwe, where crop and cattle losses are heavy, has been swamped by 50,000 refugees from neighbouring (and "marxist") Mozambique. Now the government has ordered its border patrols to turn back starving Mozambicans, "ruthlessly if necessary." Dr. Simbi Mubako, Zimbabwe's minister of home affairs, maintains: "We cannot improve the living standards of our own citizens if foreigners keep adding to the numbers."

(*Newsweek, ibid*)

And to all of this misery on the African continent - starvation, poverty, disease - must be added the atrocities of tribalist and nationalist-faction warfare going on in Ethiopia, Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Chad.

The barbarism of the capitalist mode of production cannot be undone by any modifications in the manner of commodity-exchange or circulation

(marketing). The present horrors of mass famine and disease are no "senseless tragedies" (as are neither the "accidents" at Pemex in San Juanico, Mexico, or at Union Carbide in Bhopal, India), but are the central features of the social system founded on wage labour and profit (Capital), and are, moreover, harbingers of even worse events if capitalist domination over human life continues with its unchecked melt-down course toward nuclear conflagration - imperialist bloc war. Under genuine socialism, or libertarian communism, such capitalist calamities would be forever eliminated because all the means of life - food, shelter, clothing, medicine, self-enhancement, humanized technology - would be provided by an international association of Workers' Councils on the basis of material human needs, and not the dictates of market-value.

In Africa as elsewhere, it is only the urban proletariat when it rebels at the conditions of the economic crisis - the food riots in Tunisia and Egypt this year, and most recently the miners' strikes and shanty-town riots in Sharpeville and Soweto, South Africa - who can challenge the death-lock capitalism has on all humanity.

Tampa Workers' Affinity Group
December 1984

Expelled jobless face famine

From Joseph Hanlon
in Maputo

The expulsion of unemployed people from Mozambique's cities is to be resumed according to the Mayor of Maputo, Mr Alberto Massavanhane, even though serious problems remain with the 12,000 jobless transported last year to Niassa province.

Under "operation production" tens of thousands of unemployed were rounded up and flown 1,000 miles north of Maputo to Niassa and Cabo Delgado provinces. The remote area is underpopulated and has good land and rains, promoting hopes that the unemployed would grow their own food.

However, the daily newspaper, Noticias, last week admitted that many people in Niassa still had not been given work, and that people stayed in transit camps for more than three months instead of the

one week that was intended. Many were to be labourers on state farms, but the state-owned banks refused to authorise credit for the over-staffed farms to pay more people.

Noticias also said that there was not enough food or medical care for the new arrivals. It quoted a provincial health supervisor, Mr Amos Salde, as saying that malnutrition and tuberculosis were serious problems.

Crime in the provincial capital, Lichinga, has risen - particularly housebreaking and the theft of food from gardens, according to the newspaper.

Independent reports from Niassa indicate that the problem is serious. Many people were taken from their homes in Maputo at night, and arrived in Niassa with only the clothes they were wearing. This was during the cold season in Niassa and there was

inadequate shelter. The food shortage has become worse recently and in the past two months people have been allowed out of transit camps to beg for food. Some of those transported to Niassa claim that people have died of starvation or disease exacerbated by malnutrition.

Confusion has been compounded by poor record-keeping. "Many families have come to this province looking for a father, mother, or brother and taken a long time to find them - or else failed," Noticias said. At a fairground in Lichinga, many women and children have set up a camp, hoping to find relatives.

Reports from Niassa indicate that the process has been particularly hard on women sent without their husbands. Some have been forced to marry, even if they left husbands or boyfriends behind in Maputo.

How Capitalism deals with the Unemployed
In the Third World.