THE CRISIS OF LIVELIHOOD IN ETHIOPIA

by

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1. INTRODUCTION:

It was not uncommon in the 1960s and 70s to speak of Ethiopia as having the potential to be the breadbasket of the Middle East. It took two devastating famines for the "breadbasket" argument to beat a reluctant retreat, and social analysts are now awakening to the fact that the periodic disasters that engulf rural Ethiopia are not aberrations but rather dramatic manifestations of a disease that has been afflicting the country for centuries, and continues to do so at present. The depth of the crisis now facing the country is such that the very survival of the society is threatened, and the "struggle for livelihood" will have to over-ride the "struggle for development" at least until the Year 2000. The fate of the Ethiopian peasant has always been either destitution or death by starvation, and the evidence now being compiled suggests that the intensity of the first and the frequency of the second has been growing in the last two decades, and will continue to do so in the years ahead.

This paper is primarily about the crisis of food shortage in Ethiopia and only secondarily about peace, or the absence of peace, in the country in the period 1974 - 1984. The linkage between peace and food security in our case has not, in the past ten years at least, been a direct one, although in the

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1 This paper was first presented at the Peace and Development Panel of the Eleventh General Conference of the International Peace Research Association, April 13 - 18, 1986, University of Sussex, Brighton, England.
last century and early in this one, famine has followed war or rural violence. In the decade under consideration, however, it was not because there was war in eastern and northern Ethiopia in the 1970s that famine followed, nor did famine provoke local and regional conflict. The causes of the catastrophe lie elsewhere. Nevertheless, civil disorder and violence has, in one way or another, contributed to the aggravation of the crisis as we hope to show further down.
TWO FAMINES IN A DECADE (1974 - 1984)

In 1974 the Western media brought scenes of horror and told tales too gruesome to be believed to their audience: tens of thousands of Ethiopian peasants were dying of starvation, neglected by their own government and the world at large. The famine of that year, which had actually gathered momentum during the preceding two years, was a regional affair, affecting primarily the densely populated provinces of Wollo, Tigray and Eritrea in northern Ethiopia. Except for Eritrea, none of the areas hit by famine (which included to a lesser extent eastern Hararghe province, bordering on Somalia) had had any experience of armed conflict in the two decades preceding the disaster. This 1974 famine subsequently became a factor (though not a critical one) in the overthrow of Emperor Haile Sellassie and his regime and the establishment of military government.

Exactly a decade later, in 1984, the world again woke up to discover that once more rural Ethiopia was being ravaged by famine, with the toll of death and destruction reaching catastrophic proportions. This famine was different from its predecessor in two respects: it was far more devastating than the earlier one, and it extended far beyond the critical areas of northern Ethiopia to engulf the greater part of the country. The same government which had ridden to power partly on the back of the famine of 1974 now stood mute in the face of what may be considered the greatest tragedy rural Ethiopia has ever experienced.
All in all, 1974-1984 may be considered the decade of the Ethiopia holocaust: mass starvation, bloody rural insurgency, a crippling war with a neighbour, mass urban terror, wide-spread epidemics - nothing like this or on this scale has occurred in the country's modern history.

It is worth briefly looking at the political and social context in which these two serious crises took place, for it has a bearing on our analysis of the recurrence of famine in Ethiopia. While there may be controversy on how to define, in socio-economic terms, the Old Regime, there is general agreement regarding some of the elements in the social formation. Of relevance to us here are the following:

1. A landholding system involving on the one hand landlordism, and on the other hand a tribute-based tenure, tenancy and landlessness. The agrarian system as a whole was widely recognized as having been exploitative, and a serious bottleneck to rural modernization.

2. Incipient capitalism which, in the rural areas, took the form of large-scale mechanized agriculture involving in some instances peasant eviction from the land.

3. In the political sphere, a form of royal absolutism, in which the economic interests of the landed classes far outweighed those of other social groups.
Absolute monarchy was replaced in 1974 (following the first famine under discussion) by military government whose first important act was the initiation and implementation of a radical land reform. This swept away landlordism, abolished tenancy, and significantly reduced landlessness, but left peasant production with all its other traditional maladies: diminutive holdings and land fragmentation, archaic farming techniques, and peasant insecurity (Dessalegn 1984). The new regime shares a great many features in common with what are known as "Afro-Marxist" states. Its economic policies emphasize state enterprises and collectivization on the one hand, and centrally planned, state-directed development on the other (Dessalegn 1985).

In brief, the social systems in which the two major food crises occurred were radically different from each other in a great many respects. Furthermore, many observers held the opinion that if the Old Regime had undertaken the kind of rural reforms carried out by its successor, the tragedy of 1974 would have been avoided. And yet 1974 was repeated - on a much larger scale - ten years later. The least the social researcher can now do is re-examine the problem afresh, avoiding in the process the pitfalls of the past.

The literature\(^2\) that appeared in the wake of the earlier crisis may, in retrospect, be described as superficial and unsatisfactory. The argument that the fundamental causes of the

\(^2\) Because of space limitations this and the general literature on famine cannot be fully discussed. For the latter see references in Dinham and Hines, and A. Sen.
famine should be traced to capitalist development or under-
development (Cliffe, Hussein), or to feudalism and the land
tenure system (Fitzgerald) has not stood the test of time and
deserves a quiet burial. The socio-economic and political
explanation offered by works such as Mesfin Wolde Mariam's are
too all-embracing to serve the purpose of rigorous inquiry.
Different, yet equally unsatisfactory is the analysis provided
by the military government. This is predominantly couched in
moral terms, and accuses the monarchy and the landed aristo-
ocracy - the chief culprits in the tragedy - of having long
abdicated their responsibility to the people. The ruling
classes are further castigated for their moral turpitude, and
for harbouring ill-will towards the producing classes (see RRC

For the purposes of this paper the general literature on famine
may be divided into two main groups. There are those who have
argued that the increasing incidence of hunger and starvation
in the Third World is largely caused by powerful global forces
(such as major food producers, multi-national agribusiness,
etc.) which have a stranglehold on both the supply of food and
the movement of world food prices. The consequences of this
domination of the world's food resources are the following:

1. It induces poor countries to neglect their own agriculture
and become dependent on food imports (often subsidized by
foreign aid) or on food aid.
2. Directly or indirectly it encourages a rapid growth in urbanization in these countries, further diminishes the local food supply, and creates greater demands for food imports.

3. The direct control of Third World agriculture by multinational agribusiness means that greater attention is paid to the production of exportable cash as opposed to locally-consumed food crops (Dinham and Hines, Friedmann, George).

Others emphasize that hunger and famine is primarily the outcome not of food shortage but of poverty and deprivation (Dumont and Cohen, Sen). Underdevelopment also breeds its own form of social structure and property relations which often deny the majority of the people access to the sources of livelihood. Underdeveloped countries are not only poor but also dominated by grasping elites (often non-peasant in origin) who control vast agricultural resources (Vallianatos).

The first set of arguments is not borne out by the Ethiopian experience - indeed, it is contradicted by it. The emphasis on the "external causes" of hunger deserves to be re-examined, and the works in the second group at least provide a welcome counterbalance, even though their chief arguments are hardly new. As far back as the early 1930s, R.H. Tawney masterfully showed the intimate linkage between underdevelopment and mass starvation.

The debate in our case cannot be fruitful unless it is recognized that there are certain significant aspects about the
country which are not commonly shared by others which have experienced recurrent famine. The first is that Ethiopia has hardly been incorporated into the world capitalist system. This is not to say that the country earlier had, or has now, an independent economy, but rather that it offered nothing enticing to external economic forces, and its resources - almost exclusively agricultural - were employed primarily for subsistence, which by all standards has remained low-level and barely life-sustaining. Secondly, the country's agricultural resources are not now, nor have they been in the past, controlled by multi-national agribusiness; additionally, production has not predominantly been geared towards exportable cash crops at the expense of locally consumed food crops. It is true that in the late 1960s and early 70s, large-scale plantations (a few of which were foreign owned) were expanding in the countryside, nevertheless capitalist agriculture was a puny force compared to small-scale peasant production. The argument that modern agriculture has played a part in exacerbating famine conditions in some parts of the country, particularly in the Awash Valley (Kloos), is not justified.

The Progress of Famine

Let us now turn to our main subject, i.e. the march of famine in the decade under discussion. It must first be noted that the famine of 1974 was not fully extinguished, it was only partially smothered, thanks mainly to food aid and temporary improvements in the weather in the succeeding two years. Enough has been said about this disaster to make a lengthy discussion here unnecessary (see among others ENI 1974; Mesfin,
and references in it; RRC 1985 B; Sen; Shepherd 1975). However, a brief commentary is needed to help us place the discussion of the latter tragedy in perspective.

The damage caused by this disaster has never been fully assessed, and all figures for the loss of lives, livestock and other property provided by independent observers or official sources are either guesses or rough estimates. An observer who had witnessed the famine first hand reported that by the end of 1973 the disaster had claimed more than 100,000 human lives (Shepherd 1975). Official sources have declared that the famine had affected about 4.2 million peasants, of whom some 200,000 had subsequently died (RRC 1975); by our estimate the affected population constituted at the time over 60% of the population of the famine areas. Judged by present trends, more than half of the survivors were youngsters below the age of 15. Of the dead, about half were children below the age of 5 (ENI 1974).

What is of significance to us is the long term impact of famine on rural society and economy. Survivors of famine are often likely to suffer prolonged enfeeblement (leading of course to low labour input), listlessness, and to have low defence against illness. As noted above, of the affected population more than half were children, and these were prone to suffer, in addition to the maladies noted earlier, permanent physical handicap or considerable mental deficiency. In a word, the enduring consequence of famine is, among other things, its crippling effect on the future labour force of the affected
population. The empirical evidence to support this is not readily available in our case, but the following may be relevant. Cereal production in Wollo province, one of the three provinces hit hard by the first and second famine (we have no comparable data for the other affected areas) fell by 14% between 1975 and 1979; for the period between 1979/80 to 1983/84, the decline was 33% (MoA July 1975; CSO December 1984).

Paradoxical as it may seem, it is in many instances the survivors of an earlier famine who become a factor in the emergence of a new one. A massive loss of life, livestock and property; severe debilitation of the labour force, especially the future labour force; large-scale dislocation of rural communities: these are the effects of famine. But these are also the preconditions for a serious decline in food production, itself a prelude to mass starvation.

The first few years following the 1974 disaster were marked by what seemed to be encouraging signs of recovery in the major food growing areas, including the affected highlands. The generally positive impact of international food aid, favourable weather, and the land reform helped produce relatively good harvests in 1975/76 and 1976/77. Sadly, these were to be two of the three exceptions (the third was 1979/80) in the persistent decline of food production in the decade as a whole. The "bad" times began towards the second half of 1977, were aggravated in 1978 and 1979 when poor harvests in the main and/or spring seasons were combined with high grain prices in
rural markets and considerable migrations of peasants from areas in Wollo, Tigrai, southern Shoa, and southern Sidamo provinces; the latter development was itself a sign of the onset of a food crisis. By the end of 1978, peasants affected mildly or seriously included those in Bale, Gamo Goffa and Harrarghe provinces in addition to the areas mentioned earlier (for the march of famine in this period see 2nd entry under RRC; RRC May 1978; April 1979). Already, from its inception, the second food crisis was taking a national rather than a regional dimension.

To further aggravate matters, food shortage in the rural areas was accompanied by war with Somalia (1977-79) and armed hostilities in the rural areas, particularly in the North. Although the former finally came to an end in 1978 (sporadic raids across the border by each side continued for much longer), the latter, especially insurgent activity in Eritrea, and later in Tigrai, continued at a high level of intensity well into the 1980s. The net result was peasant dislocation and loss of life and property; in all the areas affected by hostilities there was a large population of displaced persons who urgently needed food, medicine and shelter. In 1980 RRC estimated that the famine affected population in the country as a whole was about 2.8 million, and the victims of war and insurgency numbered 2.4 million, giving a total figure of 5.2 million (RRC 1985 B: 143). Three years later, the figure had changed somewhat: the number of famine victims rose to 3.7 million but that of victims of conflict remained the same (RRC January 1984: 63); the total now stood at 6.1 million. Those
provinces which have suffered hard from the effects of war and armed hostilities (Bale, Eritrea, Tigrai, Harrarghe, and more recently Wollo) are the same provinces where the second famine has been most damaging (ibid.).

There were three major kinds of armed hostilities in the decade under discussion, each with a heavy toll on the lives and property of the rural population:

1. War with Somalia: over a million people in Harrarghe, Bale, and Sidamo, were displaced, and most of them were unable to return home for a considerable period.

2. Insurgency by "nationalist" groups seeking secession from the country: about a million peasants were dislocated by this and made dependent on government handouts. There were also more than half a million refugees in the Sudan (not counted in RRC's figures) who had left because of the hostilities.

3. Traditional forms of banditry (mainly in Gondar province) by disaffected individuals or groups, or raiding and vengeful activity by one ethnic group against another: nearly 400,000 peasants may have been displaced by this form of conflict (the latter kind in southern Sidamo).

The famine, which the world dramatically discovered only in 1984, had continued to claim more and more victims since 1978 and to spread to areas of the country hitherto famine-free. This progress was aided not just by civil conflict but also by
persistent drought and, more importantly, by acute rural poverty. Table 1 shows the rapid march of famine in the 1980s; the term "affected population" means a population which has exhausted its food supplies and begun to suffer the ill-effects of starvation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number (Million)</th>
<th>% of Rural Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>5.2*</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>6.1*</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 1984</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 1984</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 1984</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 1984</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 1984</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early in 1985</td>
<td>+10.0</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Estimate for 1986)</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Includes victims of conflict (but for the two years only).
Total rural population 37.3 million (1984 Census).

Source: Various RRC documents.

The intensity of the famine varied from one locality to another. In the three long-suffering provinces of Wollo, Tigrai and Eritrea, 76, 65 and 38 percent respectively of the total rural population was in the grip of starvation by the end of 1984; in Harrarghe, Sidamo and Gondar provinces, the comparable figures were 23, 15, and 13 percent respectively. Arssi, Gojjam and Wollega provinces were the only ones which were more or less famine free in this period.

Of the 7.7 million victims in December 1984, 17% (or 1.3 million) were children below the age of 4, and 26% (about 2
million) between 5 to 14 years. In other words, some 43% of the victims at any one period - for the proportion is fairly consistent at various other counts - were the future work force of rural society (RRC December 1984: Annex VIII; RRC October 1985: 18). If we add to this children born shortly after by mothers who have gone through or are going through the agony of starvation - and such children suffer the same fate as the older children - the crippling effect on society's ability to feed itself in later years is quite alarming.

The total food supply needed to support the millions of peasants on the brink of death and to avert what everyone, from high UN officials to lowly Western journalists in the field, predicted would otherwise be the greatest tragedy since the end of World War II, ranged from 1.0 to 1.5 million tonnes. This would not have even made a small dent in the huge food mountain built up over the years in the Western countries, but food aid had long become a tool in international politics, hence the great concern of UN and other donor officials involved in the emergency at the time. The figures for food requirement variously published by RRC were arrived at on the basis of a ration of 500 grams of food per person per day. This ration was just enough to keep the recipient alive - we shall return to this point later.

How is it, some may ask, that a tragedy of this magnitude could be "hidden" for so long and was only "discovered" in the fall of 1984?
The Relief and Rehabilitation Commission - RRC -, the country’s main relief agency, whose experience in these matters goes back to the earlier disaster, says it warned of an impending disaster as far back as 1981. This is indeed supported by the agency’s periodic reports, especially those prepared by its Early Warning Service; these provide a picture of a steadily advancing disaster all through the 80s, and the warnings and pleas for assistance in them are often quite vociferous. The Commission’s works were, however, accessible only to a limited audience, mainly UN agencies, diplomatic circles and high officials in the military government. Neither in the months leading up to the dramatic revelation, nor for some time afterwards were its findings and appeals, in a word, the true extent of the tragedy, brought to the Ethiopian public.

The government-controlled media continued to be niggardly with its coverage of the growing crisis, at least until the end of October 1984. This was the date when as a result of mounting international publicity and pressure, the military government issued a statement formally acknowledging the famine and setting up a bureaucracy, the National Rehabilitation Committee, to oversee relief operations. In this same statement the PMAC claimed that the government had been concerned with the problem as early as March 1983 when it decided to divert resources to help rehabilitate over four million victims of drought (Addis Zemen, 17 Tiqimt 1977 E.C. - 27 October 1984 G.C.). The government’s claim did not carry much weight among the public. It is indicative of its attitude about the
problem, for example, that neither in the Ten Year Plan, nor in the newly established Party’s programme, both of which were formally adopted in September 1984 at an extravagant Tenth Anniversary celebrations, was any mention made about the famine which had been raging in the country for a number of years. Indeed, for several months before the celebrations strict measures were taken to prevent famine victims from flocking into the capital.

The international volunteer agencies (known locally as NGOs - Non-Governmental Organizations) also say they knew in advance of the impending crisis and were actively engaged in providing assistance to those in need. However, their support was not sufficient to make any impact on the wave of sufferers who periodically engulfed the relief camps and feeding centers. The magnitude of the assistance required was also far beyond the capabilities of the NGOs (Hancock).

The UN agencies, in particular those based in the country, likewise admit they had advance knowledge of the onset of famine; indeed, all through the early 1980s, teams of UN experts had investigated the problem by themselves and supported RRC’s claims and requests (UNCCRR 1981). So the question is: if all these agencies knew and provided written evidence about the disaster, how was it that the catastrophe was not prevented, or at least its magnitude and damaging effects minimized? This question may never receive a satisfactory answer. It may be a long time (if at all) before the damage of the second famine is assessed. The toll of death and destruct-
ion may in fact never be accurately known, as a considerable proportion of deaths occurred outside the relief camps - in villages, settlements, on the road, etc. - where, that is, they could not be registered. RRC documents do not provide - and this is deliberate - figures on deaths, nor do they contain information that could be employed to extrapolate on mortality. Some Western news sources have reported that the human toll may have reached half a million in the period between September 1984 and October 1985. This is not as excessive as some may think. According to the World Bank (September 1985: 7, 80-81) famine and famine-related deaths between mid-1984 and mid-1985 may very well be half a million. But this is not the end of the story; the death toll will continue, though at a lesser rate, since the crisis has not yet been brought under complete control. Furthermore, resettlement in the inhospitable western lowlands, the government's chosen solution for the famine, involves high risks for the peasantry participating in it.

Food Aid and Politics

RRC and others (Hancock, Gill) have argued that if international assistance had arrived in time and in the right quantity, the impact of the famine would have been considerably less severe. This may very well be true, but it shows only one side of the story. An even-handed criticism should also have pointed out that the military government was equally to blame for the delay or deficiency of the assistance it offered to the starving. It will take us too far to discuss this point, but it is an important one and should be borne in mind.
The politics of international food aid is just as involved as the politics of international trade or other such world issues. This is so especially when countries who have governments that are strongly detested by the aid-giving states - as in our own case - are involved. There is a burgeoning literature on the subject of food aid, and a crop of experts, some of whom may soon make Ethiopia an important case study (see bibliography in Clay and Singer). It is easy enough to be a purist and condemn all the parties involved in the politics of famine, as has been done recently (Hailu), but this only leads to quietism and defeat. It is far more fruitful to try and examine the causes and consequences of the problem and prepare possible alternative options for the future.

It is true that some Western governments, particularly the U.S. and Britain, attempted initially to use food aid as a means of putting pressure on the Ethiopian government. But the climate of opinion in the world, and specially in both the U.S. and Europe, soon forced them to retreat. One persistent critic of U.S. food policy has emphasized that it was the American public outcry that forced the hand of the Reagan administration, which had earlier decided to cut off food aid to Ethiopia in the fiscal year 1984 as a means of showing its political displeasure at the Ethiopian authorities (Shepherd 1985, 1984). Although the unprecedented popular outburst of emotion eventually forced governments to unlock their stores of surplus food, the brief political jockeying that took place did inflict some damage. At the most critical moment of the emergency, in the
months between September to December 1984, RRC had received less than half the food that the aid donors had earlier pledged, itself only about a third of what the Commission had urgently requested. By the end of the year, its food security reserve, a scheme supported by multilateral agencies and others, held only about 6% of the stock that was pledged to it. Admittedly, a greater part of the disparity between what was pledged and what was delivered had to do with transport and logistical bottlenecks both inside and outside the country. The port of Assab was too small to handle the volume of emergency supplies arriving there almost by the day, and further, the government's occasional policy of giving priority to ships unloading goods destined for the Tenth Anniversary celebrations, or military hardware, over those carrying emergency supplies, made matters worse. Despite all this, however, the politics of food aid must shoulder part of the blame.

It was not until the UN Secretary General made an unprecedented and forceful appeal to the world to aid Ethiopian famine victims at the end of August 1984 that the UN specialized agencies stepped up their efforts in and outside the country. It has to be noted that these agencies are hampered in their activities by a number of structural and political considerations. First, they are part of a large international bureaucracy, and as such, they respond to crises far more slowly than independent volunteer agencies. In the second place, they often have no direct and immediate access to emergency supplies, so that considerable delays occur between their pledges
and actual delivery. Finally, these bodies have a political burden that they carry: they have to tread delicately in order not to offend the recipient country or the donor governments on whom they depend for some of the assistance they offer — an exercise not always successful or rewarding. The UN Office of Emergency Operations in Ethiopia, which was specifically set up to monitor and oversee international relief operations in the country in November 1984, often came into conflict with the Ethiopian authorities over a number of issues relating to the handling of relief operations, and, at least on one occasion, the head of it was accused by the government of interfering in the internal affairs of the country.

The major advantage that international volunteer agencies (NGOs) have over UN (or other multilateral) bodies, or Western governments, is that they are less burdened with bureaucracy, less politically motivated, and far more flexible. It is true that a number of NGOs operating in the country are fundamentalist religious organizations, and some have used the opportunity to carry out proselytizing activities. It is also true that some others are probably more interested in gaining publicity for themselves rather than in the arduous work itself. Nevertheless, a majority of the NGOs must be commended for the fine work that they carried out, especially in the early phase of the famine. These agencies — often consisting of a handful of volunteers — were engaged in relief, and frequently in rehabilitation work long before the famine came under the glare of world publicity, and continued to do so long after that — a fact recognized and often appreciated by RRC
If many of them have been reluctant to be drawn into political controversy — such as, for example, being involved in relief operations together with insurgent forces in the north of the country — it is for the understandable reason that they can be far more effective, and provide help to more people in need on this side of the fence than on the other. Of course, a few have provided emergency aid to rebel held areas surreptitiously; a few others have chosen to work on the Sudanese side of the border with refugees (for relief work in rebel held areas see Peberdy; Firebrace and Holland). The major weakness of NGOs, however, is that they lack the diplomatic clout and the economic resources of the multilateral organizations.

One of the serious aspects of the politicization of food aid was the extension of the East-West conflict to Ethiopia in the context of the famine. The West, especially the U.S., accused the Soviet Union of failing to come to the aid of its ally at the time of its greatest need and of supplying it instead with guns and tanks. The Soviet contribution in support of famine victims has indeed been conspicuously modest, although for propaganda purposes the local press often gave far greater publicity to donations from Moscow or its Eastern allies than to those from Western countries. At the end of October 1984, i.e. after the international outcry about the famine had reached a climax, the Soviets sent aircraft, helicopters and several hundred trucks to help transport supplies. About this time, the Reagan administration reported that it had agreed to pay the fuel costs of all Soviet aircraft engaged in transpor-
ting emergency supplies to the affected population in the country. It is not clear to this day whether the Soviets requested such assistance; all the same, it was a jibe at their intentions.

The Soviets were quick to respond to Western criticism which they denounced as self-serving. G. Galperin, the chief Soviet political analyst of Ethiopian and Horn of Africa affairs argued that his country had not been parsimonious in its emergency aid to Ethiopia. Further, Moscow was involved in long-term economic and technical assistance to develop Ethiopian agriculture and industry, and this, Galperin noted, was far more important to the country than occasional aid prompted by emergency conditions. "Over the past decade," he pointed out, "Ethiopia has achieved much more with (East bloc) countries' assistance than it ever did with Western help in the 45 years of Haile Selassie's reign" (see also Halliday and Molyneux 1986).

The Ethiopian government's decision to get involved at this time in the propaganda tussle between East and West was anomalous, to say the least. Prudence would have suggested that it stay neutral in this particular contest, but it chose instead to support the Soviet side publicly, even though, as far as relief assistance was concerned, the evidence told a different story (Addis Zemen, Hedar 9, 1977 E.C. - 18 November 1984 G.C.). If the Western donor powers and organizations had taken umbrage at this and withdrawn, or reduced their
assistance, the consequences for the rural population would have been catastrophic.

The lesson to be drawn from this experience is not that food aid has lost its pristine purpose, that of saving lives - food aid has always been employed as a political weapon but that world public opinion can override the politics of famine and rivalries among governments, and reduce considerably the damages these would have caused. Indeed, the climate of opinion at the time was such that British, West German, Russian and Polish aircraft, each with its own flight and maintenance crew, were able to work together for several months, transporting emergency supplies from the port of Assab and air-dropping food to the starving in the inaccessible regions of the country. If this kind of international co-operation had been extended to all spheres of relief work, and had involved all or a majority of the aid-giving agencies in the country, far more lives would have been saved.

The full extent of the international aid that poured into the country in 1984 and '85 may never be accurately known, for RRC published documents are notoriously inconsistent in this area. The agency has in fact admitted that its records are incomplete and unsuitable for making a full-scale inventory of aid received (RRC January 1984: 94-95).

RRC documents show a list of more than 50 countries which provided emergency aid of one kind or another, and this includes such Third World countries as India, which only a short while ago was itself racked by chronic food shortages. By mid-1985 the major food donors were the U.S., the EEC, the World Food Programme (of the UN), and Canada. The number of NGOs involved in relief work may at one time have reached about 60, but of these only 30 or thereabouts remained to carry on their tasks. The UN was also represented in force: more than a dozen of its agencies were active in all aspects of emergency work, from supplying food, to medical care, to co-ordinating logistics and transport.

Data provided by RRC show the critical role played by NGOs especially in the primary task of food distribution. Of the more than 1 million metric tonnes of food distributed between January 1984 and May 1985, about 53% was handled by NGOs and the rest by RRC (RRC 1985 B: 257). By the end of the second year of the famine, NGOs were distributing an average of 50,000 tonnes of food, and reaching about 4.6 million beneficiaries throughout the country each month (from UNEOE, NGO Newsletter), an achievement unmatched by other organizations, including RRC itself. With the easing of the crisis by the beginning of 1986, both NGOs and UN agencies were turning towards more long-term rehabilitation projects.

The annual inflow of food and other assistance in the decade between the first and second famines is shown in Table 2. The data refers to aid provided directly to RRC, and does not
include assistance channelled through other government agencies, or handled by NGOs or UN bodies themselves.

Table 2: World Food and Other Assistance, 1973-1985
(Food in 000 metric tonnes, Other aid in million Birr)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Food Aid</th>
<th>Financial Value of Other Aid</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>UN Agencies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1973</td>
<td>67.3</td>
<td>1.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>150.9</td>
<td>12.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>37.2</td>
<td>10.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>22.9</td>
<td>6.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>32.0</td>
<td>15.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>187.7</td>
<td>42.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>131.4</td>
<td>38.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>87.3</td>
<td>70.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>115.9</td>
<td>89.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>140.2</td>
<td>110.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>123.9</td>
<td>113.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>550.0</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>1118.7</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2765.4</td>
<td>532.14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Total food aid for the years 1973-83 is given as 1.10 million tonnes in RRC A; this is higher by 300,000 tonnes compared to the figures presented here.

Source: For the years 1973-83, RRC 1985 B; the rest from recent RRC documents.

The food crisis is not yet over, indeed, it is quite likely that despite emergency assistance and rehabilitation efforts, famine conditions may well persist, at least in some regions of the country, until the 1990s. This of course means continued dependence on food and development aid, as has been recognized by RRC (1985 B: 147-9):

"The scale of the country's economic and ecological problems is such ... that the specter of (famine) cannot be entirely abolished without many years of sustained assistance and development efforts both by Ethiopia and by her overseas partners."
It is now widely recognized that famine has been quite common in Ethiopian history, although in much of the literature it is often associated with drought. Significantly, it appears that mass starvation has been more recurrent in this century than in previous ones. Charles Wood, who has attempted to compile famine data covering several centuries of Ethiopian history, has pointed out that eight serious famines have taken place in the period between 1830 and 1975. Our own estimate is that five "killer" famines, and numerous serious but localized food shortages, have occurred between 1950 and 1985. Mesfin has argued that in the 20 years covered by his work, i.e. 1958-1977, some 25 million people have been affected by famine at one time or another (Mesfin: 56). This may be equal to the total rural population of the country in the early 1970s.

Famine has occurred in the country under a variety of social, political and economic conditions, in times of war as well as in times of peace, and with or without nature acting as an irritant. We saw earlier the radically different social and economic contexts in which the tragedies of 1974 and 1984 took place. Nevertheless, a close examination reveals that there have been certain elements in Ethiopian society that have remained substantially unchanged in the last 100 years, and the most significant of these for our purposes are the indigenous system of peasant production and the nature of state-peasant relations. It is our opinion that an in-depth investigation of these two elements will reveal that their contribution to the
persistence of hunger and the recurrence of mass starvation in rural Ethiopia is far greater than those of other factors, natural or social. It will, however, take us too far to make this kind of investigation here, and we must instead content ourselves with a brief note on some aspects of the problem.

**Peasant Production**

When we talk about Ethiopian rural production we are talking about a fragmented, use-value oriented, precapitalist economy, which forms a part of the generalized system of petty production. Of the numerous characteristics specific to peasant production, the following are important, in themselves as well as in reference to the subject at hand:

1. The family is the unit of labour, of production and consumption. The aim of production is consumption, and vice-versa. The family as the unit of labour means more hands are valued, and this leads, through practices such as polygamy, early marriages (in some of the famine prone areas of the north girls marry as young as 13 and 14), to high rates of demographic expansion.

2. The economy is highly segmentary, and involves only limited exchange which is carried on within communities and not among communities. This limited exchange often leads to the anomalous situation where famine in one region is "complemented" with a bumper harvest next door.
3. There is in most communities a socially accepted level of income (or consumption) and any income beyond this level is considered superfluous. The level of consumption (or self-sufficiency), however, is very low, hence Ethiopian peasant communities are often on the edge of starvation.

4. The stock of technical knowledge employed in production is the same for all households. Peasant know-how, productive practice and technology is, ecologically speaking, highly destructive. The peasant, on the other hand, is helpless in the face of long-term environmental degradation.

A few more words about this last point. Recent studies have begun to reveal the magnitude of the resource degradation in the country; this refers to the permanent loss of productivity of resources, or of the resources themselves, as a consequence of erosion, deforestation, removal of protective vegetation from the soil, and the like. Specialists now estimate that almost 2 billion tonnes of soil is being washed away every year, most of it from the cropland regions of the country. In the regions predominantly specializing in cereal cultivation (the northern highlands, containing the famine prone areas), an average of about 100 tonnes of soil per hectare per year is permanently lost. In 20 years, soil erosion could wipe out about 15% of the country's farmland, and in this same period, resource degradation in general is likely to reduce the per capita income of the rural population by as much as 30% (discussion based on MoA-FAO: 2-8). The chief cause of this massive loss of resources is human activity, in particular
destructive land use practices, active deforestation, and excessive over-grazing.

State-Peasant Relations
Decades of abuse of the peasantry, and neglect of rural production by successive governments have left peasant society inward looking and resilient to change. For successive states, peasant production has been the chief source of revenue but not the main beneficiary of development effort. Over the years the peasant in the countryside and political authority in the towns have evolved a "special relationship," involving deep suspicion on the part of the first, and archaic paternalism on the part of the second. In brief, the state has often been a force of peasant underdevelopment.

The Reality and the Prospects
It is necessary to have a reasonable assessment of the existing capabilities of the country with regard to food production; we should know as accurately as possible how far the country is able to feed itself from its resources, and where the surplus food is grown. Attempts to provide such information have been made by RRC (September 1985, January 1986), and the MoA-FAO study noted above, but the methods used and the results were not satisfactory to us. The alternative we are presenting is based on a simple formula: take RRC's daily ration of 500 grams (gms) of food per person (see above) as standard for the whole country; to find the level of sufficiency of each province, divide total crop production in that province (all crops) by total provincial population, and convert the result into per
capita consumption. Our findings appear in Table 3. We took the best food production figures available for each province (from CSO December 1984): for famine free areas (Arssi, Gojjam, Illubabor, Kaffa and Wollega) the figures are a five year average; for the rest, the 1979/80 harvest figures, which are good for most of the country, were used (for Eritrea and Tigrai, there was only the 1979/80 estimate).

It should be noted that according to UN sources there are 3500 calories in a kilo of grain, and the average person needs between 2300 and 2400 calories per day. A daily ration of 500 gms of grain provides 1750 calories, about half of what a labouring adult requires.

### Table 3: Per Capita Food Availability

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Food Production (Million Quintals)</th>
<th>Total Population (Million)</th>
<th>Per Capita Food (Gms per Day)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arssi</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>849</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bale</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>389</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eritrea (incl. Assab)</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>192</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gamo Boffa</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>242</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gojjam</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>693</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gondar</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>575</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harrarghe</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>283</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illubabor</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>504</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaffa</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>362</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shoa (incl. A.A.)</td>
<td>20.6</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>594</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sidamo</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tigrai</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>263</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wollega</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>640</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wollo</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>575</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** Urban and rural

**Source:** CSO, 1984; 1984 Census.
On the basis of these findings one can identify three major food production areas:

1. **Chronic Grain Deficit Areas** (Per capita consumption below 500 gms): - Bale, Eritrea, Gamo Goffa, Harrarghe, Kaffa, Sidamo and Tigrai. These contain about 43% of the rural population.

2. **Relatively Self-Sufficient Areas** (Per capita consumption between 500 to 600 gms): - Gondar, Illubabor, Shoa, Wollo - containing about 40% of the rural population.

3. **Grain Surplus Areas** (Over 600 gms per capita): - Arssi, Gojjam, Wollega - containing 17% of the rural population.

In short, our findings cast strong doubt on the oft-repeated assertion that the country has the potential to feed itself and others as well. Only three provinces, containing 17% of the rural population, turn out to be food surplus areas. Although the provinces of Sidamo and Gamo Goffa in the first category are not as badly off as they appear because much of the diet of the people is not grain but root crops (not included here), a number of farm regions in the 2nd category will quickly turn into grain deficit areas with the slightest change in normal farming conditions. Taking this into account, it may be argued that about 60% of the rural population is almost always unable to meet its basic food requirements.
There is additional evidence to support our conclusion, which it must be noted is based on the low consumption figure of 500 gms of food per person per day. Studies of the availability of food over the five years after land reform (1975/76 to 1980/81) show an alarming drop in consumption levels. According to one study, the average "consumption of cereals (including commercial imports and food aid) may be as low as 335 gms. in 1980/81 compared to 423.5 gms. in 1975/76. Indeed, since 1976/77 the per capita food availability has remained below the standard of 400 gms. per person ...." (UNCCRR: 12). A similar conclusion was reached by another study of consumption trends between 1966 and 1982, using MoA annual statistics (I. Watt). The study argues that in this period rural per capita food consumption showed a marked decline, and had it not been for the positive redistributive effects of the land reform, the rate of decline would have been much sharper than they appear now. The positive effects of the reform were, however, reversed, according to Watt, in the early 1980s, suggesting that henceforth there will be sharp falls in the level of consumption.

If the existing reality is bad, future prospects are even worse. Given the current rate of population growth and the depressed state of rural production, it is highly unlikely that the country will become self-sufficient in food by the year 2000. As Table 4 shows, any development in food production more favourable than the current estimate of below 3% per year is likely to be offset by higher rates of population growth, which today stands at 2.9%. The projections regarding growth in food self-sufficiency are based on the basic RRC ration of
500 gms per capita: they assume, in other words, an unchanging standard of consumption. They also assume not only favourable agricultural conditions, but also the absence of hostilities and peasant destabilization.

Table 4: Population Growth and Food Requirements 1985 to 2015

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total Population (Millions)</th>
<th>1985</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2015</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. No Fertility Decline</td>
<td>42.3</td>
<td>67.1</td>
<td>113.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Gradual fertility Decline</td>
<td>42.3</td>
<td>64.1</td>
<td>93.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total Food Production (Million M.T.)</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3. Growing at 3% Annually</td>
<td>5.81*</td>
<td>9.11</td>
<td>14.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Growing at 4.5% Annually</td>
<td>5.81*</td>
<td>11.41</td>
<td>22.41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total Food Needs** (Million M.T.)</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5. If No Fertility Decline</td>
<td>7.72</td>
<td>12.25</td>
<td>20.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Gradual Fertility Decline</td>
<td>7.72</td>
<td>11.68</td>
<td>17.03</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


** Based on per capita consumption of 500 gms/day

Source: Population projections and fertility rates from World Bank (Sept. 30, 1985); the rest our own computation.

The consequences of recurrent food crises on top of continued insufficiency of food production are quite numerous, but for the purposes of this paper we shall point to three major ones. The first is food dependency: the country will continue to be dependent on food imports and food aid on a large scale well into the 21st century. This has now been recognized in several
government circles, although the necessary reorientation of development priorities to meet this problem has yet to be made. Such policy re-orientation will have to emphasize, above everything else, basic needs and poverty alleviation, as has been argued in a recent study (ILO 1982).

The government has pinned its hopes on massive resettlement as a solution to recurrent famine in the highlands. Resettlement as the "lasting solution" to people in famine areas has become state policy since 1978. The government was convinced that there was sufficient cultivable (and habitable) land elsewhere in the country to support a large population. In some branches of government, however, resettlement did not arouse great enthusiasm, particularly because results from existing resettlements were quite disappointing. The Planning Council, for instance, complained of low productivity, low labour participation, and low morale among peasants resettled in the southern regions since 1976; it argued that settlements established since the mid-1970s have continued to be dependent on government handouts (NRDC, December 1984: 55). This may account for the slow pace of resettlement up to the time of the last famine (see also Eshetu Chole and Teshome Mulat).

According to the Ten Year Plan, some 360,000 peasants and their families were expected to be resettled in various parts of the country during the ten-year period (NRDC February 1984: 114). However, after the 1984 disaster, resettlement was greatly accelerated: between November 1984 and August 1985 alone, three-quarters of a million peasants and their families were
moved to hastily set-up resettlement sites, mainly in the western lowlands of the country (RRC October 1985: 14-16). A great portion of the investment as well as the day to day cost involved in this massive effort is expected to come from foreign, mostly Western, sources (Ibid: Ch. 6). This is the other side, or the spin-off effect of food dependency.

The second major consequence of the continued failure of the country to achieve food security will be the spread of insurgency, banditry, and civil disorder in general. Famine in other experiences has often been followed by war, or violence of some kind, in which the main victims have been rural producers. In our own case the likely result will be a gradual break-down of security in the face of escalating hostilities by bands of men made destitute and desperate by hunger and dispossession. This will lead to the third major consequence, that of continued destabilization of the peasantry, and as a result, serious decline in food production. Already, thanks to the triple evils of famine, rural violence, and forced resettlement (which officials responsible for the programme have often resorted to), there may be around one million Ethiopian peasants who have sought refuge in neighbouring countries, mainly in the Sudan. This may later serve as a cause for tension, or even armed conflict between Ethiopia and her neighbours.
4. CONCLUSION: FOOD AND PEACE

We noted early in our discussion that the major cause of food shortage in the period under discussion has not been violent (or non-violent) conflict, but rather economic and political factors. But we also tried to show that in one degree or another local and regional conflicts, and the extension of East-West hostilities to the country, have aggravated the severity of the food crisis and hampered relief and rehabilitation efforts considerably. It was also our contention that increased rural destitution and continued food shortage - a most likely prospect in our view - will heighten the level of conflict in the country in the years to come.

Thus, although in the immediate future it will be the absence of food security which will aggravate hostilities in the country, in the long run it will be the absence of peace which will be the prime cause of hunger and mass starvation. Famine and violence feed on each other.

Two conclusions flow from this. First, peace, considered as the cessation of hostilities or of active preparation for hostilities, while adequate for problems relating to national security, is insufficient from the point of view of the subject at hand. Peace in our case should include the right to life based on the right of access to food.
Secondly, it follows from this that the issue of peace and security, which in the standard debate relates to disarmament and dimilitarization, should be expanded to include food security as a factor leading towards all-round peace. The debate on peace has often made a positive connection between peace and development — although some are now beginning to doubt (see R. Luckham, ed.), but it is not as easy to make the same kind of connection between food security and development. Indeed, it is our contention that food security will not contribute significantly to the development process in Ethiopia, although no development will be possible unless there is an adequately fed and labouring population. Food security will not be translated — like perhaps dimilitarization and disarmament — directly into higher output or enlarged infrastructure, but it is the rock on which the development foundation will have to be built.

Now, the question that the international peace community will have to answer is this: should the concept of peace be enlarged to include the issue of food security of nations? The connecting link between peace and food security is that the absence of one or the other leads to the crisis of livelihood in the profound sense of the term. It thus seems only proper that the right to life through the cessation of hostilities (peace) should be complemented with the right to life and of access to food (food security).
5. ABBREVIATIONS

CSO. = Central Statistical Office
E.C. (G.C.) = Ethiopian Calendar (Gregorian Calendar)
ENI = Ethiopian Nutrition Institute
FAO = Food and Agricultural Organization
ILO (JASPA) = International Labour Organization (Jobs and Skills Programme for Africa)
MoA = Ministry of Agriculture
NRDC - CPSC = National Revolutionary Development Campaign-Central Planning Supreme Council
PMAC = Provisional Military Administrative Council (i.e. the Military government)
RRC = Relief and Rehabilitation Commission
UNCCRR = United Nations Coordinating Committee for Relief and Rehabilitation
UNEOE = United Nations Emergency Operation in Ethiopia
Currency: 2.10 Birr is equivalent to U.S. $ 1.00
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