

# GORBACHEV'S HOLOCAUST

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## Soviet Complicity in Ethiopia's Famine

MICHAEL JOHNS

**M**ikhail Gorbachev is an accomplice in one of the most appalling holocausts of the 20th century. He is massively arming a Communist government in Ethiopia whose man-made famine tactics took one million lives in 1984-85, and threaten three million more in 1988.

Mikhail Gorbachev took power in the Soviet Union in March 1985 just as the famine of 1984-85 was coming to a close. During that famine, almost \$2 billion in food, medicine, and other aid from the West helped save hundreds of thousands of Ethiopians' lives. The Soviets' famine relief efforts were limited to sending 3,500 tons of rice (a rather thoughtless grant in the midst of a drought since each cup of rice requires approximately two cups of water to cook). Meanwhile, the Kremlin poured \$800 million in military hardware into Ethiopia in 1985 alone.

In 1988 three million lives are at stake as the result of the decision by Lt. Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam to expel international relief workers and prevent Western aid from reaching the famine-stricken provinces in the north. But Gorbachev's military aid to Ethiopia has not been shaken. Already this year, an estimated \$800 million worth of Soviet military equipment has been sent to Mengistu, and an estimated \$5.8 billion worth of such Soviet equipment has arrived since 1977. "It is clear the Soviets have no concern for the starving," says Haile Tassew, a high level defector from Mengistu's diplomatic corps. "They are exclusively concerned with achieving their military and strategic objectives in Ethiopia."

### Everything to the War Front

Under world pressure, Gorbachev did recently agree to send 252 million tons of grain to the Ethiopian government's Relief and Rehabilitation Commission, 50 million of which had actually arrived by early June. Even this gesture shows a callousness to human life. Aid distributed by the government relief organization is extremely unlikely to be distributed in Eritrea or Tigre, where rebels are operating and famine is most severe. Furthermore, government-distributed aid is frequently used by Mengistu to draw Ethiopians to areas where they can be forcibly boarded on Soviet transport vehicles, split with their families, and resettled to the south and the west.

Much of the military hardware received from Moscow

has been used in carrying out indiscriminate bombings, shellings, and scorched earth tactics against civilian targets in Eritrea and Tigre, contributing greatly to the current famine situation in the north. Soviet military equipment has also been used to bomb and burn famine relief centers in the north and along the Sudan border. These attacks, along with sporadic rebel assaults on relief transport vehicles, have greatly complicated Western relief efforts. "Food convoys must come at night, because they know the government will attack," says anthropologist Jason Clay of Cultural Survival, a U.S.-based organization that tries to protect tribal cultures.

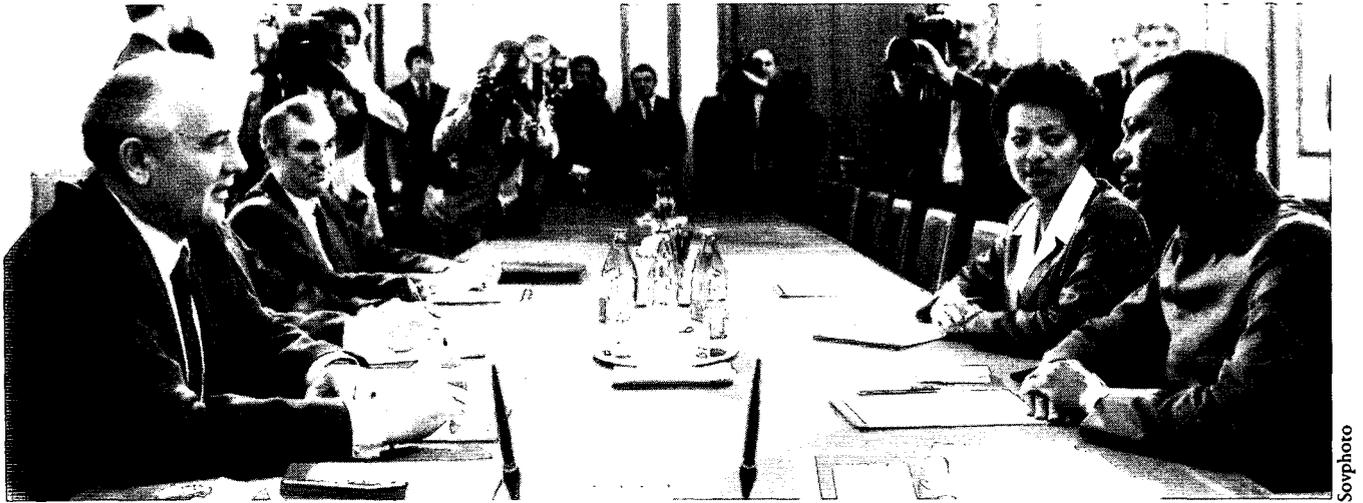
In April, after Eritrean separatist rebels killed or captured 18,000 Ethiopian soldiers, including three Soviet advisors, in the northern garrison town of Afabet, Gorbachev immediately resupplied Mengistu with \$500 million worth of Soviet military hardware, allowing Mengistu to carry on the war against the Eritreans. In the face of another famine, Mengistu has launched a massive Soviet-supported military campaign, "everything to the war front," in which he has asked all Ethiopians to forfeit one month's pay for the war effort and has doubled the size of the Ethiopian army in the north, often with conscripts as young as 12 years old. "After that attack at Afabet," says an Ethiopian government defector, Dr. Aradom Tedla, "new Soviet cargo planes arrived in Eritrea, and literally for hours they unloaded equipment and troops."

### Mass Resettlement, A Soviet Idea

Soviet transport trucks and planes have played an important role in Mengistu's hated villagization and resettlement programs, which have forcibly relocated over five million Ethiopians. According to the French medical group *Medecins sans Frontieres*, Mengistu's resettlement programs have resulted in the deaths of some 100,000 Ethiopians, often from cholera and other diseases. The villagization program uproots peasants from their rural hamlets—many unthreatened by famine—and marches them into squalid government collectives where food is often less plentiful, and where they are usually separated from their immediate family.

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Mengistu with his arms supplier, 1987

As part of the villagization program, which serves the purpose of breaking down traditional power bases that are perceived threatening to Mengistu, the government orders the peasants to carry all their belongings and the roofs of their houses to the new sites. Once in the cooperative, the peasants are forced to walk as far as five miles to and from the fields every day at gunpoint, to turn all their produce over to the state, and to attend indoctrination seminars that laud the Mengistu government. Ethiopians in the cooperatives are given food to inform on one another, and peasants are frequently tortured for any slight deviation from the cooperative's strict rules. Dr. Tedla, who now heads an African human-rights group, says, "The mass resettlement program was initially proposed by Soviet advisors." Mariam-Kidane Betrou, who was Mengistu's ambassador to Cairo before his defection to the West, actually participated in meetings with Soviet officials in which villagization was discussed, and contends today that "they are behind it; they made the plans; they urged it on."

Official visits between Mengistu and Soviet officials have never been followed with much Soviet criticism of Mengistu's Stalinist policies. When Mengistu visited Moscow in April 1987, Gorbachev was quoted as merely warning him to "proceed from realities and not outrun stages of development." When Politburo member Lev Zaikov visited Addis Ababa in September 1987, he was reported to have been somewhat blunter with Mengistu, but nothing was said publicly. Betrou claims Ethiopia has and continues to be "completely in the Soviets' hands. Mengistu's arms supply comes from there, and he is in massive debt to them." He says Soviet and Ethiopian officials in Addis Ababa were "just implementing what came from Moscow. . . . Gorbachev has his priorities, and famine relief is not one of them."

### Mengistu's Gala Celebration

Had Gorbachev cooperated in famine relief efforts in 1985, Betrou claims, Ethiopian fatalities "would have been greatly minimized." Frank Carlin, who assisted in relief efforts inside Ethiopia as an employee of Catholic Relief Services, says one of the main questions that continually

puzzled Western relief workers was: "Why is it that this 'ally' is not providing the aid that is needed? That was one of our grave concerns."

But if the Soviets were doing little to save lives, they were doing plenty to wage war. Dr. Tedla recalls that the Eritrean rebels proposed a cease-fire during the 1985 famine, but, as a million died of hunger, the government instead launched an offensive against the rebels. Tedla says there is "no doubt that that offensive was Gorbachev's idea . . . it included 200,000 government troops, the largest offensive ever, and Mr. Gorbachev gave the green light to go ahead."

The Mengistu government has even given greater priority to Leninist celebrations than to his starving countrymen. In 1984, for instance, as famine was commencing, Mengistu turned his back on the starving, spending \$200 million on a gala celebration for the 10th anniversary of Communist rule in Ethiopia. As Communist celebrities such as the Soviet Union's Grigory Romanov, Cuba's Fidel Castro, and East Germany's Erich Honecker arrived in Addis Ababa for the lavish celebration, the starving were conveniently removed from the streets so that Soviet tanks, missiles, and rockets could be displayed in a parade.

Furthermore, Soviet and East European ships carrying military supplies have consistently been given unloading priority over Western ships carrying food. The Mengistu government has also assessed each Western ship carrying food a \$50-per-ton fee to unload the food, which is used to subsidize the militia, turning away ships when they have been unable to pay the fee. Food intended for civilians has frequently been diverted to the militia, and often it has been allowed to simply rot on the docks. On these problems, too, Moscow has been hauntingly silent.

Ethiopia is blessed with fertile land and a hard-working population, and was once an agricultural exporter, but today the country is plagued with man-made famine propped up by massive Soviet military hardware. Mikhail Gorbachev wants the world to believe that glasnost is real, and that he is sincere about distancing himself from the Stalinist atrocities of the past. The world has a right to ask: Why doesn't he put an end to his Ethiopian holocaust? 🗿

## The Reagan Revolution and Its Limits

**Revolution**, by Martin Anderson (*San Diego/New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, \$19.95*).

**Reaganomics: An Insider's Account of the Policies and the People**, by William A. Niskanen (*New York: Oxford University Press, \$22.95*).

Reviewed by Tim W. Ferguson

This has been a year for recriminations and score settling by alumni of the Reagan White House. Now two insiders have written instead to examine the meat of policy and the future of whatever kind of revolution unfolded these past eight years.

Martin Anderson headed the Office of Policy Development through the first 14 months of Reagan's presidency and kept ties to the administration for more than three years thereafter. William Niskanen was a member and then acting chairman of the Council for Economic Advisers (CEA) through 1985. Both are libertarians. But those who've followed the fractious economic debate within the Reagan camp (for instance, the contrasting insider accounts by Paul Craig Roberts and David Stockman, also libertarians in their economic views) will not be surprised to find that Anderson and Niskanen also present very different accounts.

Anderson, now senior fellow of the Hoover Institution, was an adviser to Ronald Reagan during his 1976 and 1980 bids for the White House. He has written a personal and largely enthusiastic appraisal of the man and his record. Niskanen, the economist fired from Ford Motor Company for his fealty to free trade, also dates his acquaintance with Reagan to the California days, but he was never as close. Told with detachment, his is a sober and mostly sad tale of opportunity lost.

### Perils of Pollyanna

*Revolution* paints Reagan in broad brush strokes as a masterful shaper of tax-cutting prosperity and missile-negating security. Anderson pays little attention in his nearly 500-page book to the crude compromises and confounding acts of Reagan's presidency—the abandonment of heralded cuts in spending and bureaucracy, the creeping protectionism evident as early as the 1980 campaign, the remarkable tolerance of underlings who opposed Reagan's expressed positions, the troubling about-face on the Soviet

Union. Anderson has tried to emerge as *the* sympathetic political chronicler of the Reagan years. But his reverence for the man he served, his tendency to see the glass not just as half-full but as *nearly* full, undermines his attempt.

Not until his discussion of the Iran/Contra affair, and then for a special reason that becomes clear, does Anderson's tone change. In a surprisingly strong section that takes up more than a quarter of the book, he holds Reagan accountable overall, but emphasizes the perfidy of subordinates and their overreach for executive-branch power.

Elsewhere, *Revolution* provides a picture of a decisive and wily president, not the dim bulb sketched in other accounts. Anderson calls Reagan a "closet workaholic" who "rationed himself carefully because even the caffeine in a half cup of coffee will make him acutely alert." He exposes Reagan's speechmaking magic—including, in the pre-presidential years, the candidate's painstaking, shorthand-style lettering of the famous index cards. And he remembers how the Reagan espousal of Kemp-Roth tax cuts grew out of a deal in fall 1979 to keep Jack Kemp from running for president the following year. But Anderson omits some of his political mentor's missteps that still beg for explanation, such as the bizarre overture to Gerald Ford at the 1980 convention.

### Deaver Saves Reagan's Life

Anecdotal glimpses of others in the Reagan entourage contribute to an understanding of events. For instance, Anderson depicts Michael Deaver as a selfless aide to Reagan for 12 years until the candidate allowed John Sears and other campaign officials to "gang up" on him on Thanksgiving 1979. They accused Deaver of ripping off the campaign. He quit and, although he returned after Sears was fired a few months later (and after Deaver saved Reagan's life in a choking incident, Anderson recounts), "Deaver stopped looking out for Reagan's interests first and instead began looking out for his own." Reagan, for his part, is socially distanced from his staff and not prone to say thanks.

Many conservatives, including some with a libertarian prefix, will swallow hard when Anderson puts a favorable spin on the arms talks with the Soviets. An eclectic and long list of administration acquaintances draws kind reviews, including ones of James Baker (Anderson is not the only one to forget too soon the first term's frustrations) and George Shultz (why is there no discussion of the socialist or price-distorting practices perpetuated by the foreign-aid bureaucracy?).

Instead of a comprehensive review of administration

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