

ERIC
MARGOLIS



The awful truth about Ethiopia

During three nightmare years, Josef Stalin unleashed his Great Purge on Russia. Between 25 and 27 million Soviet citizens were shot, purposely starved or perished in concentration camps.

While this epic slaughter was in process, numerous Western intellectuals, churchmen and journalists were toured through Moscow and the Ukraine by helpful Soviet guides. Such luminaries as the philosopher Bertrand Russell and the writer John Reed reported back to the West that Russia was happy and prosperous.

Malcolm Muggeridge, one of the few who reported the extermination of millions of Ukrainians, saw his dispatches censored by disbelieving editors in London. The West simply would not see the awful truth.

One must suspect that a similar process is being repeated today in Ethiopia. Western journalists and aid administrators are being shown only what their Ethiopian hosts want them to see. No Westerners are allowed anywhere in Ethiopia without government "guides."

If Western reporters or aid personnel in any way offend their Marxist hosts, they are simply expelled from the country. Most relief agencies are too busy trying to feed starving people to question whether their Ethiopian hosts are cynically using them.

The most striking example of ignoring the obvious concerns is the current campaign by Addis Ababa to remove 2.5 million northerners and resettle them in Ethiopia's underpopulated south. To date, some 250,000 peasants have been moved.

Western governments and aid organizations have been asked to help in this massive population movement. Some have already provided funds and food. But is this campaign a humanitarian effort, as the Ethiopians say, or a Stalin-style "final solution" to separatist movements?

The bulk of the 2.5 million people to be moved is to come from the provinces of Tigre and Wallo where two guerrilla movements have fought for decades to free themselves from colonial rule by the regime in Addis Ababa. They are close allies of two other rebel groups seeking independence of the neighboring, war-torn province of Eritrea.

In these three provinces, the Ethiopian government controls only the major cities and their road links. The remaining 80% of the provinces are held by rebel groups. It is precisely from these rebel-dominated areas that the Marxist regime intends to move millions of farmers.

We cannot help but suspect that the Ethiopian regime's Russian advisers have a hand in this campaign. In Afghanistan, Russia has been conducting a terror program aimed at depopulating the countryside — and thus depriving the anti-communist guerrillas of the food and shelter given them by rural civilians.

Ethiopia appears to be doing the same thing. Unable to crush rebels in Tigre, Wallo and Eritrea, the government is now trying to depopulate the provinces and rob the separatists of vital civilian support. And, with incredible gall, Addis Ababa is asking the West to pay for this "humanitarian" program.

Northern farmers are to be removed from their ancestral lands and resettled in large collective farms in the distant southern lowlands. People from the northern highlands have no immunity to the many diseases, such as river fever, prevalent in the semi-tropical south.

Nor should we forget that Ethiopia is a disparate amalgam of different tribes, races, cultures and religions. The Marxist regime intends to settle northerners in lands of the Oromo (sometimes known as Galla) peoples who are, themselves, resisting the central government.

The U.S. government, to its credit, is showing awareness of this problem. Not only is Washington refusing to join the resettlement program, it has recently begun to discreetly channel 3,000 tons of food aid monthly directly to Tigre and Wallo via the Sudan.

Many officials in Washington are convinced that the Marxist regime in Addis Ababa is using Western food aid to reward supporters and feed its 300,000-man army. Farmers who object to forced collectivization are denied food and seed grains. Other food aid, in typical African fashion, simply finds its way onto the black market. The only people surprised by this reality have been Canadian aid officials.

By sending food aid directly to the rebellious provinces, Washington is attempting to prevent another Ukraine. It is also demonstrating its well-founded distrust of the Ethiopian regime that has shown a consistently brutal disregard of its suffering people.

Canada should do the same. If we really care about the Ethiopian people — as opposed to the Marxist regime — Canadian aid and administrators ought to be sent to Tigre, Wallo and Eritrea. If the Ethiopian government objects, well, too bad for them. We are paying the piper and can call the tune.

In decades hence, when the true facts about the government-manufactured famine in Ethiopia finally emerge, we certainly do not want to be seen as having aided the brutal displacement of entire peoples for political reasons. Our generous aid should help the peoples of Ethiopia, not the commissars in Addis Ababa.

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