

# We're the tobacco industry, too.

**I**n 1983, our brothers and sisters marched in Washington honoring the memory of Dr. Martin Luther King. We worked for passage of the Voting Rights Act. We marched in the Nation's Capital to support health care for the elderly. In 1981, we rallied in support of Social Security. We were part of the historic Solidarity Day March. And again and again, we have fought to save the Food Stamps program.

You may be surprised to know we also work for the tobacco industry.

We are proud members of the Bakery, Confectionery and Tobacco Workers International Union. And we care about the same things working people all over the country care about—jobs, equality, social justice, economic democracy, peace. We also care about the wages and benefits we have won for ourselves and our



*Members of The Bakery, Confectionery and Tobacco Workers International Union Local 203 T*

families while working in the tobacco industry.

We want you to know our industry is threatened—not by foreign competition or old-fashioned technology—but by well-meaning people who haven't stopped to consider how their actions might affect others.

Everyone knows there is a controversy over smoking. What everyone doesn't know . . . and should . . . is that attacks on the tobacco industry threaten the livelihoods of thousands of working Americans who have marched, worked, and struggled for causes we all believe in.

The tobacco industry creates jobs, which for many of us make the difference between poverty and dignity. It means a lot to us.

Sponsored by The Tobacco Industry Labor/Management Committee

ADVERTISEMENT

By David Kline

**T**HE DIFFICULTY OF DOING humanitarian work in a political world is perhaps nowhere more evident than in the famine-stricken Ethiopian territory of Eritrea, in the African Horn.

According to Western relief workers on the scene, as much as one-third of the Eritrean population is in danger of starving to death, the result of a four-year drought. Their plight would seem to cry out for an immediate response from humanitarian relief organizations which, given their sophisticated funding and distribution capabilities, are prepared as never before in history to respond to just such a crisis.

Surprisingly, the American humanitarian aid community has in large part chosen to steer a wide berth from Eritrea despite the immense need that exists there. Privately in most cases, publicly in some, relief officials say the geo-political high seas around Eritrea are simply too dangerous to be navigated safely.

As one relief official, who wishes to remain anonymous, put it, Eritrea's is a "politically sticky" famine.

What makes the famine "political" is the insurgency that has raged for 22 years in the Horn—Africa's longest-running war. It is a bitter conflict with strategic implications for superpower control of the Red Sea and the passage to Suez. Until 1974, when emperor Haile Selassie was overthrown, the U.S. supported the Ethiopian ruler against left-wing Eritrean insurgents. Today, ironically, the Soviet Union supports the Ethiopian regime against the Eritreans with \$2 billion in arms aid and 1,500 Soviet military advisors. But American relief agencies still have a large investment in resources in Ethiopia that they are reluctant to jeopardize.

To protect that investment, most American agencies have refused to provide aid to anti-government Eritreans, even though they make up nearly half the starving population within Ethiopian borders. Indeed, officials at the American Council for Voluntary Agencies, the umbrella of U.S. relief groups, put the total value of private American famine-relief funds going to the government side in Ethiopia at more than \$8 million annually versus less than \$900,000 for Eritrea and Tigray, another province where anti-government insurgency rages.

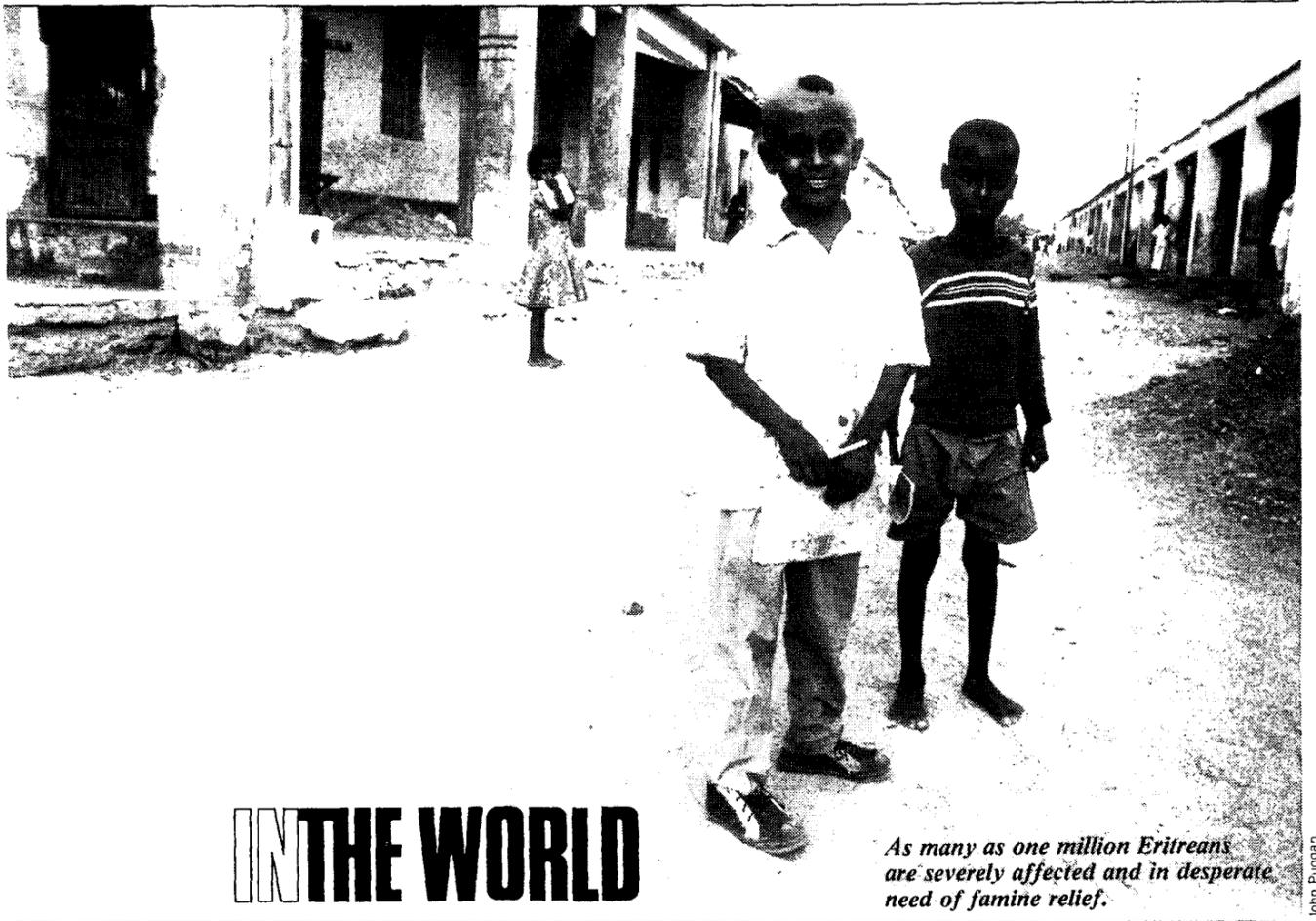
This nine-to-one ratio exists despite the fact that roughly half of the starving population within the national boundaries of Ethiopia live outside of government-controlled areas. In Eritrea, 85 percent of the population is estimated to live in anti-government areas.

Some critics—American as well as Eritrean—call this disparity in aid a scandal. Dan Connell of the Boston-based aid group Grassroots International charges that many agencies have allowed political expediency to stand in the way of their duty as humanitarians. "There's no doubt in my mind that political fears are responsible for the scandalous neglect of Eritrea," he says.

Indeed, some agencies admit that politics does play a role in their refusal to aid the Eritreans: "We're concerned that the government [of Ethiopia] would be very upset if we worked directly with the Eritreans," says Jim DeHarport of the Africa Programs section of Catholic Relief Services. "That could jeopardize our ongoing work in the rest of Ethiopia."

Another organization that has also avoided work in Eritrea is California-based World Vision, which recently refused a request from the Eritrean Relief Committee of New York for emergency aid. Dr. John McMillin, director of the agency's Relief and Rehabilitation section, concedes that the key issue in his organization's denial of the request was the fear of invoking the displeasure of the Addis Ababa authorities.

"We have a long history in Ethiopia, with a large investment in staff and resources," McMillin explains. "We had to make a choice and we tried to serve



As many as one million Eritreans are severely affected and in desperate need of famine relief.

John Puggan

## IN THE WORLD

### AFRICAN HORN

# Eritrea's famine is politically sticky

the most people in the best way.

"But looking back on it now," he adds, "knowing what we know now about how serious the situation in Eritrea is, I'm not sure that I wouldn't make a different choice today. In fact, we're now reevaluating whether to start up some work in Eritrea."

One organization that has opted for a strong Eritrea involvement is the Mennonite Central Committee, despite the fact that five members of an Ethiopian group associated with it languish in government prisons.

"We're running a risk but frankly we felt we had no choice," explains Stoesz. "Our mandate is to feed the hungry—wherever they are and despite any political controversy—and we intend to live up to that."

Some agencies cite other reasons for refusing to work in Eritrea. The UN-sponsored World Food program, for ex-

hesitate to do the same for fear of alienating their few aid and publicity sources.

In Ethiopia, for example, government authorities have for some time been accused of misappropriating aid to feed their own troops or to pay laborers, and yet these charges have so far not been a roadblock to aid from Western sources. This reporter was told by EPLF-held Ethiopian prisoners of food supplies donated by European Economic Community (EEC) and the International Committee of the Red Cross that were used to pay laborers in lieu of salary. In addition, journalists on the scene have from time to time reported cases of EPLF fighters capturing Western-donated food stocks, intended for civilian use, from Ethiopian garrisons.

For a long time, these and other reports were dismissed as hearsay by the EEC, which conducted an audit of Ethiopian relief channels and found no

**Dan Connell of the Boston-based aid group Grassroots International says that many agencies have allowed political expediency to stand in the way of their duty as humanitarians. "Political fears are responsible for the scandalous neglect of Eritreans."**

ample, says it will work only with legally recognized governmental entities. In part, rules like this stem from the belief that non-governmental or insurgent-sponsored relief organizations are inherently "political" and therefore less trustworthy than the governments they oppose.

But this bias may be based more upon Western political prejudices than upon observable reality. For in today's world, governments often divert and corrupt aid meant for civilian purposes, whereas grassroots and guerrilla organizations

evidence of abuse. Then, to the embarrassment of Addis Ababa officials and Western donors alike, a senior official of the Ethiopian Relief and Rehabilitation Commission, Abraha Haile Mikael, defected to Khartoum, Sudan, late last year with clear evidence of violations.

Abraha carried with him a letter sent by the Relief Commission in February 1983, to its regional offices ordering an urgent cover-up of 15,000 tons of missing food aid—twice the amount, incidentally, received by the Eritreans in all of 1983. The letter, as reprinted in a

December 4, 1983, *London Sunday Times* story by Peter Wilsher, was written in what seemed to be a panic. It noted that an auditor had just arrived in the country from the UN-sponsored World Food Program.

"We are aware," the letter warned, "that as we have failed to act appropriately, the chances of the country securing further food aid could be adversely affected." The document then set out seven steps for limiting the damage, including making false registration entries and "readjusting" transport expenses.

When the scandal broke, the World Food Program indicated it would "be looking very hard again [at Ethiopia], when we have studied the letter." In late July, at the organization's headquarters in Rome, spokesman Trevor Page said, "It appears the whole problem was simply an accounting error; there doesn't appear to have been any fraud."

When asked for his view of the significance of the purloined letter, which appears to show Ethiopian government officials planning to commit fraud, Page replied, "I don't know about the letter. You've got me on that one."

As for the Eritrean side, Western observers on the ground have consistently reported that insofar as they can determine, famine aid in the rebel zones is being distributed properly. That at least was the conclusion of a report late last year by field monitors for a consortium of aid groups, principally European, most of whom also work on the government side in Ethiopia.

The consortium is made up of about a dozen organizations, including Dutch Inter-Church Aid, Christian Aid of Britain, and America's Lutheran World Relief. The latter group is by far the largest American contributor to Eritrean relief, donating more than \$500,000 in 1983.

Significantly, the consortium's other members insist on working anonymously, for fear of subjecting their projects in government-controlled areas of Ethiopia to possible retaliation.

Indeed, the project has been so secret that only after top-level meetings in Europe at the end of 1983, when field monitors reported the full scope of the impending disaster in Eritrea, did the three organizations named above even decide to go public and openly appeal for aid.

"The Eritrea crisis is just too serious. We have to speak up, appeal for aid, if we're going to help these people," explained Norman Barth, director of Lutheran World Relief. Barth spent 10 days in Eritrea inspecting ERA operations last December.

This neglect of the Eritrean famine

*Continued on page 22*