

By David Kline

THE 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.

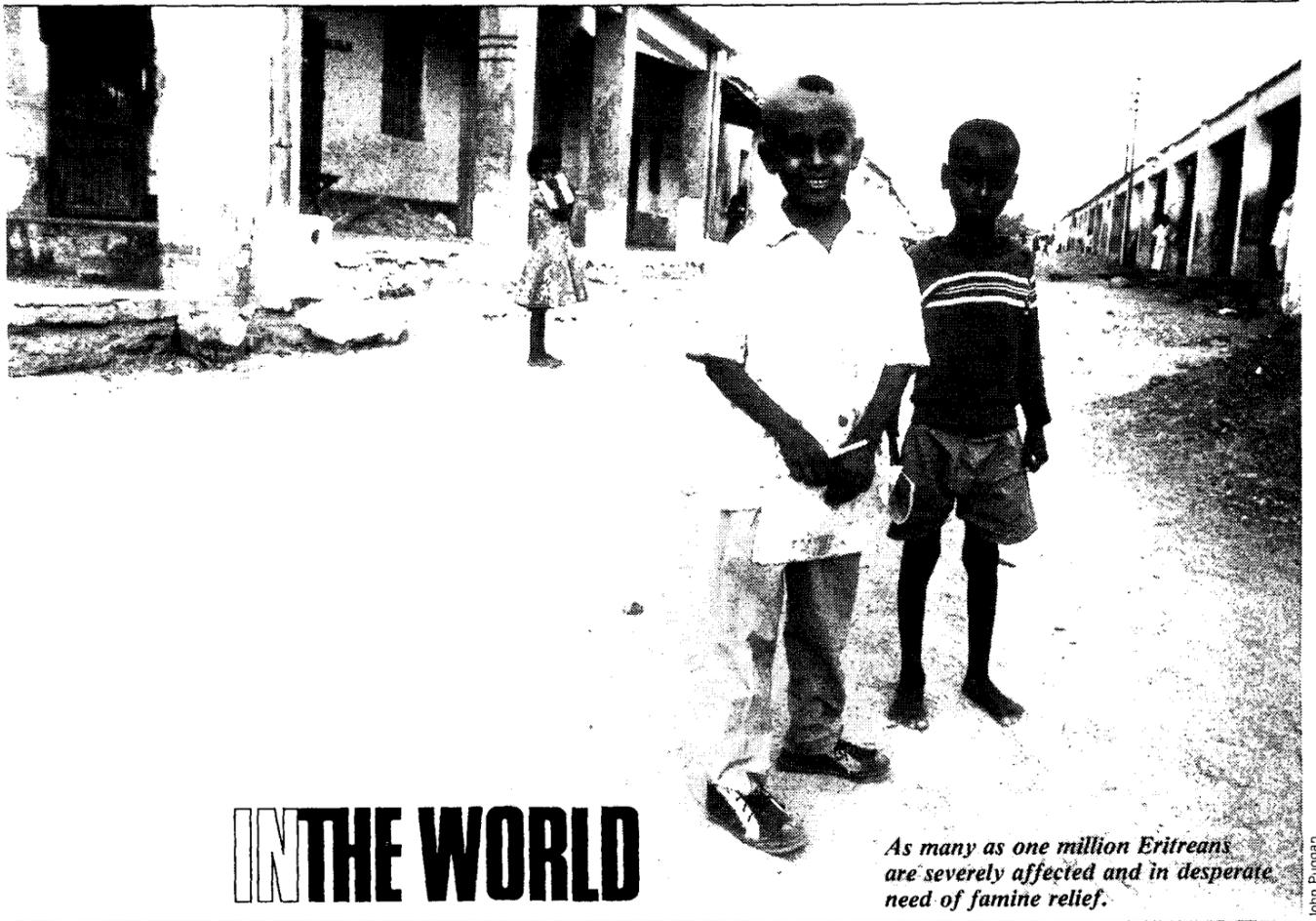
This nine-to-one ratio exists despite the fact that roughly half of the starving population within the national boundaries of Ethiopia live outside of government-controlled areas. In Eritrea, 85 percent of the population is estimated to live in anti-government areas.

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

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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

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By Neil Miller

BOSTON

WHEN BROWN UNIVERSITY senior Matthew Hirsch started college, he and his classmates looked back on the involved, activist students of the '60s with nostalgia. "We would ask each other, 'What happened to us? We should be like them,'" he recalls. "There was a real feeling we were lacking something." Four years later, that generational inferiority complex is gone.

When Liz Koch, also a Brown senior, was in high school, she felt "stuck in the wrong generation." Where she wanted to be was in the '60s. Now, she says, most of her friends view that decade as "too irrational, not reasonable, with too much anger."

Although Laura Damson, who graduated from Harvard in June, envies the "common cause" of yesterday's protesting students and praises their achievements in terms of "consciousness-raising," she also observes, "We saw the generation that came before us floating around for 10 years [without direction]."

In the late '60s and early '70s, when American society was tearing itself apart over the Vietnam War and struggling with lifestyle and cultural changes, a popular way of looking at social divisions was in terms of a "generation gap" in values and attitudes between the young and their more traditional parents. When the Gallup Poll asked Americans in the spring of 1969, "Is there a generation gap?", 73 percent responded, "Yes."

Gallup doesn't bother to ask that question these days. If the term "generation gap" has an application in 1984, it seems not to be between the current generation of college students and their parents, but between the college-age group and those now in their mid-30s to early 40s—the "Vietnam generation." Polls show that on several issues, college students today have more in common with their parents than with their more radical predecessors, despite the '60s generation's milder current guise. Sixties political activist Abbie Hoffman suggested in a recent *Newsweek* interview that the '60s battle cry, "Don't trust anyone over 30," should now be "Don't trust anyone under 30."

June, 1970. Richard Nixon is president. College campuses are still reeling from protests over the U.S. invasion of Cambodia earlier in the spring. Generational politics is in full flower, and pollster Louis Harris is asking college students lots of questions.

What Harris found was a hard-core 11 percent of students nationwide who categorized themselves as "far left" politically, a number that rose to 16 percent on the West Coast and 19 percent on the East Coast. Forty-one percent of students described themselves as "liberals." Seventy-six percent advocated basic changes in "the system," although only 10 percent believed violence was the sole way those changes could be achieved.

Of course, you can read polls any way you choose. If 27 percent of yesterday's students told Harris they didn't agree with their parents' values, the other 73 percent did. If Gallup reported that 28 percent of students nationwide had taken part in a demonstration, the vast majority had not. On a Harris inventory of personalities admired by both college and non-college youth, John Wayne was admired by more young people than Bob Dylan, Richard Nixon was more popular than John Lennon. Bringing up the bottom of the list were Ho Chi Minh, admired "a great deal" by only 4 percent of those surveyed, and Fidel Castro, hero to only 2 percent. (The combining of college and non-college youth perhaps moderated the survey's findings: polls showed non-college young people lining up with their parents on most of the issues of the day.)

Despite differences among even those who attended college, the group that came of age during the Vietnam years had a remarkable sense of generational consciousness and cohesiveness. It was not just that it developed its own heroes,

music, and patterns of dress, evolved its own living styles and sexual patterns, or imported its spirituality and intoxicants from exotic locales. It was not just that it challenged the social norms in almost every area. Previous generations had done some of those things, too.

What was particularly distinctive was a collective sense of forging a new world, that every personal act—from wearing bell-bottom pants to acquiring a mantra to swallowing a subspecies of Mexican mushroom—had political, if not millennial, implications. Add to this the opposition to U.S. military involvement in Southeast Asia and a sheltered generation's general feeling of betrayal by a political system they had been raised to view as beneficent. All these elements gave the generation its own—more militant—sense of political identity.

Political identities tend to be formed during one's late adolescence and early adult years, according to Paul Beck, professor of political science at Florida State University. The more traumatic the political events of a particular period, says Beck, the stronger the political identities individuals will carry away with them. This happened in the United States during the Great Depression, when an entire generation of New Deal Democrats was created, a political identification that

endures to this day. In the same manner, the Vietnam War, the civil-rights movement and the political assassinations and social turmoil of the late '60s shaped the world view of another generation.

So we arrive at 1984. Despite the anthropological discovery of the "Yuppie," despite media hype about Volvos and BMWs, running shoes and pasta primavera to go, studies indicate that members of the Vietnam generation have kept their political views relatively intact long after the events that shaped them have faded.

Probably the most exhaustive study of the evolution of Vietnam-generation attitudes comes from Gregory Markus, an associate professor of political science at the University of Michigan. The study, which Markus co-authored, examined the attitudes and values of some 1,669 high-school seniors and their parents. Offspring and parents were interviewed in 1965 and reinterviewed in 1972 and 1982. (By 1982, two-thirds of the original group was still participating in the study.) What Markus found was "a clear evidence of persisting attitude differences between the Vietnam cohort and their elders and also with the people who came after them. The Vietnam generation were attitudinally distinct back then, and they remain attitudinally distinct today."

Although Markus did find that those

who came of age in the '60s had modified their views on economic issues, on most issues they remained liberal "as liberal is defined in terms of lifestyle and culture." Markus says that "If you scan the whole attitudinal horizon of people from 18 to 65," you will find it "reasonably flat" except for the generation in their mid-30s to early 40s. "If you are dividing people according to age, that really is the only age group that continues to be in any way distinctive," he says.

In compiling several polls for the December-January issue of the magazine *Public Opinion*, Everett Ladd, director of the Roper Center for Public Opinion at the University of Connecticut, found much the same thing. In the early '80s, half of those polled from the Vietnam generation described themselves as "liberal" and had views to the left of the general population on a host of issues, ranging from military spending to the death penalty.

Ronald Inglehart, a professor of political science at the University of Michigan, also contends this group has not succumbed to the Big Chill, even though its members clearly dress and behave differently than in the headiest days of the '60s.

"What is interesting is that they are a highly educated, well-paid group, many



Coming of Age in the