

Agriculture by Marcia Merry

Sudan's 'harvest of joy'

Sudan is bringing in its April wheat harvest, but Anglo-Americans plan to invade in the name of "food relief."

As of the end of April, the completed wheat harvest for the season in the Sudan might total as much as 800,000 tons. Called a "harvest of joy," this crop is precious, because it will go to relieve the desperate hunger now haunting millions of the 25 million Sudanese people after two years of drought, decades of forced impoverishment by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank, and recent months of food warfare by the U.S. government and collaborating relief agencies.

The crop is a "miracle crop," because it results from the second sowing of wheat within 12 months, an unusual practice in Sudan.

Last December, President Omar Hassan El Bashir issued an official request for food aid, to be delivered by this June, totaling up to 1.2 million tons, the same as the U.N. estimate of Sudan's food shortages, based on U.N. mission assessments after last fall's drought-hit harvests. At the same time, the government initiated an emergency grain-planting program.

However, the U.S. government policy has been to conduct food warfare, in great part because President El Bashir opposed the Persian Gulf colonialist adventure. In October 1990, the U.S. ordered a shipment of 45,000 tons of wheat commercially purchased by Sudan, to change course for Kenya. The IMF declared Sudan a "non-cooperating" member and moved to cut off credit from all sources, crippling Sudan's ability to finance imports of agricultural inputs and food. U.S. warships in the Red

Sea interdicted ships bound for Port Sudan with farm chemicals. The U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees cut aid for refugees in Sudan by 20%.

Meantime, orchestrated testimony was delivered to Congress by State Department front groups such as the U.S. Committee on Refugees, which blamed El Bashir's government for depriving its own people of food.

The cynical U.S. actions were part of a neo-colonialist policy of covertly engineering catastrophes, such as famine, in order to rationalize emergency invasions and takeovers, and national sovereignty be damned. The United States has repeatedly attacked President El Bashir for being guilty of causing delays in providing food, i.e., accusing him of what the U.S. did, in fact.

On April 15, a dispatch came from Reuters in Nicosia, Cyprus, stating that an invasion of "relief missions" by the U.S. and U.N. non-governmental agencies (NGOs) was pending. The wire stated, "Western donor states are considering going ahead" and sending relief missions into Sudan "without official approval. . . . The [relief] officials, contacted by telephone, told Reuters they were so alarmed by the delay and worried about loss of life that they were considering giving the Arabized military government of Omar Hassan El Bashir an ultimatum."

The "harvest of joy" has caused great embarrassment to this U.S. policy, because it provides tangible evidence of the great extent of the Khartoum government's emergency

measures on behalf of its people. Normally, wheat is planted in Sudan in August and harvested in October-November. But the second, emergency planting that was done last November has turned out well. Cotton acreage, also sown in the fall, was decreased in favor of wheat, as well as by grain sorghum, a cereals staple in Sudan.

When the emergency measures yielded a fruitful harvest, there was a festival atmosphere in the beleaguered nation. Even U.S. Ambassador Cheek was forced to give it praise. Hope has been restored. Perhaps only 500,000 tons or even less in emergency food aid will now be required by June, and the government has the basis to forge ahead with its ongoing plans for the nation to be food self-sufficient within two years.

However, in the face of being able to prevent famine, the U.S. has escalated its food warfare tactics. In early spring, the State Department gave approval for the shipment of 330,000 tons of food aid (wheat, rice, lentils, vegetable oil) over a four-to-six-week period. The catch was that terms of how this food is to be distributed were yet to be worked out with Khartoum officials. In 1988, when rains were good, farmers produced 50% of their wheat needs, and Sudan attempted to achieve food self-sufficiency. U.S. relief agencies came in and dumped cheap grain on the local markets. The farmers were financially devastated by the typical U.S. "food aid" pattern.

Sudan, the largest nation in Africa, equivalent in area to the United States east of the Mississippi, was food self-sufficient until the 1970s. But then the country conceded to an IMF program whereby it would concentrate on cotton and export crops, and rely on the "world market" for food, in case domestic production was insufficient. Within two years, the nation suffered its first famine.