

Here Cows Burning, There Children Starving

by Rosa Tennenbaum

The beef market in the European Union (EU) has collapsed. Even Agriculture Commissioner Franz Fischler speaks of a “total breakdown” of the market, due to European consumers’ hysteria over the outbreak of BSE (“Mad Cow” disease), even before the eruption of hoof-and-mouth disease in Britain. Beef cattle, and older cows in particular, became unsellable, causing not only big financial difficulties for farmers, but also crowded stables.

The EU decided to slaughter 1.7 million older cows and burn them, because there would be no need for the meat they deliver. This plan caused many politicians to raise “ethical concerns.” German Consumer Protection Minister Renate Künast of the Green Party, in particular liked to talk in public about “morality” in this regard, but finally agreed to the program, despite having “ethical remorse” over it.

So, orders from abroad for this slaughtered meat should be highly welcomed, one expects. And there came a letter from the North Korean government, asking Künast to send the meat of 200,000 out of the 400,000 cows that are to be culled in Germany in this “market cleansing program” of the EU, as food aid to this country, to ease the needs of 2 million people who are suffering under famine.

Almost the total North Korean population has been exposed to starvation for three years. This Winter, the situation got even much worse. The whole North and Northeast of Asia is experiencing extremely low temperatures, down to -40°C (-40°F). Already the past Winter was very cold, and in between, there was a severe drought. In Mongolia, for instance, cattle have already frozen, and according to the United Nations, a total of 6.6 million head of cattle is at risk.

In North Korea, after years of famine, there are no cattle left to speak of. It is a hungry people who need help, and the demand by their government gave politicians like Künast, who were tortured by “moral scruples”—at least in public—the chance to get rid of the unwanted cows and to do good deeds at the same time.

‘They Don’t Need Meat’

But Künast rejected the request. “North Koreans,” she stated, “do not need meat, but grain and rice.” In addition, such aid programs would “distort the internal market” of the country, and third, the transport would be “too difficult and too expensive.”

The EU’s “market cleansing program” had already caused a storm among farmers and in the general population. The meat should be frozen and stored and given away for free to people in need, is the general opinion, because it is best quality and it is tested for BSE. “*Hier brennen Rinder, dort hungern Kinder, das kann’s nicht sein!*” (“Here cows are burning, there children are starving, that must not be!”) was one of the slogans farmers carried in their major demonstrations against this insane agriculture policy during the past weeks. On top of this came Künast’s blatant and arrogant neglect, which provoked a lot of harsh criticism. The head of the aid organization “Cap Anamur,” Rupert Neudeck, ridiculed the minister. “After years of hunger, there is no internal market to speak of in North Korea,” he told the daily *Die Welt*, “so, aid programs cannot disrupt any.” On the contrary, aid programs that are well planned and done in cooperation with the government could help to rebuild this country. “It is like with the raisin bombers,” he reminded people, “they also ‘disrupted the internal market,’ then, but did a lot of good to the population.” (The famous “raisin bombers,” as Germans called them, were the American airplanes that flew into Berlin during the 1948 Soviet blockade, bringing everything the population needed.) Neudeck proposed to call the meat transport “beef bombers for North Korea.”

Deutsche Welthungerhilfe (German World Hunger Aid), the biggest German aid organization, was also shocked at Künast’s decision. Together with Cap Anamur, it has been working in North Korea since the beginning of the famine crisis. They know the country and its needs from within, and are ideal partners to work on such programs. Both organizations appealed to the minister to rethink her decision, and even offered to help finance shipping the meat and to distribute it through their networks.

At last report, Künast has declared herself willing to talk with North Korea about their requested beef aid. It had to guarantee that the meat would reach the population in need, and not the army, she said, trying to not lose more of her “moral” face while still insisting, that “rice, corn, and pulses would be the appropriate food to help the people in North Korea.”

Other countries, which asked the EC bureaucrats in Brussels for some of the unwanted beef before it is burned, got the very same answer. The Serbian government, for instance, asked for beef to be included in the current aid program for South Serbia. This demand was turned down as well, with the stereotypical answer, that shipment would be “too difficult and too expensive. . . . We discussed the demand and rejected it, because it is not practical,” the EC spokesman said. And “such considerations had no role to play” when the Commission planned the annihilation of 1.7 million cows. “Such considerations” to not just kill and burn, but to at least do some good in this terrible crisis, seem to be completely unreasonable for Western politicians, nowadays. There is only one exception: Moscow’s Mayor asked Bavaria to sell 100,000 tons of beef, and Bavaria promised to deliver.