

Editorial

Merry Christmas?

Every day sitting in front of our television screens, we see more visions of horror. Atrocities occur in Bosnia which can only remind us of Hitler's Germany or Stalin's Soviet regime, and no one intervenes. Still worse, the British and American governments are quietly supporting the Serbians, just as, in the past, Averell Harriman's friends in Britain and the United States conspired to bring Hitler to power and maintain him there against opposition within Germany.

Now we see a U.S. military force deployed to Somalia, whose purpose, we are assured, is to keep the peace there so that food can be supplied to its miserably hungry population. Can we credit the Bush administration with humanitarian motives? Unlikely. The administration and its political allies do not even hide their purpose: to place Somalia under a United Nations trusteeship. This is a foot in the door for a new era of colonial governance modeled upon the mandate system of the League of Nations.

The truth is that Somalia has been reduced to its present condition of ungovernability and starvation because of the direct intervention of those same forces who now propose to "rescue" it. The civil war there resulted in the ouster of Somalia's 20-year President, Siad Barre, in January 1991. This occurred after the U.S. government cut off all aid to Somalia, on the pretext that Barre was a dictator who violated human rights.

The Soviets were also involved in creating the unnatural disaster which now confronts Somalia. From July 1977 until spring 1978, they supported the Ethiopians who were at war with Somalia. The devastation caused by that war was never repaired, because of the International Monetary Fund austerity conditions imposed on the whole of the Horn of Africa. Funds for reconstruction or expansion of basic infrastructure were denied.

Nevertheless, despite the undoubted cynicism with which President Bush is acting, we must take the military intervention by the United States into Somalia as

a great opportunity to turn the situation around, not only for Somalia but for all of Africa. What is needed is the application, not of military force per se, but of classical military logistics, so that, at the least, 2 million metric tons of food can be delivered to the people of Somalia. This food must be brought to the people where they live, not dumped in camps. It is intolerable that already-starving men, women, and children should be forced to make long treks which can only become death marches.

Logistical help should be given for millions of Somali refugees to return to their homes. Roads, bridges, water supply, and housing must be provided to aid millions of displaced Somalis in reestablishing or supporting the local village structures. The kind of "military" deployment needed in Somalia is that represented by the capabilities of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Seeds, fertilizer, and farm implements must be delivered. And there must be immediate suspension of all payments on foreign debt to the International Monetary Fund or any other debt collection agency.

Somalia must become a model for how all refugees, all displaced persons, and all victims of war and the shock therapy policies of the IMF must be treated.

Christmas too often becomes a holiday in which the celebration of the meaning of the birth of Christ is lost. By organizing a worldwide mass mobilization to bring a genuine aid program to Africa, we can genuinely affirm Christ's birth by committing ourselves to ensure the right of every child to hope.

What more joyful time than Christmas! Even in these terrible times this can be so, if we unite with our families and friends to truly celebrate the birth of Christ. If we celebrate the Child of love, Who is come to liberate mankind from the bonds of slavery, by celebrating that quality which makes of each and every one of us a sacred being, made in the image and likeness of God the Creator, each child, each man, each woman, is a precious, unique being, whom we must cherish as we cherish those bound to us in love.