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CRISIS IN THE ETHIOPIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

Beware of the Coming Storm

Our religious leaders have continued "to serve God" under police escort. The police force is not yet through with keeping law and order in the secular world. However, religious leaders have entrusted the police with the responsibility to "keep law and

order" in the spiritual domain. Religious leaders should have taken the responsibility to stabilize and comfort the faithful. But that "responsibility" has been taken over by the Police Commission of Region 14. Clubbing and imprisoning believers would only

worsen the situation. Such acts would not remedy the deadlock. It is a matter of time before the storm breaks loose. (AGERE, January 24/97)



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GRAPECA

Groupe de Recherche et d' Action pour la paix en Ethiopie
et dans la Corne de l' Afrique.

Research and Action Group for Peace in Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa.

RAGPEHA

repeatedly demonstrated by Khartoum's handover to Ethiopia of anti-government elements operating from its soil» now vows to support Ethiopian opposition forces. In a recent interview with the New York times, (24/12) he threatened to «take the flames of war to Ethiopia and Eritrea unless the US renounces its attempts to overthrow the Sudanese government with the connivance and collaboration of neighbouring countries».

The situation in the east is no less alarming. The call for «Jihad» against Ethiopia made by the fundamentalist group Al Ittihad is now being openly supported by Sudan as well as by «an increasing number of Somalians». According to the Amharic independent weekly TIKURET (06/01) «Two important Somalian faction leaders, Hussein Aideed and Somali National Army leader Mohammed Ali Abdi, as well as youth and elder leaders are said to

have positively responded to the call».

Meles Zenawi's unwarranted military and political posturing against neighbouring countries may help him poise as «a front line fighter» against fundamentalism and enable him to draw more support from the Americans. But he is definitely playing with fire. With a new and «more favourable» geopolitical situation, Ethiopian opposition forces will surely be encouraged to launch and/or intensify armed struggle against his ethno-military dictatorship.

Unless the international community steps up efforts to defuse the crisis, we fear that all the ingredients are present for the entire region to move back to square one: to the terrible dictatorial regimes of the '80S which «externalized» their internal crises by supporting dissident armies against their neighbours.

FOCUS

THE REVOLUTIONARY DEMOCRATIC «PRIVATE» SECTOR

The ethno-military regime now taking root in Ethiopia is not interested exclusively in political control which TPLF has arrogated to itself by virtue of the Stalinist constitution imposed on our people. In the economic domain the organization did not stop at decreeing State ownership of land in the predominantly agrarian society. After having «accepted» the principle of a market economy, the Front is now consolidating its hold on the country's economy through its own «private companies».

This strategy was clearly outlined in the secret TPLF document we published in the last issue of Addis Digest:

«State control of the economy which was approved by the First EPRDF congress is no longer acceptable in current global economic thinking - imperialism and the comprador bourgeoisie are against it. Therefore various reliable Revolutionary Democratic associations, organizations and individuals should take over the role of the State and invest. The State should use fiscal instruments to encourage growth of

these forces and destroy those that are not in line with the goals of Revolutionary Democracy. We will reduce or write off taxes due from those who support us and pile up the tax burden of those who do not support us.»

This policy having been pursued relentlessly over the last five years, Ethiopia today is on the verge of being controlled by «one giant, military, political and ethnic organization, TPLF Inc.» Summarizing the results of a thorough study of the Ethiopian economy under TPLF, the independent monthly «ETHIOPIAN REGISTER» noted:

«TPLF has almost monopolized key sectors of the Ethiopian economy from retail business in the Piazza to wholesale distribution throughout Ethiopia, from stone quarrying in Tigray to gold mining in Lega Dadi, from trucking to air transport, from smuggling to manufacturing. Indeed, according to international financial institutions, the TPLF controls or owns more than 80% of Ethiopia's economy. If events unfold as the TPLF hopes they will, the Ethiopian economy will be controlled by one giant, military, political and ethnic organization: TPLF Inc. Such an unprecedented degree of control by a political, military, ethnic organization has obvious, ominous political

implications to which opposition political parties must pay attention in formulating an effective emancipatory common front.»

TPLF's drive to control Ethiopia's economy is so steady a process that not a single month goes by without a report in the government or the independent press on the «incorporation» of party-controlled monopolies. In December 1996 and January 1997 for example, the independent press reported the following:

PARTY CONTROLLED CONGLOMERATE

According to the independent Amharic weekly TOMAR (December 4) «A media and publishing giant MEGA-NET has just been incorporated. The corporation, an agglomerate of existing TPLF or TPLF-controlled enterprises has a paid-up capital of 20 million birr. It is feared that the emergence of a corporation of this magnitude controlled by the ruling party will constitute unfair business competition with

the private sector. It might be hard for private business to compete for contracts with federal and state agencies. The new corporation is already believed to have signed a contract to publish all school text books for Ethiopian schools. TPLF executive committee member Alemseged is the Chairman of the Board of the Mega-Net Corporation.»

SECOND LARGEST BANK IN THE MAKING

The independent weekly IT'OP (January 1, 1997) reported: «The Tigray Development agency (TDA) will soon set up a new private bank to be known as WOGAGAN (dawn). It is widely expected that veteran TPLF leader Sebehat Negga will be the senior boss of the new bank. Like all other commercial enterprises under the umbrella of TDA, the shareholders of the new bank are expected to be almost entirely Tigreans. The bank is expected to be the largest private bank in the country, second only to the Commercial Bank of Ethiopia.»

SOME TPLF - OWNED COMPANIES

No.	Name of Enterprise	Capital*	Activity
1.	Guna Trade House	10	Import/export wholesale trade
2.	Sur Construction	100	Construction
3.	Meskerem Investment	25	Agriculture, Trade, Construction, Mining
4.	Tesfa Livestock Development	20	Livestock fattening for market supply
5.	Addis Consultancy House	1	Consultant project study
6.	Africa Insurance	15	General Insurance
7.	Burh Chemical	15	Manufacture of chemicals
8.	Fana Democracy Publishing	0.6	Publishers
9.	Trans-Ethiopia	100	Transport
10.	Hiwot mechanization	25	Cash crops, agricultural machinery
11.	Al-media Textiles	180	Manufacture of textile materials
12.	Sheba Tannery	40	Processing hides for domestic market
13.	Selam Busline	1	Bus services
14.	Desalegne Veterinary	5	Importing and selling veterinary drugs
15.	Ambassed Business	1.5	Distribution of agricultural products
16.	Mesfin Industrial Engineering	10	Industrial engineering
17.	Bruh Chemical	20	Chemical products
18.	Mesebo Building Materials	240	Manufacturing building materials
19.	Tesfa Animal Resources dev.	200	Animal resources development
20.	Ethio Rental House	72	Building, renting houses
21.	Zelleke agr. mechanization	270	Agricultural production and mechanization

TOTAL

1,341.1

* in millions of birr

These are but two of the latest major business concerns established by TPLF. An «investigative report» published by the weekly TOBBIA (25 December 1996) mainly based on a study entitled «The emerging monopolies of TPLF» published in the «Ethiopian Register» (July and August 1996) and another «State document entitled «Ethiopian Non-governmental businesses»» have clearly shown that «monopolies aimed at consolidating the ruling party are in the process of being formed».

Although EPRDF's own law prohibits political organizations from engaging in any business, the TOBBIA study reveals that TPLF had established 24 major companies with a total capital of 1.7 billion birr. Two minor partners in the EPRDF coalition, the Amhara National Democratic Movement (ANDM) and the Oromo People's Democratic Organization (OPDO) are said to have established a number of enterprises of their own with capital estimated at 92.5 million birr and 55.5 million birr respectively. As junior partners in the coalition, ANDM and OPDO, which claim to «represent» the Amara and Oromo ethnic groups (together accounting for 57% of Ethiopia's population) are allowed to operate within their respective territories only i.e. in Amaharaland and Oromya, while TPLF's business concerns are operative all over the country and even beyond. As shown in the table below, these activities cover almost all major fields of the country's economy.

REVOLUTIONARY DEMOCRATIC BUSINESSMEN

Politburo members of the Marxist-Leninist League of Tigray (MLLT), the inner core of TPLF, and other leading members of the Front run these «private companies» as prominent shareholders, board chairmen or managers. Most notorious among these «revolutionary democratic businessmen» are:

1. Ato Sebehat Nega: Veteran TPLF leader and Politburo member of MLLT. Board chairman of Trans Ethiopia.

2. Ato Yemane Kidane: Founding member of TPLF and MLLT, member of the central committee of

both organizations, former top official of REST. Now board chairman of Hiwot Agricultural Mechanization and Tesfa Animal Resources Development.

3. Ato Baadi Zemmo: CC member of TPLF, Board chairman of Messob Construction Materials, Brah Chemicals and Almeda Textiles.

4. Ato Tsegaye Tamyalew: Member of TPLF, prominent shareholder of Guna Trading House and Trans Ethiopia.

5. Ato Solomon Tesfaye: TPLF CC member and member of the Council of People's Representative (the federal parliament) prominent shareholder of Addis Consultancy House.

6. Ato Tekalign Kahssay: Member of TPLF and of the Legal Affairs Commission of the Council of People's Representatives, prominent shareholder of Fana Democracy Plc.

7. Ato Worede Gessesse: Member of TPLF and of the Communication and Cultural Affairs Committee of the House of the People's Representatives and manager of Meskerem Investment SC.

8. W/O (Ms.) Kidisan Nega: A MLLT member and chairperson of Tigray Women's Association. Prominent Shareholder of Hiwot Agricultural Mechanization SC.

9. Ato Solomon Tesfaye: CC member of MLLT, shareholder of Addis Consultancy PLC

10. Ato Araya Zerihun: TPLF CC member and Director of Tigray Development Agency (TDA) which owns 99.6% of the shares of the Selam Bus Line SC.

11. Ato Aseffa Mamo: Head of TPLF's Information Center and manager of Shala Advertising Enterprise.

According to the TOBBIA study, «These enterprises are using various devices to kick the business community out of the market. Since the ruling party controls the political situation and the State apparatus, nepotism and partiality are being practiced by the government. In the process, those businessmen who have neither loyalty to nor connections with the ruling party are being deliberately excluded. In due course,

there is a possibility that the business community could be marginalized and pushed out of the competitive market and the country's economy could be under total control of the ruling party.»

FINANCIAL SOURCES

How did TPLF accumulate the capital required for these enterprises? TOBBIA claims TPLF started accumulating wealth «through illegal means» while the organization was conducting the «liberation struggle».

TPLF's financial resources were not limited to contributions in kind (goats, sheep, chickens and eggs, etc.) imposed on the people in the areas it controlled. Banking on the famine and misery of refugees, the organization, through its «humanitarian branch» the Relief Society of Tigray (REST) used to raise considerable resources both in kind and cash «to alleviate the plight of famine victims and the displaced». The study quotes Ato Gebre Medehin Araya, former treasurer of TPLF and now a staunch opponent of the Front) who disclosed how he persuaded some western NGOs to buy «surplus» grain from certain regions of Tigray for distribution in other areas where there was a shortage. Then the grain that had earlier been donated by the West was brought as «surplus», stored at convenient locations and sold to unsuspecting representatives of these NGOs!

TOBBIA also claims that «The TPLF had imposed taxes on people living in the areas it liberated». In the name of war booty, it confiscated buses, heavy duty trucks, private vehicles and construction equipment. This booty has not been returned to the government nor to the individual owners after TPLF established a government. The buses, vehicles and construction equipment have served as initial capital to establish the transport and construction companies belonging to the Front.

When TPLF took power it plundered state property including the assets of the Workers Party of Ethiopia, the Revolutionary Ethiopia Women's Association (REWA), Peasant Associations and Revolutionary Ethiopia Youth Association (REYA). All this has been plundered and secretly transported to TPLF's

base area: Tigray.»

The ETHIOPIAN REGISTER study also claims that one important source of wealth for the organization was «TPLF-organized smuggling», «trading in precious religious relics from ancient churches», etc.

PLUNDERING THE NATIONAL TREASURY

According to many observers this is a very common practice. Millions of public money have been transferred to TPLF's coffers. One such instance disclosed by the study is the transfer of more than 4 million Birr from the 1992/93 budget of the ministry of health on the direct orders of former Prime Minister Tamerat Layne. According to ETHIOPIAN REGISTER, «The justification given by Tamerat Layne for demanding "reimbursement" was that EPRDF had distributed medicine to the health departments of Tigray, Gonder and Wollo worth that amount when it took control of these regions before May 1991.» The magazine also quotes Dr. Adanetch Kidane Mariam, the Minister of Health who told a reporter of the Amharic monthly TOBBIA (8/1985 E.C.) that TPLF had sold medicine worth 7 million birr to the Ministry of Health during the previous budget year!

GOVERNMENTAL NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

The «relief» and «development» associations set up by TPLF and almost all its surrogate organizations are important sources of financial and material resources, both from local and foreign sources. Most prominent among these «NGOs» are of course the Relief Society of Tigray (REST) and Tigray Development Association (TDA) which are turning into huge business concerns. In 1995, these two organizations obtained the right to directly negotiate and sign bilateral agreements with the international donor agencies and thus became recipients of aid in foreign currencies. USAID also granted them a «certificate of registration» as direct recipients of funds from the American government.

The «relief» and «development» organizations established by the surrogate organizations do not

enjoy these privileges and have to do with «fund raising» from local sources in their respective regions.

At the same time, NGOs that are independent or close to political organizations unaffiliated with the TPLF have been banned. In 1994, All Amhara People's organization (AAPO) established its own relief association. The relief and rehabilitation commission refused to grant permission on the ground that «any aid agency must be free from political affiliation»! The authorities in the Oromo region ordered the veteran Oromo Relief Organization (ORA) to suspend its activities and even arrested some of its relief workers claiming that this organization was close to the Oromo Liberation Front...

DANGEROUS SCENARIO

TPLF's political and military hold is steadily being consolidated by the creation of an economic might based on ethnicity. Although the Tigrean people are only pawns in this dangerous political gamble, a new group of ethnic Tigreans (including Tigreans from Eritrea) is engaged in a systematic pillage of the country's resources. The most outrageous aspect of this trend is that the ethnocentric group of «overnight

millionaires» and their supporters are playing with fire by using the extremely sensitive issue of ethnicity as an instrument of political power and economic might. The economic privileges ostensibly enjoyed by the emerging Tigrean elite, which are marginalizing most economic agents from all other ethnic groups, are inducing many in our country into believing that TPLF's dictatorship is rule «by Tigreans for Tigreans». TPLF's Machiavellian policy is to perpetuate and consolidate its rule by playing the Tigrean people against the rest of the country.

This is what makes the ethnic problem the most sensitive issue in Ethiopian politics. TPLF's policy has already led to a situation where passion is fast taking the upper hand in the minds of millions of the country's population. The ingredients of a dangerous scenario are already present: democratic forces - both Tigreans and non-Tigreans, could be overwhelmed by narrow ethno-nationalists from all ethnic groups thriving on hatred. The outcome would be a confused and generalized ethnic war.

We believe that the most urgent task of the country's democrats, and of foreign friends of our people, is to address this issue before passions unleash and turn the country into another Rwanda.

POLITICS

SERIOUS RIFT IN THE ETHIOPIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

As opposition to the TPLF appointed Patriarch of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC) gathers momentum and becomes increasingly organized, the crisis in the church reached alarming proportions during the month of January 1997.

Murder in the church

Thursday, 9 January: Bahtawi (Hermit) Fekade Selassie, a prominent member of the dissident group known by the name of MAHEBERE HAWARYA (apostolic union) was shot dead in the presence of the Patriarch himself at the annual commemoration day of St. Stefanos the martyr. On that day, worshippers had

gathered early in the morning to observe the day at St. Stefanos church in Addis Abeba. Present at the occasion were his Holiness Abune Paulos, Patriarch of the EOC, other church dignitaries and foreign guests. While a bishop was preparing to deliver the day's sermon, he was interrupted by a group of monks belonging to the MAHEBERE HAWARYA, asking for a response to their 21 point petition submitted to the church in December.

Who killed the Bahtawi?

Behetawi Fekade Selassie moved forward to deliver a copy of the petition to the Patriarch. He was shot and died instantly. TPLF's official version disclosed that the same evening claims the hermit «who carried a sword and disturbed the peace» was killed «by an