

- Voter registration exceeded the levels of the 1994 constituent assembly election. This seemed to be the result of effective political organisation by the EPRDF, especially in rural areas.
- Overall voter interest was low, especially in urban areas and uncontested constituencies;

The May 1995 Ethiopian election had large numbers of candidates, large numbers of voters, a generally effective administration, and was conducted in a peaceful manner. Elections, however, are about choice. For the reasons stated in the report, the ability of the Ethiopian people to use the ballot effectively to choose their leaders is still limited. Until alternative political organisations participate, however, such choices will remain limited.

## POLITICS

### US APPLAUDS ELECTIONS

Following is the text of the news release by US embassy 23 June 1995

The American Embassy in Addis Abeba congratulates the people of Ethiopia and the TGE as they complete the series of elections that has led to establishment of a new constitution and a new government. The recent elections are only one among many discrete events in the long-term evolution of the democratic process that must continue in Ethiopia.

The American Embassy joined with representatives of other countries and non-governmental groups on May 7 and June 18 in observing the most recent elections. As has been the case in other newly democratizing countries, some problems were encountered. Charges of harassment and other irregularities have been brought to the attention of the National Election Board. However we concur with the finding of one participating opposition party that these irregularities «were not of a pattern and of a magnitude to have affected the outcome of the elections». In our judgment, the elections were conducted in a manner that was, on the whole, free and fair.

The Embassy regrets that some Ethiopian political organizations rejected numerous efforts, including those of the U.S. Congressional Task Force on Ethiopia, to encourage their participation. The unilateral decision by some parties to boycott does not invalidate the election exercise. The elections represent an important milestone along Ethiopia's road to greater democracy. U.S. policy is, and will remain to encourage all Ethiopians to engage in constructive and peaceful dialogue, and we will condemn the efforts of those groups who continue to seek political advantage through the use of violence.

### WHY IS «ANTI-TIGRAY PASSION» ON THE RISE?

Although they are not yet sure whether it would work or not, many Westerners seem to agree that by introducing the «secession clause» in the new constitution which divides the country into 9 ethnically distinct regions, Meles had «launched a radical experiment in democracy» which it is said could serve as model for other ethnically torn nations in Africa. Opposition to Melese's radical experiment in «democracy» is simply dismissed as «chauvinist opposition»

by Amharas who have «lost their privileged position in society and are angry about it».

This is simplistic because it does not explain why the Oromos are waging armed struggle against what they call the Tigrean government, neither does it enlighten us on the reasons why the southern Ethiopian People's Administrative region holds the country's record in terms of the number of people detained without charge for political reasons.

As Westerners are «waiting to see if it works» and Africans concerned over what some diplomats in Ethiopia call the «ethnic time bomb» now poised to draw Ethiopia slowly and steadily into undescrivable chaos and bloodshed, Ethiopians of all ethnic backgrounds are living with the uncomfortable feeling of someone sitting on top of a volcano.

Although the 31st summit of the OAU held in Addis Abeba from 26 to 28 June was overshadowed by the attempt on the life of Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak, the independent press in the country tried to use this opportunity to draw the attention of Africa's heads of state to the dangers of ethnicity not only to Ethiopia but also to the entire continent.

In an article entitled «African leaders, Save us!» the weekly **Genanaw** said «Your host country which had once played a significant role in the fight for the freedom and dignity of the African people ... is now up against itself. We have become so deeply inward-looking that ethnic and regional tensions and passions have clouded our reasons. We are yearning for peaceful life free from ethnic animosity and conflict. We plead with African leaders who have emancipated themselves from ethnic bigotry to save this country».

Another weekly, **Addis Tribune**, wrote that the Pan Africanist's passionate cry «Africa must unite»! had now become «hopelessly out of tune» with the continent fast retreating «into tribalism of the virulently ethnocentric strain». Criticizing the non-inclusion of this burning issue in the agenda of the Summit, **Addis Tribune** called on African leaders to consider passing a resolution to counter these dangerous ethnocentric tendencies observed in several countries including Ethiopia.

Why this «cri d'alarme» of Ethiopia's free press? This is not because Meles' «bold experiment in Democracy» is brining

equality to Ethiopia's ethnic groups but on the contrary because a small group of «ethno-nationalists» who used ethnic animosity to secure power are now trying to use the Tigrean people as a means of consolidation of their totalitarian hold on the country.

This deliberate drift towards ethnic domination and away from equality of all the peoples of Ethiopia is the main cause of rising ethnic hatred in the country and the source of the eminent danger facing our people. To illustrate more concretely the reasons of «ethnic hatred» now fast developing in the country we asked our correspondent in Addis Abeba to go through the independent papers in the country and send us a report on the factors that are generating «anti-Tigray passion». The following is a sample of what he found in the June 1995 editions of the independent press:

**- A TIGREAN AT THE HEAD OF OROMIYA:** (ITJOP 28 June 1995) The EPRDF government is making sure that power remains in the hands of the Tigreans. The replacement of the outgoing Oromiya president Hasan Ali by hitherto interior minister Kumsa Demeqsa is in line with this policy. It is notorious that Kumsa, born and bred in Illubbor zone of Oromiya, is the son of a Tigrean settler. Many childhood friends of «Kumsa» recall that his real name was Taye Teklehaimanot (a typical Tigrean/Amhara name) before he took up his typically Oromo name. The same suspicion concerning Tigrean attempts at hegemony surrounds Abate Kishos' retention as head of the Southern Ethiopia People's Administrative Region; ITOP claims that real power in the region rests in the hands of a certain Belay Bitew «a Tigrean and a high ranking cadre of Tigray People's Liberation Front».

#### **HUMERA: ANOTHER NOGORRO KARABAH?**

(Ethiopian Tribune June 16/ letter to the editors): I surely believe history will avenge the annexation of Humera by Meles and friends. Will Tigray stand against the forces of Gondar who will never sleep when their land is taken from them? Will TPLF afford to bring a situation of Nogomo Karabah and Armenia in the former Soviet Union to its doorsteps? No matter how long it takes, Humer will not be part of Tigray, and Gondar will not be partitioned for Tigray to have access to the Sudan. This is an illegal act by an illegal government. It will not stand the test of time.

#### **NEPOTISM IN THE CHURCH** (ITOP June 14):

Administrative posts in the Theological College of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church are being filled exclusively by Tigreans. One of the Administrators is the Patriarch's nephew, himself a Tigrean. Non-Tigreans are systematically forced into leaving the college. The headquarters of the Ethiopian Orthodox church are also said to be staffed mainly by Tigreans.

#### **ETHNIC AFFILIATION OR INTELLECTUAL ACHIEVEMENT?** (BEZA June 13)

The original Ethiopian Teachers association headed by Dr; Taye Wolde Semayat criticized the education policy recently unveiled by the government. ETA was particularly critical of the standard by which teachers are hired. It said they were accepted more for their ethnic affiliation than for their intellectual achievements.

**- DISPROPORTIONATE SHARE OF RESOURCES:** (Tobia June 22): A report to the recently held regional Council of Tigray indicated that the population of the region is around 4 million including people in four Woredas (districts) which were recently annexed from Gondar and Wollo regions. Compare this with the population of the Oromo, Amhara and Southern Ethiopia Peoples Administrative Region: The population of each of these regions is estimated to be between 15 and 20 million. Despite the disparity in terms of population:

1. The present and probably future allocation of civil servant jobs in the structure of the federal government;
2. The present/future ethnic composition of the country's defense forces;
3. The present/future allocation of the country's economic resources among its regions is believed to be highly skewed in favour of Tigray region.

A disproportionate share of political and economic power held by one minority ethnic group cannot lead to political, economic and administrative justice. Instead, such a scenario is bound to lead to greater misunderstanding and discord.

#### **80% OF THE TIGRAY REGION BUDGET "EXPECTED" FROM OUTSIDE TIGRAY:**

(Ethiopia radio 19 June): The ongoing conference of the new Council of Tigray has approved a 328.5 million birr budget for the 1988 Ethiopian calendar (1995-96) fiscal year. The report on the budget indicated that 62 million birr of the annual budget would be secured from various revenue sources in the region, while the balance is expected from the central government and foreign sources.

#### **A CALL AGAINST «ANTI-TIGREAN PASSION»** (Dagmawi, June 20)

Although it remains to be seen whether they will grow into a considerable Tigrean force capable of countering TPLF's hold on the people, Tigrean democrats and intellectuals are growing more and more conscious of this rising tide of anti-Tigrean sentiments in the country. In addition to the already existing Tigrean groups opposing Mlese's ethnocentric policies (Tigray Tigrigny Ethiopia and the Tigray National Alliance for Democracy recently created by former TPLF leader Aregawi Berehe) one independent paper has reported the setting up of another anti-TPLF Tigrean organization.

An American based organization «the Tigrean Salvation Front» is reported to have issued a call to all Tigreans to fight the Tigrean led order now in the making. The call is highly critical of the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) which it accuses of seeking to weaken Ethiopia, while it, in collaboration with EPRDF, reconstructs and develops Eritrea with Ethiopian resources. The statement urged Ethiopians not to link Tigreans with the TPLF and to refrain from anti-Tigrean passion.

**OROMIYA AND FINFINNE:** Mebreq (22 June 1995): Quoting an official announcement from the outgoing Council of Representatives Mebreq disclosed that the recent decision of the newly elected Oromiya Council, designating Addis Abeba as the capital of Oromiya was rejected by the

incumbent government as a «premature, inept and parochial decision». It noted that the Oromiya council's decision was rejected because it was made «irresponsibly and without considering the historical, concrete and actual status of Addis Abeba which as the capital of Ethiopia has a separate legal status and is a cosmopolitan city, home to Ethiopians of all regions, languages and religious backgrounds and international organisations and foreign nationals.»

After its bid was rejected by the TGE, the Oromiya Council reversed its decision and announced that it was to build a new capital at a cite 175 km from Addis Abeba. Seife Nebelbal (23 June) described this move as a conspiracy against history and the Oromo people which, the paper said, will make the Addis Abeba (Finfinne) the «vatican of Oromiya».

#### **HOW IS IT POSSIBLE?**

EPRDF's National Electoral Board (NEB) announced on May 30 the results of the May 7 elections. As expected, they offer no surprises as the EPRDF is declared the winner with 90% of the votes cast. Among the numerous irregularities that are now surfacing, one has been singled out and has become the subject of mirth and jokes in Addis Abeba.

According to the electoral law, independent candidates are required to collect 1000 endorsement signatures, twice that required of party candidates. Simple logic would suggest that individual candidates who qualified to run for office after having produced at least 1000 signatures should get at least the votes of those who endorsed them in the first place. But in many constituencies candidates got less than 1000 votes. For example, the candidate who «challenged» Meles in Adwa got only 137 votes against 27,000 for Meles and the «independent» candidate who ran against the Prime Minister Tamerat Layne in Gondar region fared no better as he only got 243 votes as against 37,431 to Tamirat. «How is this possible?» This is the question many are asking in Addis Abeba and elsewhere. Asked to comment, Meles' challenger, is reported to have replied by a simple «No comment for the time being!».

#### **THE OPPOSITION: PURSUING DIFFERENT STRATEGIES**

While different armed opposition organizations (OLF, ONLF, IFLO, KEFAGN Patriotic Front, etc.) vow to continue the armed struggle against the «Tigrean government», the rest of the opposition is showing growing signs of division on the issue of what strategy to follow to bring an end to EPRDF's one party rule.

Are these divisions based on politics and ideology? One article in the Ethiopian Tribune (June 16) claimed they are. According to the author, Mr. Awlatche Woube, «the MEDHIN Party, the All Amhara People's Organisation (AAPO), the KEFAGN Patriotic Front (KPF) and even the MOA ANBESSA (Monarchist) along with their supporters

and sympathisers in the broad spectrum of Ethiopian politics, make the core of what might be called the right wing», while the «major players in the Council of Alternative Forces for Peace and Democracy in Ethiopia (CAFPDE) including the Southern Ethiopian Peoples Democratic Coalition (SEPDC) and the Coalition of Ethiopian Democratic Forces (COEDF) and their supporters best represent what might be called the democratic left».

Many agree this notion of right and left continues to divide the country's political forces but almost all political groups agree (at least in their official pronouncements) that it is somewhat irrelevant to the country's present situation. They all say that EPRDF/TPLF is an «irremediably ethnocentric» group and that irrespective of political and ideological differences all must come together and bring this government down before TPLF/EPRDF destroys the country. The question is how to do this.

#### **CAFPDE's call for a pre-emptive peace conference**

CAFPDE, an umbrella organisation of 34 political parties and civic organisations created in December 1993 at the Peace and reconciliation Conference held in Addis Abeba, and which operates inside the country, maintains that the possibility of pursuing a peaceful struggle is not completely blocked and repeatedly pledged to continue on this path in spite of pressure from the radical opposition, scepticism of growing sections of Ethiopian society, repression and the feeling of abandonment by the international community.

At the same time, CAFPD leaders are convinced that the net result of the transition fiasco would be the escalation of armed conflicts. CAFPD's April manifesto «For a new democratic beginning» clearly stated that not only will the struggle continue and intensify but also admitted that the coming struggle will inevitably take different forms of struggle «depending on each organisation's possibilities and assessment of the situation in the country».

The objective of the CAFPD manifesto seems in fact not only to reassert the organisation's continued commitment to the peaceful path of struggle. By calling on all democrats in the country to join forces in a common struggle for the realisation of free elections and a democratic constitution, CAFPD tries to avoid «the tragic Somali episode (which) could partly be explained by the prevalence of confusion and division that overwhelmed the alleged forces of change in that country. Ethiopia's democratic forces should draw adequate lessons from the mishaps that have engulfed our neighbours».

It is in line with this concern to «save the country and the people from probable chaos and anarchy which are fuelled by irresponsible rulers and the enemies of Ethiopia» that CAFPD has launched a new initiative for a pre-emptive peace conference on Ethiopia. At the end of May, CAFPD sent a letter to all political parties (including EPRDF) inside as well as outside the country, requesting them to give a positive reply to this call for an all-party conference.

### A need for «the language of force»?

Although some major opposition organisations like COEDF, which had earlier launched its own call for a Peace conference, have supported CAFPDE's new initiative, many Ethiopians are sceptical about the success of such a conference. During the month of June, many private papers' headlines and editorials focused on the CAFPDE call. But not surprisingly, most of them doubted the possibility of such a conference even taking place. The weekly AIMERO reported on the rift now emerging among the country's opposition forces and some questioned whether those groups waging or advocating armed struggle would accept to participate in such a peace conference at this «early stage». The argument is that, for such a conference to bear fruit, EPRDF must first be «persuaded» to come to the negotiations table and that this can be done only by resorting to the «only language it understands». It is now becoming clear that the prevailing political situation is more than ever favourable to those «uncompromising» forces who claim that the use of force is the only option left to the peoples of Ethiopia to achieve peace and democracy. Although many Ethiopians disapprove the unwarranted attacks on CAFPED, which they say is struggling against tremendous odds to explore the peaceful path hitherto unknown in Ethiopian politics, it cannot be denied that these tenants of armed struggle have considerable support in the country.

One such group, advocating an «uncompromising struggle» against the «ethnocentric Tigrean minority dictatorship» is the «Coordinating Committee of Ethiopian Unity Forces» whose creation was reported in our April issue and which has now turned into a full-fledged organisation called the Alliance for Democracy and National Unity (ADNUE). In a three page statement, ADNUE accused TPLF of deliberately steering Ethiopia toward anarchy, civil strife and

fragmentation and vowed to wage an uncompromising struggle against it.

The Alliance, which clearly intends to duplicate the role of CAFPDE, has as one of its objectives the bringing together of all Ethiopia's opposition parties. In sharp contrast to CAFPDE's call for continued dialogue with the government and the convening of an All-Party national conference, including EPRDF, the Alliance rejects any «participation in any political process of the TPLF/EPRDF as long as it is in power».

Although the need for armed struggle is not explicitly mentioned in the document, it is clear that rejecting dialogue and calling for an «all round struggle» show the group is not excluding the option of armed struggle. Lest some may entertain doubts about the Alliance's intentions, Colonel Goshyu Wolde, Chairman of the organisation MEDHIN, which is the backbone of the Alliance, is reported as saying in a recent BBC interview that EPRDF came to power through armed struggle and that it would not understand anything except the language of force. (BEZA, 14 June 1995).

So given the circumstances and the different strategies, it is extremely doubtful whether the call for an All-Party pre-emptive peace conference made by CAFPDE would ever get off the ground let alone succeed, as it will be boycotted both by the incumbent EPRDF and the radical opposition. We in GRAPECA believe, however, that the holding of such a conference, even in the absence of EPRDF and armed opposition groups, would contribute to the peace process in the country as it will allow peaceful democratic forces to come together and draw an alternative plan of action which takes into account the tremendous cultural, historical, psychological and diplomatic odds against peace in our country.

## HUMAN RIGHTS

**YOUNG JOURNALIST MURDERED:** Gizachew Mengistu, a young journalist working for the independent Addis Abeba weekly MOGAD, was murdered in cold blood on 5th June 1995 at 7:30 in the evening in the town of Debre Berhan by two covertly armed, unidentified, plain-clothed gunmen. According to the weekly MOGAD, which quoted eye-witnesses, the killers of the young man met him in a bar located in Kebele 08 of Debre Berhan and started shouting «You are the one who tipped off MOGAD on local events» and started firing at him.

In its tribute to the deceased reporter, MOGAD wrote that the high school graduate Gizatchew Mengistu, worked for the weekly as a correspondent stationed in Debre Berhan, and covered local events in Eastern Shoa zone with courage and accuracy.

The killers disappeared immediately and have not been apprehended so far by the pertinent local authorities. In a statement issued on June 11, the Ethiopian Free Journalist

Association (EFJA) condemned this «first murder case of a free press journalist» which it said «seems to have been committed to eliminate someone who accurately reported on local events».

### NEW WAVE OF ARRESTS OF JOURNALISTS:

According to reports from the Ethiopian Free Press Journalists Association (EFJA) a new wave of repression against its members has been underway since the first week of June 1995. The report says that this new campaign «has reached a new climax in the 4th week of this month, when a number of independent journalists were picked up from offices, printing houses and public places by plain-clothed policemen and placed in detention. Those arrested are: 1. Ato Taye Belachew (Editor in Chief of TOBIA) 2. Dereje Biru (Journal Tekwami) 3. Abiy Afework (Journal Tekwami) 4. Abinet Tamirat (Journal Dagmawi) 5. Daniel Dirsha (Kitab now defunct) 6. Girmayeneh Mammo (Ex-Editor in Chief of Tomar) 7. Solomon Gebre Amlak (Editor in chief MOGAD) 8. Sintayehu Biro (Editor in chief