

A BRIEF NOTE ON ME'ISONE

ME'ISONE, the All Ethiopia Socialist movement, was founded in august 1968 from among the advanced elements of the Ethiopian Students' Movement, which then was the most radical national opposition to the feudal tyranny of Emperor Haile Selassie.

As it's name clearly indicates, it's members both at the leadership and rank and file levels are drawn from all the nationalities of Ethiopia. It's immediate objectives are the destruction of feudal oppression and imperialist domination and the establishment of a democratic and independant Ethiopia.

In the dark days of the feudal tyranny, ME'ISONE struggled secretly and clandestinely for six years. The revolutionary movement of february 1974 being a spontaneous upsurge, and as such, having no clear leadership, ME'ISONE took it upon itself to give direction to the popular movement. Together with other democratic forces it struggled to assume it's vanguard role, specially by publishing it's underground organ " The Voice of the Masses." After very

intensive popular pressure brought about the deposition of the Emperor and the PMAC was created in september 1974, ME'ISONE adopted a position of " critical support " vis-à-vis the new gouvernement. It intensified it's struggle to implement it's programme: land to the tiller, Democratic rights, Equality of all nationalities, National independence etc....

In 1975, it played a very important role jointly with progressiv elements within the PMAC; and through the mobilisation of the popular masses, it made it possible the proclamation of the great revolutionary decrees that transformed the economic basis of the feudal order.

The following year, the growing unity and strength of armed counter-revolution made it urgently necessary for the progressive forces to set up their own unity and to accelerate their efforts to mobilize organize and arm the people. To face this challenge ME'ISONE called upon all democratic and patriotic forces to unite under the banner of a revolutionary programme. To this effect, the National Democratic Revolution Programme was prepared together with the progressives within the Derg. In april 1976 it



became the common platform for all Ethiopia's progressive and patriotic forces as well as a comprehensive guiding document of the revolution.

This comprehensive document which is close to the political programme of ME'ISONE itself, proclaimed the recognition of democratic liberties including the right to organize in different political parties as a matter of urgent necessity to the Ethiopian revolution. It discarded the military's chauvinistic policies followed in 1974 and 1975, and proclaimed the principle of the right to self-determination for all nationalities as the basis for the democratic unity of the peoples of Ethiopia. The country's foreign policy was to be based on the constant safeguard of the motherland's independence, on anti-imperialist solidarity and consistent non-alignment.

The military government accepting these and other provisions, ME'ISONE agreed to form an alliance with the Derg. At the same time, it made it clear both to the government and to the Ethiopian people that the alliance would hold as long, and only as long as the government would respect these provisions. Even if the alliance did not put an

end to our underground activities, many ME'ISONE members became ministers, government advisors, regional administrators and other high government officials. Another 850 members staffed the newly created Provisional Office for Mass Organizational Affairs and the YEKATIT 66 ( February 74 ) political school. This tactical alliance with the military government which enabled our organization to operate semi-legally and to play a key role in all the affairs of the revolution lasted for about 18 months.

At the end of this period the organization had to go back to full clandestinity since the military government betrayed the commitments it had formerly taken when the alliance was formed. In april 1977, it started a policy of alliance with the feudo-bourgeois bureaucracy which represented a mortal danger to the democratic organisations all over the country. The anti-democratic alliance refused to enact the democratic rights bill prepared by ME'ISONE as stipulated in the 1976 programme. Instead of respecting the rights of nationalities to self-determination, our country became the scene of a most vicious chavinistic repression. The Derg sold out the honour and sovereignty of the motherland



to the Soviet Union and it's allies.

In this context of treason, ME'ISONE was faced with a clear choice. Either we accepted this betrayal and went along with the military government, or we accepted the challenge and continued our struggle for democracy and the restoration of our country's national independence. Given Ethiopia's conditions, where no legal opposition is tolerated, the later choice meant that our members would have to leave their official functions and go back to full clandestinity. We made this honorable choice. On the 20th. of august 1977 all our ministers, high government officials and POMOA cadres were ordered to resigne and to go underground.

In spite of the overwhelming support given to this courageous decision, and because the anti-democratic forces were afraid of the implications of this vast popular support, the following months marked the beginning of the most ruthless repression in the history of our country. No organisation in Ethiopia had ever been subjected to anything near the terror unleashed against our organisation. During it's alliance with the military government

and specially between september 1976 and august 1977 hundreds of it's members and sympathizers had been assassinated in the streets of Addis Abeba and in the provinces by forced opposed to the revolution. When the Derg started it's betrayal and ME'ISONE refused to go along, it was again subjected to a most brutal repression. From august 1977 to the end of 1978 hundreds of our members were assassinated by " unknown " elements and summarily executed by the henchmen of the régime. More than 20.000 members and sympathizers were thrown into the over-crowded prisons of Ethiopia both in the capital and in all the regions.

Inspite of this repression, ME'ISONE has continued the struggle. Drawing the appropriate lessons from past experiance and errors, it has reorganized its forces so as to be able to fulfill its responsibilities under the new conditions. The blood of our hundreds of martyrs, the sufferings of thousands of our members and sympathizers still languishing in the Derg's prisons, the courage and steadfastness of those who continue the struggle under these hard conditions, have won to our organization the sympathy of the progressive and patriotic



elements of the Ethiopian society. In addition, the break up of the terrorist organisation EPRP and the total bankruptcy of the other organisations which continued their alliance with the regime after 1977 put great responsibilities on ME'ISONE which is now the oldest multi-nationality progressive organization on the country's political scene.

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The general background to the present situation as it has developed since mid-1977, is the temporary defeat of the national democratic revolution and the rising tide of resistance by the people determined to defend their hard won victories and to march forward on the path of the struggle for an independent and democratic Ethiopia.

The country's peasants oppose the dismanteling of the democratic mass organizations and the reinstatement of the anti democratic and chauvinistic bureaucracy. They stand against forced enrolment in the Derg's " peoples' militias "; forced collectivisation, and the endless contributions to the régime's war efforts. This has led them to step up their resistance, armed or otherwise, in almost all the regions of the country. For Ethiopia's oppressed

nationalities, which constitute the vast majority of the population, the situation is further aggravated by blind chauvinistic repression. Broad based resistance movements in TIGRAY, the OROMO regions, OGADEN, SIDAMO and BALE have taken up arms to struggle for their right to self determination. The régime's scorched earth policies aimed at crushing this legitimate struggle are now ruining the country. Today's Ethiopia is at grips with one of the most deadly famines in it's history. More than 2,000.000 people have been forced to leave their homes and seek asylum in the neighbouring countries and elsewhere.

In the urban centers the working class and other low income groups have fallen victim to a deep economic crisis. Rising prices and wage freezes that have been enforced since early 1979; mass lay offs and the general breakdown of the national economy, have all contributed to create the unbearable conditions of life that have become the lot of the urban population. Although the intensity of the struggle is no where the one in the rural areas, the above groups and other sectors of urban dwellers, merchants, intellectuals, students, government



employees etc..are recovering from the shock of the so-called red terror campagne of early 1978. Angered by anti democratic rule and the sale out of the motherland's independance, they are stepping up their struggle against the military dictatorship.

Within the armed forces, democratic and patriotic elements who have been subjected upto now to a fascistic campaign of repression are carefully organizing to do away with the presence of foreign forces on Ethiopian soil.

It is the strong belief of ME'ISONE that the military dictatorship is not capable of solving any of the major problems facing our country. The resulting crisis would mean the developpment of the determined struggle of the people. We can therefore say that the comming months will witness growing and ever sharper contradictions between the regime and the people. We can also predict that these difficulties will provoke, within the ranks of the dictatorship, vicious internal strifs that would ultimately weaken the anti democratic camp as a whole.

Given these challanging perspectives, ME'ISONE

feels that it would have a unique vanguard role that would allow it to influence the development of events in the country. In order to better assume these historical responsibilities, the organization is now working to strengthen its clandestine apparatus that has successfully survived the most barbaric repression ever known in our country. At the same time ME'ISONE is working towards the creation of a united democratic front composed of all the progressive and patriotic forces in the country. In this respect, the enthusiastic response from progressive sectors of the Ethiopian society to the unity call that we made in June 1979 in N° 69 of our official organ " The Voice of the Masses " is very encouraging. We intend to continue on this path which is the only guarantee for a lasting victory.

In the international field, ME'ISONE works with democratic and progressive forces in order to create a vast current of solidarity with the struggle in Ethiopia and to express support for the world wide struggle for peace, democracy and social justice. It has been drawing the attention of world public opinion to the atrocities being committed by the military government. It has been untiringly



exposing Soviet intervention in the internal affairs of our country and the dangerous implications of its involvement in the region. These efforts have helped to shatter the " progressive " image that the dictatorship had been trying to project abroad. They have also helped to unmask Soviet " Internationalism " which has brought nothing but humiliation to the Ethiopian people and defeat to their democratic revolution.

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The struggle of the Ethiopian people is part and parcel of the world wide struggle for peace, democracy and social justice. The invitation forwarded to ME'ISONE to attend the congress of the SOCIALIST INTERNATIONAL testifies to the fact that world progressive forces sympathize with the cause of our people. By attending this congress, we are expressing solidarity with all forces that struggle for the same noble objectives. In order to foster a better understanding of our organization and the perspectives of the situation in Ethiopia, we have outlined below the stands of ME'ISONE on some major issues.

## I. WE STRUGGLE FOR FULL DEMOCRATIC RIGHTS

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One basic condition for the alliance with the military government in 1976-77 was the acceptance by the later of the NDRP which recognized the necessity of democratic rights including freedom of speech, press, demonstration, assembly, strikes, organization etc...The bill prepared by ME'ISONE but which was never enacted by the government put a strong emphasis on the right to organize freely and rejected the idea of a single party system in the country.

The betrayal led to serious confrontations between the Derg and our organization and was one of the fundamental causes for the break in 1977. With the repression that followed, all the democratic mass organizations were dissolved and the elected leaders arrested, executed or dismissed. All existing political groups were banned and the creation of any party other than the Derg's working class party was prohibited by law.

ME'ISONE fights against the instauration of a single party system in Ethiopia and the so called " Commission to Organize the Party of the Working



Peoples of Ethiopia." ( COPWE ) The creation of this commission is nothing but an attempt to consolidate the anti-democratic and chavinistic rule and to further strengthen the hold of the Soviet Union on our country. ME'ISONE therefore rejects this commission and fights for the recognition of full democratic rights for the Ethiopian people.

## 2. THE RIGHT OF NATIONALITIES

Ethiopia is a multi-national country. Here again the NDRP, which the Derg still pretends to uphold clearly states that, " The right to self determination of all nationalities will be recognized and fully respected.... and will be implemented in accordance with democratic procedures and principles."

ME'ISONE, which is an organisation composed of members from all the nationalities in the country, struggled for the respect of this right as the only basis for the democratic and voluntary unity of the peoples of Ethiopia. It sympathizes with all the national libration movements fighting against chauvinism and for their right to self determination. We believe however, that this question cannot be resolved in

isolation from the general problem of democracy in Ethiopia. Only a united struggle can do away with the chavinistic dictatorship and create the conditions for a new democratic life in a multi-national state.

### 3. THE STRUGGLE OF THE ERITREAN PEOPLES

The legitimate struggle of the Eritrean peoples for self determination has been going on for the last 20 years. It will no doubt continue as long as the just aspirations of the people are not achieved.

The military dictatorship and it's foreign allies have been trying to impose a military solution. In the process they have committed untold atrocities against the peoples of Eritrea. On the other hand, the Eritrean Liberation fronts have repeatedly called for negotiations with out pre conditions and have expressed their readiness to solve the problem in a just and democratic manner.

ME'ISONE consistantly opposes the pursuit of military solutions in Eritrea and condemnes the atrocities being committed there. It has on the other hand expressed full support for the Eritrean struggle



and the call for negotiations made by the fronts.

We strongly believe that the fate of the Eritrean struggle is closely linked with that of the Ethiopian revolution. Only the united struggle of Ethiopian and Eritrean progressives can do away with the military dictatorship. Based on this belief, ME'ISONE has already taken some fruitful steps towards the creation of a principled unity of struggle with Eritrea's progressive forces. It will continue on this path until the problem finds a just and democratic solution, which takes into account the legitimate aspirations of the Eritrean peoples and the interests of the revolutionary struggle in Ethiopia.

#### 4. THE RESTAURATION OF NATIONAL INDEPENDANCE

Ethiopia has often been portrayed as a country with a rich and enduring civilisation. Except for a brief period of occupation by Moussolini's troops in 1936-41, it has maintained it's independance for centuaries. Even during the hay days of colonial expansion, our country sucessfully repulsed every attempt of foreign powers which tried to bring it

under direct or indirect control and domination.

The present generation is proud of this worthy heritage. The struggle that is being waged for democracy and social justice is interwoven with the question of national liberation from any form of foreign domination. It is in view of this that both in it's own programme and the NDRP, ME'ISONE has stood for a foreign policy based on the principles of consistant non-alignment.

Soviet intervention has meant not only unprecedented repression against democratic and patriotic forces, but also a naked violation of our country's honour and sovereignty. The Derg's denunciation of the Peoples' Republic of China, its stand on the Vietnam-Kampucha conflict, it's declared support of the Soviet invasion of Afganistan...are but a few examples that show that the present régime has seriously compromised our country's sovereignty.

In a country like Ethiopia where patriotism has always been a way of life, the patriotic opposition is already gathering momentum. ME'ISONE stands at the vanguard of this national struggle and is



mobilising the people to fight against Soviet domination and for a free and independant Ethiopia.

##### 5. A NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC FRONT

At present, ME'ISONE is the only progressive multi-nationality organization. But it is not the only democratic movement in the country. Chavinist repression has touched off a series of legitimate nationalist uprisings in almost all the regions of the country. All these movements which, taken together would have formed a democratic alternative to the regime, have not yet united their forces. The survival of the dictatorship has upto now been rendered possible by the continued disperssion of the democratic opposition. That is why ME'ISONE has been consistantly fighting for the creation of a National Democratic **Front** which is the only sure way of liberation for all the peoples of Ethiopia.

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