

A Decade of Progress?

The Special Issue¹ painted even more beautiful pictures of the current educational, health, and the over-all economic aspects of the country. But behind these illusive pictures, today's actual reality in Ethiopia is grim. In order to look at this, let us see the "facts" presented by the Special Issue published in commemoration of the military regime's Tenth Anniversary of coming to power.

The Special Issue indicated that in the last decade the number of Ethiopian children who attend school has increased by 30%. If we assume the age range for school-age children to be at least five and at most nine, there are 5,250,000 Ethiopian children in this age-group. If we include those whose ages range between ten and fourteen to the above category, there should be at least a total of 9,250,000 enrolled in primary schools in Ethiopia. However, even according to the data provided by the Ministry of Education, the total number of students who attend primary school is 2,500,000. Contrary to the government's assertion that 49% of the school-age children attend schools, the actual figure is only slightly more than 27% of the school-age children. Moreover, this proportion diminishes further when one considers all those millions of school-age children, who are gripped by famine, lack the basic means of survival let alone having the opportunity to attend school.

In this Special Issue, apart from empty bragging, there is no evidence to suggest that the military regime has made any serious effort or commitment toward the expansion of educational opportunities in Ethiopia. A glance at the annual budget of the regime reveals that only 8.6% is devoted to education. This allocation is insignificant when it is compared with the portion assigned to defense and security, which is

47% of the total budget.

There is also another deliberate omission regarding high-school graduates. There are some 80,000 students who complete high-school every year. Currently, out of these only 15% gets a chance to pursue higher education in Ethiopia, in the Soviet Union, and in other East European countries. Of the remaining 68,000, a couple of thousand are absorbed by the various state apparatuses. As the Ethiopian economy has been in shambles for many years, employment outside the government agencies virtually does not exist. Thus a great majority of high-school graduates are forced into the ranks of the unemployed annually. Alarmed by the swelling unemployment especially those of high-school graduates, the military government has seized the opportunity as a blessing in disguise which enable it to replenish its battered army with manpower and instituted a compulsory military service. This, then, is what awaits Ethiopia's youth upon graduation from high-school!

In matters of health, the Special Issue simply piling up absolute figures stated that there are 1,850 clinics, 130 health centers, and 16,220 medical personnel in Ethiopia and according to which 45% of the people receive multiple health services.³ In order to see the true picture in this respect, we will be compelled to do some comparisons. In Ethiopia today there is:-

- one hospital for 407,000 people,
- one hospital bed for 3,200 people,
- one medical doctor for 69,400 people,
- one medical nurse for 20,830 people,
- one health assistant for 5,160 people.

One can easily see from these facts that contrary to the report of the government, the health services in Ethiopia are still far from being adequate. In addition, diseases like typhus, malaria, dysentery, leprosy, tuberculosis, etc... etc... are rampant particularly

among the rural population mainly as a result of malnutrition, lack of clean drinking water, and poor sanitation. These diseases being contagious, continue to spread extensively.

Despite the rhetorics of improved health facilities, the resources allocated for health are meager, a mere 3.9% of the government's annual budget.

The other indicators of the health situation which the Special Issue is "oblivious" about but which are important in highlighting the condition of the people are the following:-

- the average calorie in-take per person in Ethiopia is two-thirds of the 1800 required daily for survival,
- the average life expectancy of an Ethiopian is 46 years; whereas in the rest of the least developed countries it is 50 years and in the developed countries it is 75 years,
- in Ethiopia, the number of children who die before the age of one is 145 out of 1000; whereas in the other least developed countries it is 124 out of 1000 and in the developed countries it is 11 out of 1000.

The Special Issue rhetorically concludes the general economic status of Ethiopia as:-

" Ethiopia's wealth of untapped natural resources, the rich variety of endemic flora and fauna, place the country among the richly endowed countries of the world. This is why Ethiopians always sing of the beauty of their land, ... in no less elation than a young love adorably sings of her lover."⁴ (emph. NE)

As evasive as the callous military leaders are, it is crystal clear that the Ethiopian people haven't actually benefitted from the country's "wealth of untapped natural resources". And for this, the military dictatorship with all its misguided economic policies is equally accountable as the former obstructive feudal regime. It is unfortunate that on the top of their economic misery, the people are also victims to such endless rhetorics. The general economic status of Ethiopia is partly reflected by few of the indicators listed below:-

- a GNP per Capita of \$140,
- a population growth rate of 2.1% while the food production declines on the average of 13% annually,
- an estimated population below absolute poverty income level (\$190) of 60% in urban and 62% in rural areas,
- the External Debt stands at \$636,495,000 in multi-lateral loans and \$656,112,000 in bi-lateral loans,
- the balance of payment is (with a deficit of) -848,400,000 (Eth. Birr),
- the net international reserve is 222,100,000 (Eth. Birr), whereas in 1976 it was 765 million (Eth. Birr).

It is even more annoying to concerned Ethiopians and humanitarians when the military leaders shamelessly misrepresented the people's cry of paroxysm, which was caused by the super-famine and economic misery, as "a love song with a spirit of elation".

==== = =====

NOTES

- 1 "A Decade of Revolutionary Transformation, 1974-1984",
The Propaganda and Culture Committee of the
Founding Congress of the Workers Party of
Ethiopia & 10th Anniversary of the Revolution,
Addis Ababa:1984.
2. Page 53
3. Page 56
4. Page 11

=====