

EVENTS IN ETHIOPIA

Peasants continue to oppose forced collectivisation

As we have noted in the past, the regime's collectivisation attempts are essentially motivated by its desire to forcibly squeeze the surplus products of peasants. This is why peasants have been strongly opposing these attempts in the past.

Now even farmers' cooperatives established during the years 1977-79 are being dismantled by their members themselves. In fact, experience has clearly shown to the peasants that producing collectively was tantamount to being tenants of the regime's bureaucracy. After the democratically elected leaders of the peasants were either arrested, executed or left for exile, the regime's "cadres" who were imposed on the peasants' associations started to behave more as agents of the government than as representatives of the farmers and defenders of their legitimate interests.

An endless series of pretexts (government taxes, contributions to finance the various wars, for the construction of roads, schools, hospitals which never saw the light of day, etc...) were used to confiscate a large part of the peasant's production.

This led peasants in various regions of the country to break up their co-operatives and work their parcels individually. One such decision which came as a hard blow to the regime was that taken by peasants of a co-operative farm in the WONDO KASSHA district of the central SHOA region. In fact, The government considered this co-operative farm as a model. As such, it was one of the "achievements" of the revolution that foreigners and specially journalists were encouraged to visit. Another co-operative farm dismantled by its members themselves is the one in HUROGUDRU district of the WOLLEGA region in western Ethiopia.

As usual, the regime did not try to examine why the peasants themselves are forced to take such extreme decisions and to solve the problem by peaceful means. Instead, government agents that were sent to "solve" the problem arrested four peasants leaders in WONDO KASSHA and another 17 people in HUROGUDRU on charges of "counter-revolutionary activities".

► Workers against official "Trade-Unions"

One of the highlights of the revolutionary years and a great achievement of the workers' movement in the country was the establishment in 1976 of the democratically elected and independent "All Ethiopia Trade-Union". But with the advent of counter revolution and soviet intervention, the whole idea of a democratic and independent Union was thrown overboard. The elected leaders of the union were assassinated, executed, thrown into the country's overcrowded jails or went into exile.

Handpicked agents of the military dictatorship were imposed on the workers as "leaders". And in 1979, the official Union became a full fledged member of the Prague based "World Federation of Trade-Unions".

Over the past years clear sign of rejection of these imposed leaders were manifested by the Ethiopian working-class. But now, workers' militancy has grown to such a high level that the government employees who parade as "leaders" are being openly challenged by rank and file workers. The latest and most significant development in this respect, was the action taken by the workers of KALITI BISCUITS factory in the Addis-Abeba region and factory workers in the MOJO area , about 70 Kms south of the capital.

Workers assemblies in these various localities decided to dissolve the official trade-union arguing that the "leaders" are acting more as government agents than as representatives of

their members. The dictatorship reacted by arresting what it called the ringleaders. But repressive action did not help reestablish the official trade-unions let alone help them gain credibility in the eyes of the workers.

► Mengistu reported worried about "Student hooligans"

Out of the 75 000 students who sat for the Ethiopian School leaving certificate examination (ESLC) in 1981, it is reported that only 3 600 are to be admitted to the various faculties of the National University. This has also been the pattern over the last years. As nothing is provided for the more than 70 000 "drop outs" that are leaving school, they are destined to form the ranks of the already important army of the unemployed. It is reported that the regime is particularly nervous about the discontent and youth militancy that this situation will surely help to strengthen. Mengistu is reported to have said that he does not want his regime to be overthrown by "discontent spearheaded by student hooligans."

Orders have been dispatched to various government departments to do everything in order to employ at least 4 000 of these "hooligans". Governments officials who argued that nothing has been provided for such new employment in the 1981-82 budget have been termed as "saboteurs" and threatened with dismissal or imprisonment. Even if the 4 000 students manage to get employed, the vast majority of this year's "drop outs" are certainly condemned to join the ranks of the unemployed thus further deepening the economic and social crisis facing Ethiopia under the military dictatorship.

► Soldiers salaries increased

Unrest and demoralization have been growing within the

armed forces during the year 1981. If the main reason for the demoralization is the endless fighting at the various warfronts the increasing cost of leaving is also an important factor in the army discontent. In spite of the deep economic crisis characterized by galloping inflation, famine and mass unemployment, the regime was forced to accept at least the salary increase demands forwarded by members of the armed forces.

The new measures include US \$ 15 and US \$ 20 monthly increments for soldiers and officers respectively, better rations and other benefits for all members of the armed forces and their families.

As members of the Police and Security Forces, who had forwarded similar demands, were "forgotten" by the government, the former pressed for their demands and threatened to go on strike if these were not accepted by the regime. The militancy and unity of the members of the police and security forces forced the government to concede salary increments similar to those given to members of the armed forces.

These increments which are not provided for in the 1974EC (1981-1982) budget, will of course mean an increase in the forced "voluntary contribution" imposed upon the people and the diverting of more resources from social and economic projects. But other developments are showing that squeezing more from the already impoverished workers and employees will not be an easy matter.

▶ Salary adjustments demanded by workers and employees

One important feature of the economic crisis in Ethiopia is the galloping inflation aggravated by salary freezes imposed on workers and government employees since early 1979. Now conditions have become so unbearable that urban dwellers have reached the point where they feel that they "have nothing more to

lose by daring to struggle."

During the months of November and December, a series of actions in different factories and government departments have shown that workers and employees are more and more determined to struggle for their rights.

In November, employees of the water and sewage department of the city of Addis-Abeba, where the average salary is US \$ 17.25, put forward demands of salary adjustments in order to cope with the rising cost of living. The same month, employees of the Ethiopian Air Lines and the workers of the AMBESSA Transport Company joined the struggle and threatened to go on "work to rule" strikes if their demands are not met. The Ethiopian Teachers' Association, voicing the grievances of its 20 000 members, forwarded similar demands and succeeded in having accepted a committee empowered to conduct negotiations with government authorities.

The most serious challenge to the government came in December, when the national lorry drivers' association supported its demands for higher pay and better working conditions, by a short lived strike. The government promptly responded by arresting 6 workers who were singled out as the "ringleaders" of the movement and by forcing the lorry drivers to go back to work at gunpoint.

The historic significance of these actions does not of course lay in the immediate successes that are registered. Almost all of them have been severely repressed. The important thing is that after years of despair and feelings of powerlessness, workers and employees have now gained confidence and are ready to unite and struggle. The inevitable deepening of the social and economic crisis that characterizes present day Ethiopia and this regained militancy and confidence of the workers will surely lead to an intensification of the struggle against the military dictatorship. This, we are sure will pro-

vide a better ground for all patriotic and progressive forces that struggle for a democratic regime in an independent Ethiopia.

► Church properties confiscated

In what is seen as an intensification of religious persecution against the non-orthodox churches in Ethiopia, the regime confiscated many church properties in November and December 1981. The MEKANE YESSUS church, which is a member of the world Lutheran Federation, seems to be more hit by this wave of "nationalization". It is to be remembered that Pasteur GUDINA TUMSA, the leader of this religious community in Addis-Abeba was abducted by government forces in February 1980 and that his whereabouts have not been disclosed ever since.

OTHER NEWS

▶ "Torture is an internal affair"

So goes the argument used by the Ethiopian regime and the Soviet bloc countries, used to oppose a United Nations general assembly resolution aimed at creating an international fund to help torture victims all over the world. According to the United Nations resolution, this fund is to be used to provide legal protection, medical care and economic assistance to the victims if and when they get released. A vast majority of the member states of the United Nations voted in favour of the resolution while 18 countries (including Ethiopia) opposed it.