

INTRODUCTION

In this issue of 'NEW ETHIOPIA' we present to our readers the full text of the interview given to two western journalists by FREWE ABAYNEHE, a representative of the underground leadership of ME'ISONE, the All Ethiopia Socialist Movement at a meeting in Addis Abeba in September 1979. The two journalists were among the many foreign guests invited to participate in the ceremonies marking the 5th anniversary of the deposition of Emperor Haile Selassie in September 1974.

Given the repressive conditions that prevail in Ethiopia in general and the "special" persecution directed against our organization, elaborate and most secrete arrangements were first necessary in order to realise this interview by comrade FREWE ABAYNEHE, who as one of the top representatives of the ME'ISONE underground leadership in Ethiopia is one of the most "wanted" men in the country. We hope that our readers would realise the tremendous risks taken both by comrade Frewe and the two journalists in realising this interview and that they would appreciate this historical document for what it really stands for: An authoritative and couragous voice speaking of democracy, equality and National Independance from the capital of one of the most repressive regimes in contemporary Africa.

Even if we are publishing this interview with their full consent, we are withholding the names of the two journalists who have for obvious reasons, asked that their names do not go public.

"NEW ETHIOPIA"

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, September 1979.

FULL TEXT OF THE INTERVIEW GIVEN TO TWO FOREIGN JOURNALISTS BY
FREWE ABAYNEH, A REPRESENTATIVE OF THE LEADERSHIP OF ME'ISONE,
THE ALL ETHIOPIA SOCIALIST MOVEMENT AT A MEETING IN ADDIS ABABA,
ETHIOPIA, IN SEPTEMBER 1979.

Q. Can you tell us something about your organization, ME'ISONE and the objectives of its struggle?

F.A. ME'ISONE, the All Ethiopia Socialist Movement, is a revolutionary organization founded in August 1968 from among the advanced elements of the Ethiopian Students Movement which constituted at that time the most radical opposition to the fascist tyranny of Emperor Haile Selassie.

As its name clearly indicates its members both at the leadership and rank and file levels are revolutionaries drawn from all the nationalities in Ethiopia. Its immediate objectives as defined in its programme, are the destruction of feudal oppression and imperialist exploitation and the establishment of a democratic and free Ethiopia.

During the dark days of the feudo-fascist tyranny, ME'ISONE struggled for six years under very strict secret and clandestine conditions. But with the revolutionary upsurge of february 1974, given the fact that this great spontaneous upsurge had no clear and correct leadership ME'ISONE took it upon itself to give direction to the revolutionary movement. Together with other revolutionary forces it struggled to assume its vanguard role specially through the publication of its underground organ "The Voice of the Masses". After the deposition of the Emperor, following very intensive popular pressure and the creation of the Provisional Military Government in September 1974, ME'ISONE adopted a position of critical support vis-à-vis the Derg and intensified the struggle for the realization of its programme: "Land to the Tiller", "Democratic Rights", "Equality of Nationalities", "National Independence" etc.

During the year 1975, it played a very important vanguard role on the side of the progressive elements within the Military Council and by untiringly mobilising the popular masses it made possible the proclamation of the great revolutionary decrees that transformed the economic basis of the old feudal order.

The next year, the growing unity and strength of the counter-revolutionary forces which challenged the revolution by taking up arms against it, put on the agenda of the revolutionary forces the urgent necessity of creating their own unity and the acceleration of the efforts to mobilise, organize and arm the popular masses. To face the challenge ME'ISONE called upon all anti-feudal and anti-imperialist forces to unite under the banner of a revolutionary programme.

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To this effect, it prepared with the progressives within the Dereg, the National Democratic Revolution Programme which became in April 1976 the common platform for all Ethiopia's progressive and patriotic forces and the comprehensive guiding document of the Ethiopian 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 chauvinist policies of the military that was being followed in 1974 and 1975 and proclaimed the principle of the right to self-determination to all of Ethiopia's nationalities as the basis for the democratic unity of the Ethiopian peoples. It laid down the principles for Ethiopia's foreign relations which were to be based on the constant safe-guard of the independence of our historical motherland, anti-imperialist solidarity and consistent non-alignment.

With the acceptance by the military government of these and other important provisions, ME'ISONE accepted to form an alliance with the Derg taking care to make it clear both to the government and the Ethiopian Peoples that this alliance would only hold as long and only as long as the government respects these provisions. Even if this alliance did not mean an end of our underground and illegal activities in the interest of the Ethiopian revolution, many of ME'ISONE's comrades went out of the underground struggle to become ministers, government advisers, regional administrators and other high government officials. Another 850 militants of ME'ISONE staffed the newly created POMOA (Provisional Office for Mass Organizational Affairs) and the Yekatit 66 ideological School and played a very precious role in the mobilisation, organization and arming of the popular masses during the crucial years 1976-77. This tactical alliance with the Military government which enabled our organization to operate in semi-legal conditions and to play a key role in all the affairs of the revolution lasted for about 18 months.

But at the end of this period ME'ISONE was forced to go underground because the Military government betrayed the commitments it had formally undertaken when the alliance was formed. In fact in April 1977 it started a policy of alliance with the feudo-bourgeois bureaucracy which represented a mortal danger to the Ethiopian revolution. This rightist alliance refused to enact the bill prepared by POMOA and which allowed the full exercise of democratic rights for the Ethiopian Peoples as stipulated in the programme of April 1976. In lieu of the respect of the right to self-determination recognized by the programme to all the nationalities of Ethiopia, our country became the scene of a most vicious and barbaric repression against the oppressed nationalities. Instead of pursuing a policy of non-alignment and national independence as stipulated in the programme, the rightist alliance sold out the honour and sovereignty of the motherland to the Soviet bloc countries.

In this context of treason the choice that faced ME'ISONE was indeed clear. Either we accept this betrayal and go along with the military government on the path of counter-revolution and national disgrace or accept the challenge and continue the struggle for democracy and national independence. Given Ethiopia's conditions, where legal opposition is not tolerated, the later choice meant abandoning the official functions occupied by our militants and going back to full clandestinity. We made the historical and honorable choice and on the 20 of August 1977, most of the ministers, high government officials, POMOA cadres etc. were ordered to go underground and effectively did so within 48 hours.

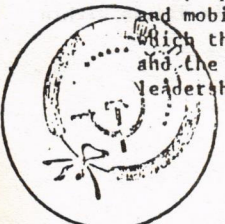
In spite of the overwhelming support to this courageous decision taken by ME'ISONE, and because of the fear that this popular support inspired in the camp of the rightist forces, the following months marked the beginning of the most ruthless counter-revolutionary repression in the history of our country. No organization in Ethiopia has ever been subjected to anything near to the counter-revolutionary terror unleashed against our organization. During the time of its alliance with the military government and specially between September 1976 and September 1977 hundreds of its members and sympathizers were assassinated in the streets of Addis Ababa and the Provinces by counter-revolutionary forces opposed to the military government and the revolution. When the Derg started its betrayal and ME'ISONE refused to go along, it was again subjected to a most brutal and barbaric repression. In the year that goes from August 77 to September 78 alone ME'ISONE saw hundreds of its members assassinated by "unknown" elements and summarily executed by the henchmen of the Derg. Today more than 20,000 members and sympathizers of our organization feel the over-crowded prisons of Ethiopia both in Addis Ababa and in all its regions.

In spite of this repression which is not only unparalleled in the country's history but also places the Ethiopian regime as one of the most repressive governments in the world, ME'ISONE has continued the struggle. Drawing the appropriate lessons from past experience and errors, it has now reinforced its organizational setup so as to be able to fulfill its duties towards the Ethiopian Peoples. The blood of our hundreds of martyrs, the sufferings of thousands of our members and sympathizers languishing in the Derg's prisons, the courage and steadfastness of those comrades who continue the struggle for democracy and Ethiopia's national honour have won to ME'ISONE the admiration and sympathy of all the progressive and patriotic elements of the Ethiopian society. In addition to this with the total liquidation of the counter-revolutionary EPRP and the political and organizational bankruptcy of the right opportunist organizations which once paraded as "marxists", ME'ISONE is not only the oldest all Ethiopian revolutionary organization but now stands as the only national force organized under the banner of the National Democratic Revolution Programme of April 1976.

How does ME'ISONE characterise the present political and economic situation in the country?

- F.A. The general background to the present situation as it had developed starting from mid 1977, is the temporary defeat of the Ethiopian National Democratic Revolution and the rising tide of popular resistance put up by the Ethiopian People determined to defend the gains of the revolution.

The defeat of the revolution is most evident in the political field. In fact a glance at the political situation during the years 1976-77 clearly shows that at that time there existed in Ethiopia a situation of 'dual power' and that a decisive struggle was taking place between the newly born democratic organs of people's power and the old feudo-bourgeois state apparatus. On the one hand the revolutionary camp had at that time a very dense net work of democratic mass organizations which were not only organs of local administration but were also precious tools for the revolutionary struggle. The Peasants' Associations, Workers' Unions, Neighbourhood Committees (Kebeles) having their own people's tribunals, militia, committees for the defense of the revolution etc. and mobilizing millions of people existed parallel to the old state apparatus which they were destined to replace at the local level. The POMOA, ME'ISONE and the other progressive organizations gave a centralized and coordinated leadership to the struggle of these democratic organs of people's power. On the

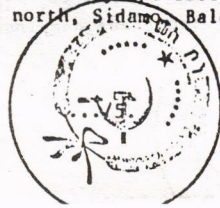


other hand there was the camp of the counter-revolution and its struggle for survival spear-headed by the remnants of the feudo-bourgeois bureaucracy and other counter-revolutionary organizations like the so called EDU and the terrorist EPRP. To these counter revolutionary elements and specially the feudo-bourgeois bureaucracy the development of the democratic mass organizations and their struggle spear-headed by ME'ISONE and the POMOA clearly represented a mortal danger and these forces were therefore ready to go to any length and to use any means in their fight for survival.

At the beginning of 1977, and specially after the limited arming of the committees of the defense of the revolution, the stage was set for the final and decisive struggle between the two irreconcilable forces. It can be said that the story of the Ethiopian revolution from this period up to the end of 1978 is essentially the story of the life and death struggle, between the newly born organs of democratic people's power and the old state bureaucracy. Principally because of the treason by the formerly progressive elements within the Derg who in the April-Mai 1977 went over to the bureaucracy and the rightists and due to many other factors that we do not have to enumerate here, this life and death struggle ended by the more or less total destruction of the democratic organs of people's power, by the complete dismantling of the mass organizations and other revolutionary institutions and by the triumph of the feudo-bourgeois and chauvinist bureaucracy and consequently by the defeat of the Ethiopian revolution. If one cares to take a look at the identity of those hundreds of Ethiopians assassinated and summarily executed during the past two and half years and the thousands of political prisoners that fill the prisons of the Derg, one would easily see the point that we are trying to make. The persecuted elements in today's Ethiopia are those very forces who played ^{4.2.1977} both before and after the february revolution and who were the vanguard fighters that represented at different levels those democratic organs of people's power in the year 1976 and 1977. On the other hand those who are parading as progressives and are persecuting the revolutionaries represent a wide spectrum of counter-revolutionary elements ranging from out and out fascists and notorious anti-communists to traitors and opportunist scumps calling themselves "marxists".

With forces absolutly hostile to the revolution and its hard-won achievements in control of the political situation it would not be difficult to imagine the economic crisis that has developed with the mounting counter-revolution. In this respect the problem can be looked at from two angles.

In the first place the repression and the dismantling of the revolutionary institutions, the passive resistance of the workers and other sectors of the urban populations, the more active and sometimes armed resistance of the peasant masses and oppressed nationalities etc. all take place against a background of a very serious economic crisis that can take catastrophic proportions if it is allowed to continue. In fact if during the revolutionary years the great enthusiasm of the peasants who saw the necessity of increasing production as one means of advancing the revolutionary struggle, resulted in an annual growth rate of about 5%, it is now recognized even by the government officials that since 1977 production in Ethiopia's countryside has gone down at an annual rate of 1.5%. This compares unfavorably with the annual population growth rate of 2.8%. The economic problem is further aggravated by the disorganization of the distribution circuits due not only the Somali aggression and the Eritrean war but also due to insecurity in practically all the administrative regions where armed resistance to the Derg's anti-democratic rule is gaining momentum with every passing day. Such is particularly the case in the regions of Tigray, parts of Gondar and Wollo in the north, Sidama, Bale, Harague and Arussi in the Southern regions of Ethiopia.

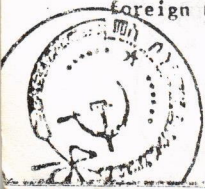


This problem is further aggravated by the equally serious crisis in the urban areas and the non agricultural sector of the Ethiopian economy. A look at the geographical distribution of the industrial activities in the country shows that a full 30% of these activities takes place in the Eritrean administrative region and another 10% in the Harargue region both of which are severely affected by the wars that have devastated and are devastating these parts of Ethiopia. About half of the industries are found in and around Addis Ababa but even here the lack of any new investment to replace old machines, the systematic sabotage of counter-revolutionary forces, the demoralization of the workers following systematic arrests and harassment, the rising cost of living, the incapacity of the reactionary bureaucracy to restore the distribution circuits and bring goods of first necessity to the urban areas have aggravated the chaotic economic situation that prevails in the country.

What renders all these even more serious is the fact that counter-revolutionary forces use the crisis to advance "solutions" that threaten the important economic gains won by the Ethiopian people during the years of the revolutionary offensive. This is another important aspect of the economic situation in the country. We are facing today a more or less direct threat to these economic gains. Under the pretext of "increasing agricultural production" a propaganda campaign is underway to denigrate Ethiopia's poor peasants described as "improductive and lazy". This campaign aims at driving away poor peasants with little or no means of production from their hard won plots of land in favour of the rich peasants who have the necessary tools for their productive activities. This of course is something absolutely contrary both to the spirit and the letter of the 5th of March proclamation rendering all land to the Ethiopian people. Under the pretext of fighting "peasant individualism" and "crushing capitalism" Ethiopia's peasants are being forced into a hasty "collectivization" scheme whose real objectifs are the extraction of the surplus products of the peasants in favor of the feudo-bourgeois bureaucracy which today holds the political power specially at the local level.

Under the pretext of "discipline" and "austerity" that is necessary to increase production" the working class is being subjected to untold harassment from factory managers and collective agreements are being discarded in one factory after another. Even the labour law of 1975 which is one of the most important landmarks of the Ethiopian revolution is now being revised by a committee in which not even the opportunist leaders of the Dergist labour unions are ~~not~~ represented.

The idea according to which Ethiopias new foreign economic relations and her proposed membership to the Comecon would help her out of the present crisis does not hold water. It is true that the direction of Ethiopia's economic relations are slowly changing towards closer ties with the Soviet bloc countries. But this is no solution. The biggest "economic deal" (2 billion dollars in 3 years) is in military hardware bought from the Soviet Union. This unproductive debt would only increase the country's dependance on the Soviet bloc countries without ever solving its political or economic problems. Long and short term loans do not come in large quantities from these countries. In fact what the Soviet Union is lending to Ethiopia today (except an 85 million dollars loan contracted in April 1979) is the balance of what was left over from a loan contracted with Emperor Haile Selassie in 1959. What is interesting to note here is that the conditions under which the loan was contracted between the autocrat Haile Selassie and the Soviet authorities have resisted the magic touch of "proletarian internationalism" and survived to govern relations between the two countries. In fact the part of the Soviet bloc countries in Ethiopia's foreign trade has increased from 7% in the pre-revolutionary era to 28% in 1978.



But this did not help Ethiopia to maintain a healthy balance of payment situation whose deficit in 1978 alone was 90 million dollars. But one cannot get the real measure of Soviet bloc economic ties with Ethiopia by what has been already achieved but rather by what lies ahead if present trends are allowed to develop unchecked. East Germany, now the second most important buyer of Ethiopian coffee, is holding key posts in the Ethiopian planning commission thus disposing of an important instrument to control the Ethiopian economy and gear it to the needs of the Soviet bloc countries.

In conclusion we may say that the present situation which is characterized by the political and economic crisis that we have described above would continue to deteriorate in the coming months. The counter revolutionary "solutions" proposed by the Ethiopian rightists and their foreign allies would only deepen the contradiction between the popular masses and the new rulers of Ethiopia. In order to cope with such a serious and impending crisis ME'ISONE is now working hard to strengthen its underground apparatus and to unite all the progressive and patriotic forces of the country whose legitimate aspirations can only be realized with the success of the Ethiopian National Democratic Revolution.

Given the present situation what are the aims and perspectives of ME'ISONE?

F.A. The aims of ME'ISONE are no other than the implementation of the National Democratic Revolution Programme. Even if the military government was forced to accept this programme during the years of the revolutionary offensive, it has now become clear to the millions of Ethiopia's peasants, workers, soldiers and other democratic and patriotic elements that the Derg has completely betrayed the programme and the revolution. I have already indicated some important aspects of this betrayal which were the decisive factors that dictated the breaking off of the alliance between the Derg and ME'ISONE in August 1977.

ME'ISONE's action at that time and the developments on the Ethiopian political arena, ever since have resulted in the total exposure and isolation of the Derg, an even deepening political, economic and social crisis and growing opposition from all the progressive and patriotic sectors of the Ethiopian population. In spite of the Derg's betrayal the overwhelming majority of the Ethiopian people are continuing the struggle for democracy, national independence and the equality of nationalities. In spite of the most brutal repression, the history of our country, the struggle is gaining momentum with every passing day.

Ethiopia's peasants, opposed to the dismantling of their democratic mass organisations and the reinstatement of the reactionary and chauvinist bureaucracy, the repression against their elected local representatives, chauvinist terror, forced enrolment in the Derg's "Peoples' militia", forced collectivization whose purpose is to squeeze the peasants products in favour of the bureaucracy, etc have stepped up their resistance, armed or otherwise, to the counter revolutionary rule of the Derg. Given the fact that the question of democracy and that of nationalities are closely linked to each other the anti democratic rule of the Derg and the chauvinist repression that has come along with it, oppressed nationalities have intensified their legitimate struggle during the last months. Today we can say without any fear of exaggeration that in practically all administrative regions of Ethiopia armed struggle is developing and the situation is getting fast out of hand for the counter revolution.

In the urban centers it is clear that the intensity of the revolutionary resistance is nothing near to the one we have in the country side. But the working class, whose vanguard elements and elected leaders have been thrown in



to the Derg's prisons in their thousands, is now fast reorganizing under the leadership of ME'ISONE and getting prepared to face the challenge and to defend its hard won victories. Other sectors of the urban population students, marchants, intellectuals, government employees, democrats, patriots etc. angered by the Derg's anti-democratic rule and the sell out of the motherlands independence, affected by the deepening economic crisis which has made life unbearable specially to the low income groups, recovering from the shock of the so called "red terror" period of early 1978, are stepping up their organizational efforts to better prepare themselves for the impending struggle.

Within the armed forces, democratic and patriotic elements who have been subjected upto now to a most vicious and fascistic campaign of repression are carefully organizing and trying to join the ranks of the revolutionary people.

Faced with ever growing opposition the military government has neither been able to appease nor to contain the revolutionary and patriotic forces. It is the strong believe of ME'ISONE that the military regime because of its class nature is no more capable of correctly solving one single problem of the Ethiopian revolution. ME'ISONE also believes that this incapacity and the resulting crisis would provoke the determined resistance of the heroic Ethiopian people. We can therefore say with confidence that the coming months will witness growing and ever sharper contradictions between the Derg and the Ethiopian people. We can equally predict with a fair degree of certainty that these difficulties will also provoke within the ranks of the military government itself very vicious internal struggles that would ultimately weaken the counter revolutionary camp as a whole.

Given these challenging perispectives, ME'ISONE feels that it would have an important vanguard role and a unique position in the struggle that would allow it to decisivly influence the developpments of events. In fact as it now stands, and as I have already pointed out earlier ME'ISONE is not only the oldest and the most solid national revolutionary organization in Ethiopia but also the only one that stands openly and unsweaveringly for the National Democratic Revolution Programme of April 1976. The late EPRP, following its complete betrayal of the Ethiopian revolution, its alliance with the monarchists and imperialists and its terrorist attempts to dismantle the revolutionary gains of the Ethiopian people has been liquidated and disappeared from the Ethiopian political arena. The other so called "marxist" groups which in fact were nothing more than fellow travelers of the most opportunist type and have gone along with the military government on the path of treason have seen reactionary terror unleashed against them and can be considered for all intents and purposes as non entities.

In order to assume this historical responsibilities even better ME'ISONE is now working hard to strengthen its clandestine apparatus that has successfully survived the most barbaric repression that our country has ever known. At the same time ME'ISONE is taking it upon itself to unite all the elements of the democratic and patriotic opposition into a single national revolutionary front. In this respect, the enthusiastic response from all the progressive sectors of the Ethiopian society, to the unity call that we made in june 1979 in number 69 of our official organ "The Voice of the Masses" is very encouraging and we shall continue to work for the unity of Ethiopia's progressives which is the only garantée for a lasting victory.

In the international field we intend to give more attention to our relations with other progressive forces in the world and to work towards the creation of a vast current of solidarity with the struggle of the heroic Ethiopian people. The relations with the world revolutionary and democratic forces will focus not only on gathering support for the struggle but we also intend to share specially with our brothers in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, the valuable

experiences of the Ethiopian revolution and to draw with them the appropriate lessons from the five years of a rich revolutionary practice. To this effect ME'ISONE's foreign branch has received very clear instructions which would allow it to develop closer ties with marxists lenninitists, socialists, social-democratic and democratic forces and organizations, national liberation movements and other anti-imperialist and peace loving forces in order to draw their attention to the brutal repression and the counter revolutionary developments that are taking place in Ethiopia and to express our solidarity in the struggle for peace, democracy and justice.

What is the stand of ME'ISONE concerning the involvement of the Soviet Union and its allies in Ethiopia?

F.A. Concerning the problem of foreign relations the Ethiopian revolution has some clear guiding principles to which ME'ISONE has always and firmly adhered. The first guiding principle of Ethiopia's foreign policy, as clearly indicated in our programme, is the unswerving defence of the national independence and sovereignty of the motherland in the best traditions of the history of the Ethiopian people. The second principle is anti-imperialist solidarity with all progressive and national liberation movements in the world and specially in Africa, Asia and Latin American countries. The major principle is non-alignment as understood to mean a policy of total independence vis-à-vis the super powers and a categorical refusal to reduce the motherland to a pawn in the hands of one or another of the forces contending for world supremacy.

Our relations with the Soviet bloc countries and our attitude towards Soviet bloc involvement in Ethiopia should therefore be examined within this general framework. But first some important and clear historical facts must be brought to light. As is clearly indicated in our programme, Haile Selassie's Ethiopia was a neo-colony of American imperialism. The revolutionary struggle in Ethiopia has therefore been a struggle against feudalism and American imperialism. During the pre-revolutionary years American imperialism worked hand in hand with the tyranny and subjected the Ethiopian people to a fierce exploitation and to neo-colonial domination which angered the proud and patriotic masses. During the years of the revolutionary offensive (1974-77) American imperialism, still working hand in hand with internal reaction tried all sorts of counter revolutionary plots. It fomented reactionary and fascistic coup d'etats. It organized and armed feudal bandits in the countryside. It armed and unleashed hired assassins to spread white terror in Ethiopia's cities and to physically liquidate the vanguard elements of the revolutionary struggle and specially the members of ME'ISONE, the POMOA and members of other revolutionary organizations. But as the Ethiopian people were surging forward on the path of the revolution, as they were scoring one victory after another and marching forward on the path of liberation the imperialist countries intensified their vicious propaganda campaign aimed at isolating the heroic Ethiopian people from world progressive forces. They systematically denigrated its achievements and denounced a so called fascistic regime in Ethiopia. They attacked the legitimate and restrained revolutionary violence of the people defending themselves against counter revolutionary terror but without saying one word in their press about the white terror that was devastating the cities of Ethiopia and claiming the lives of hundreds of Ethiopians valorous sons and daughters among whom the vast majority belonged to our organization.

Even if they were not able to halt the march of the revolution, the imperialists unfortunately succeeded in isolating the heroic Ethiopian people during these hard years of bitter struggle. During these decisive years (1974-77) the Ethiopian people and their revolution were completely isolated. But then, herein lies the factor of ever lasting pride for the heroic Ethiopian people and their revolutionary vanguards. It is in fact within this context of more or less complete isolation from international progressive forces and amidst one of the

most bitter class struggles in contemporary history that the Ethiopian people were able to register all the great victories of the revolution. To help you see my point may be I should put all this in more blunt terms: If all these victories were won against internal reaction and American imperialism, the least we can say is that Soviet bloc countries did not contribute to the victory of the besieged Ethiopian people whose revolution was as one Cuban writer put it in 1978 still "unknown" to them !

In fact we can go even further. Notwithstanding some luckworm articles of support in the official press of the Soviet bloc countries, what one may call pro-soviet and "progressive" papers in the western world, working hand in hand with the counter revolutionary EPRP, were busy denigrating the Ethiopian revolution. A case in point is the Paris based paper "Afrique-Asie" which did incalculable harm to the cause of the Ethiopian revolution by its groundless and reactionary articles on the Ethiopian reality. During these years it is no secret to anybody that the sympathy of the Soviet bloc countries went more to the infantile counter revolutionary EPRP than to the Ethiopian revolutionary forces.

It was in this context of more or less complete isolation from world anti-imperialist forces that in 1977 Soviet bloc countries suddenly started to "discover" what the Cuban author Raul Valdes Vivo later described to the outside world as "the unknown revolution". When in early 1977 the Cuban leader Fidel Castro visited Ethiopia and offered the militant solidarity of the Cuban people and other anti-imperialist forces and promised political and material help to the Ethiopian revolution, ME'ISONE and other revolutionaries had to define a principled stand governing the relations between these countries and the Ethiopian revolution. The very delicate task facing Ethiopian revolutionaries at that time was that of breaking the isolation of the revolution and defeating the incessant plots of American imperialism and Arab reaction without going counter to the principles layed down in the revolutionary programme and alienating the national independence of Ethiopia.

As early as March 1977 that is one week after the visit of Fidel Castro and his offer of solidarity with the Ethiopian revolution ME'ISONE came out with the correct and scientific stand which was openly stated in its official organ "The Voice of the Masses" no. 53. In this issue of our underground paper we stated that the proposed support of the Soviet bloc countries to the Ethiopian revolution was a recent development which all Ethiopian progressives would welcome. Fidel Castro's declaration to the effect that "a real revolution" has taken and is taking place in Ethiopia helped many progressive and peace-loving forces in the world to discover the Ethiopian reality in its true lights. And this effectively helped to brake the isolation of the Ethiopian revolution.

But ME'ISONE did not stop at rejoicing over this victory for Ethiopian progressives. It went further to show the necessary limits of this new relation with Soviet bloc countries and to warn of the dangers to our national independence and to the revolutionary process that would result if the principles of self reliance and non-alignment gave way to a policy of dependance on Soviet bloc aid as a means of solving the complex problems of the Ethiopian revolution. Such an erroneous attitude, ME'ISONE asserted, would not only be detrimental to the national independence and sovereignty of our motherland but would also sooner or later cripple and reverse the revolutionary process.

The development of events in Ethiopia after April 1977 has shown that ME'ISON's principled revolutionary stand was the only correct and scientific one. The deviation from these principles brought incalculable harm to the revolutionary struggle. In fact the rightist alliance formed between the Derg and the reactionary bureaucracy in early 1977 soon got the unqualified

material and political support of the Soviet bloc countries. The effect of this unqualified support to the new counter revolutionary alliance was not only material even if this gave the rightists the "technical possibilities" to reinforce their counter revolutionary hold on the country. But perhaps a more serious consequence is the political confusion that issued specially among world progressive and peace loving forces as a result of this "blessing" given to the growing counter revolution in the country. The tumultuous events that immediately followed Soviet bloc involvement in Ethiopia and specially the Somali aggression of July 1977 only helped to reinforce the rightist alliance and Soviet ascendancy in Ethiopia's internal affairs. Hardly six months after the "discovery" of the Ethiopian revolution by the Soviet bloc countries, not only the whole region was emblazed but also the Ethiopian revolution entered a phase of agony which was to increase with growing Soviet involvement in the country.

By the end of 1977 the systematic sabotage by the civilian and military bureaucracy completely crippled the war effort in the Ogaden. But instead of calling upon the people and arming the hundreds of thousands of workers and peasants mobilized under ME'ISONE's slogan "The revolutionary motherland or death", what did the Derg do? It did not dare arm the revolutionary people because this would have meant not only the defeat of the Somali aggression but surly would also have resulted in the crushing of the rightist alliance and the advance of the revolution. Instead the Derg chose to call in Cuban and other foreign soldiers to defend the frontiers of Ethiopia, something that the rightist alliance, busy as it was hunting down Ethiopian revolutionaries failed to do by itself.

Of course the presence of Cuban and other troops in Ethiopia accelerated the inevitable defeat of the Somali aggression. This cannot be denied. But sooner or later the Ethiopian masses would surly have accomplished this patriotic task on their own. But this is besides the point. The important thing for Ethiopian revolutionaries is that foreign troops fighting at the front gave the rightist alliance a free hand to unleash the most vicious and counter revolutionary repression in the country's history. Let us not forget that it is during the months of January and February 1978, i.e. hardly a month after the coming of the Cuban soldiers that the so called red terror period, which will go on record as one of the darkest pages in Ethiopia's contemporary history claimed the lives of thousands of Ethiopian youths, intellectuals democrats and patriots. In the second place in addition to the military advantages that the rightists obtained by the presence of foreign troops in the country this "internationalist" support helped to screen off the true nature of the rightists and distracted progressive world opinion from seeing Ethiopia's reality in its true lights. But most important of all, arming the Ethiopian masses and their revolutionary vanguards would have not only defeated the aggression but also the counter revolutionary forces inside the country itself. The arms that would have been given to Ethiopian revolutionaries and patriots went into the hands of foreign soldiers fighting for the Derg and as if to drive home even more clearly the negative effects of foreign involvement in the country the number of revolutionaries in Ethiopia's prisons increased with that of foreign soldiers at its frontiers. To put things more bluntly we see it as no coincidence if the number of revolutionaries in the Derg's prisons which is more than 20,000 is more or less the same as that of foreign soldiers in the country.

In conclusion we can say that the concret experience of the Ethiopian revolution has clearly shown that the years of Soviet bloc involvement in Ethiopia are years of counter revolutionary repression and of betrayal. These years have also witnessed and we are still witnessing a naked violation of Ethiopia's national independence. Given this uncontestable fact the position of ME'ISONE

and all democratic and patriotic forces in Ethiopia can only be one of opposition to and condemnation of Soviet bloc involvement in the country's internal affairs and in its revolutionary process.

Now three years of Soviet involvement and mounting counter revolution have given us the unswerving conviction that only a policy of self reliance and strict non alignment can serve the cause of revolution and national independence. We feel that the heroic masses for our historic motherland will never accept domination by foreign powers and we are convinced that the patriotic and revolutionary struggle against Soviet bloc penetration and counter revolution will continue and intensify.

How does ME'ISONE see the movements of the different nationalities in Ethiopia and specially the OLF?

F.A. The question of nationalities in Ethiopia which is one of the most important problems of the Ethiopian revolution is something that is closely linked to the question of land and democratic rights. This is particularly true for the southern regions of Ethiopia where the feudal land holding system reduced the masses of the oppressed nationalities to serfdom and subjected them to one of the most barbaric repression of modern times. With the coming of the revolution and the proclamation of "Land to the Tiller" in March 1975, the economic basis of this national oppression was seriously undermined. The right to organize in democratic peasants' associations recognized to the oppressed masses paved the way for the political emancipation and for the new peoples' democratic power in Ethiopia.

All the victories won during the following two years by way of putting into effect the land proclamation and the democratic peasants' associations were as many steps forward towards the final solution of the national question in Ethiopia. Further, the equality of Ethiopia's nationalities and the recognition of their rights to self determination as provided for in the National Democratic Programme, was fast becoming a concret reality on the Ethiopian scene against the background of defeat both for the great nation chauvinists and the narrow nationalists with the various oppressed nationalities. This was particularly true during the years of the revolutionary offensive of 1976-77. Indeed during these years the victorious Ethiopian revolution was correctly solving the problems of nationalities in the country and democratic forces from all of Ethiopia nationalities were closing ranks to defend the gains of the revolution and to march together towards the Peoples' Democratic Republic of Ethiopia.

These were times when revolutionary movements like "The Oromo National Democratic Movement" (OBDINE), "The Afar National Liberation Movement" (ANALM), The Hadya Nationality Democratic Movement" (HABDINE) etc. all strongly committed to the revolutionary programme were courageously and victoriously fighting both narrow nationalist elements in their own nationalities and against great nation chauvinism side by side with the revolutionaries from the latter nationalities. These were also times when members and prominent leaders coming from all of Ethiopia's nationalities, like Fikre Merid the Amhara, Gebre Egziabher Hagos from Tigray and Abdulahi Yossuf of the Oromo nationalities etc. were falling side by side for the Ethiopian revolution. These were also times of great lessons to all of Ethiopia's oppressed who clearly saw the oppressors from all nationalities closing up the ranks under the banner of the counter revolution.

The betrayal of the National Democratic Revolution Programme by the Derg and the defeat of the Ethiopian revolution meant among other things a reversal of the gains of the oppressed nationalities. It meant mounting great nation chauvinism and opened a phase of barbaric repression of the oppressed nationalities.



ties by the former chauvinist bureaucracy which started to regain control of the local political power which it had formerly lost to the democratic mass organizations. From this time on the struggle for democratic rights as understood by the peasants to mean a struggle for the survival and supremacy of their democratic organs of power over the former feudo bourgeois bureaucracy became a question intimately linked to the question of nationalities in Ethiopia.

In this context of mounting ^{counter}revolution and great nation chauvinism, nationalist movements sprung up and gained momentum as a justified response to the growing repression unleashed against them. As it might be expected the response to this new challenge took different forms.

In the first place genuine revolutionary movements within the oppressed nationalities like OBDINE, ANLM, HBDINE etc. and newly created ones like the Sidama National Movement now waging a successful armed struggle in the south, correctly assessing the new situation and firmly upholding the revolutionary class struggle intensified their struggle side by side with revolutionaries from the oppressed nationalities. And this in spite of untold sacrifices and persecutions unleashed against them both from chauvinist and counter revolutionary quarters and narrow minded nationalities. Others like the OLF, the Somali Abo (which is another important Oromo group operating in the provinces of Arussi, Bale and Sidamo) the TPLF etc. continued their legitimate struggle against national oppression without yet coming out openly in favor of a revolutionary programme capable of uniting all of Ethiopia's nationalities.

To come to your question, in this context of repression against Ethiopia's nationalities ME'ISONE cannot but sympathize with all the nationalist groups fighting against repression and for their rights to self determination and equality. As to the OLF we hold that the struggle it is waging against national oppression is justified and we support this struggle just as we condemn all the atrocities that are being committed against the Oromo masses. We also sympathize with the other Oromo groups like the Somali Abo, the OBDINE etc. It is also evident that as far as ME'ISONE - an organization which embraces in its fold comrades from all Ethiopia's nationalities - is concerned, more sympathy goes to those forces within the oppressed nationalities whose primary concern is the revolutionary class struggle in Ethiopia as a whole and who fight for self determination and equality within the framework of the general revolutionary struggle that would ultimately liberate all of Ethiopia's peoples from oppression and exploitation. We also call upon all the forces that are struggling against national oppression to coordinate their struggle with that of the oppressed masses and revolutionary forces in Ethiopia.

How does ME'ISONE see the relations of Djibouti and Ethiopia?

F.A. As far back as the 1960s, when Haile Selassie was openly entertaining hegemonic designs concerning this territory, we have consistently opposed these pretensions and supported the right of the Djibouti population to self determination and independence. After 1974 the military government has dropped these absurd claims and has recognized the independence of the territory. We believe that this is a correct stand and we shall continue to uphold the right of the peoples of Djibouti to live in peace, equality and independence without any intervention from the two neighbouring states.

What is the position of ME'ISONE as regards the Eritrean problem?

F.A. The Eritrean problem is one of the most thorny legacies of the feudo-fascist regime of Haile Selassie. The legitimate struggle of the nationalities in Eritrea has been going on for the last 18 years and would continue if a just and democratic solution, that takes into account the legitimate aspirations of

the Eritrean masses is not found. After the deposition of Haile Selassie the Derg has always continued the chauvinist policy of the former regime except for a short period in 1976-77 when under pressure from the revolutionary forces in Ethiopia itself and the principled stand of ME'ISONE, it made some short lived attempts to solve the problem peacefully and democratically.

In fact as I have already pointed out earlier, during the years of ME'ISONE's alliance with the Derg the national question in Ethiopia was in the process of getting democratic solutions. The National Democratic Revolution Programme recognized the right to all Ethiopian nationalities to self determination and proposed national regional autonomy as a framework for a democratic integration. At that time some movements of the oppressed nationalities in Ethiopia and the Eritrean Fronts did not accept this programme considering that it offers too little. But, in spite of the fact that our own programme recognizes the right of all Ethiopian nationalities to self determination up to and including secession we accepted this (NDRP) as a minimum platform for two main reasons. In the first place, compared to the earlier chauvinist policies of the Emperor and the Derg the recognition of the right to self determination and national regional autonomy was a formidable step forward and in the right direction. Secondly, ME'ISONE argued that even if the NDRP recognized the rights of nationalities beyond the minimum platform as stipulated in it, it remains that its achievement cannot be seen in isolation from the advancing revolutionary process. Hence ME'ISONE's insistence and repeated call to all progressives within the different nationalities to unite and defeat internal reaction and world imperialism in order to create the favourable conditions for the exercise of genuine self determination.

After the publication of the programme in April 76 ME'ISONE fought consistently for the opening of negotiations with the two Eritrean fronts. To that effect it proposed that an open call be made to Eritrean progressives to join the ranks of the ongoing revolution. This was done with the publication of the nine points peace declaration of May 1976 which was worked out mainly by ME'ISONE militants and stands even to this day as the most coherent and comprehensive document for negotiations with the Fronts. But even while making this call publicly, the military government was secretly preparing "peasant march" on Erythrea which was the Dergs version of the "final solution" for the Eritrean problem. As soon as ME'ISONE discovered that such preparations were underway it categorically condemned the proposed march in a special issue of its organ in June 1976. In this issue ME'ISONE demanded that the march be called off immediately and negotiations be resumed on the basis of the 9 points peace declaration. We can say publicly today that this incident constituted the first major clash between the Derg and ME'ISONE since the alliance was formed a few months earlier. Here I must also recall that the Derg was preparing its march, in spite of the fact that the 9 points peace declaration was enthusiastically supported by the Ethiopian masses.

Due to the pressure of the revolutionary forces on the Derg and the open refusal of the Ethiopian masses to join the "march" and due also to the strong resistance on the part of the Eritrean masses, the "march" was hurriedly called off and the way paved for the resumption of the negotiations. But the peace talks that went on during the following months did not succeed due to the intransigent attitudes of both the Derg and the Eritrean Fronts.

In 1977 the betrayal by the Derg of the NDRP meant, as I indicated earlier counter revolution, mounting chauvinism and repression against Ethiopia's oppressed nationalities and even more intransigence towards the Eritrean struggle. As everywhere else the response of the Fronts in Eritrea was to mount a vast military offensive which took place in the summer of the same year. The offensive, then favoured by the war in the Ogaden, was contained only a year later with the help of Soviet bloc countries.

When ME'ISONE went underground in August 1977, one of the demands that it put forward was the opening of negotiations with the Eritrean Fronts. Ever since it has consistently upheld this correct position. In July 1978, the leaders of the two fronts made a common declaration in Beirut and stated for the first time that they were ready to negotiate without any preconditions. They also made known their readiness to settle the problem peacefully in the interest of justice and the revolutionary struggle in the region. This is a very positive step forward on the part of the Eritrean Fronts. But the Derg, blinded by its soviet made military might, ignored this call and persued its policy of war and destruction.

We have already said that the Eritrean problem cannot be solved by military means. We may repeat here what we have already said about the Derg's incapacity to solve the problems of the Ethiopian revolution. Subsequently we may ask how this government can be democratic in its dealings with the Eritrean problem alone while its whole policy is based on antidemocracy, chauvenism and counter revolution. We therefore believe that the solution to the Eritrean problem should be looked for outside the Derg. It can be solved only when the oppressed nationalities in Ethiopia join hands to struggle against their common enemies and thus creat the conditions for the genuine exercise of the rights of all Ethiopia's nationalities to self determination.

We therefore support the call for negotiation without preconditions made by the Eritrean Fronts. We condemne the Dergs attitude that continues to ignore this historical call and its policy of war. We demand the immediate opening of negotiations and the settlement of the problem without any outside interference. We also call upon all Eritrean progressives to join hands with progressive forces in Ethiopia in order to fight for democracy, genuine equality of nationalities and national independance. Only such a struggle would creat the necessary conditions to solve the Eritrean problem in a peaceful and just manner in the interest of the broad masses.