

ME'ISONE AND THE STRUGGLE FOR NATIONAL INDEPENDENCE (contd.)

The years of the revolutionary offensive (1974-77) witnessed the proclamation of the revolutionary decrees that transformed the economic basis of the old feudal order and seriously undermined the traditional political structure. By late 1975, the growing unity and strength of the forces opposed to these changes, put on the agenda of the progressive forces, the urgent necessity of creating a broad democratic and patriotic front in order to face this challenge. ME'ISONE proposed a clear anti-feudal and anti-imperialist platform to serve as the basis of unity for all progressive forces. This platform, known as the Ethiopian National Democratic Revolution Programme (NDRP) was accepted by the Derg and was proclaimed as the comprehensive guide line of the Ethiopian Revolution in April 1976.

The question of Ethiopia's national independence, considered part and parcel of the revolutionary struggle, was dealt with correctly. The NDRP opted for a policy of non-alignment and for the unsweaving defence of Ethiopia's national independence. This was in line not only with the programme of the ME'ISONE but also with the longstanding spirit of patriotism of the Ethiopian people. The adaptation of this policy was not however achieved without a struggle waged against two kinds of deviations. On the one hand revolutionaries had to fight against pro-american elements who opposed the programme as a whole and opted for the maintenance of Ethiopia's "traditional alliances". On the other hand, some "progressives" maintained that Ethiopia's new foreign policy can not be a neutral one in the struggle between imperialism and the socialist camp. The later, they asserted, was the natural ally of countries like Ethiopia who are fighting for their emancipation. ME'ISONE and the now defunct organization "Proletarian League" firmly stood against both these tendencies. They struggled for a policy of consistent non-alignment not only because it would guarantee the national independence of the country but also because this policy would sense the revolutionary struggle. They asserted that the revolution would succeed only if and when the Ethiopian people rely mainly on their own forces. They maintained that alliance with any of the superpowers would only mean an inevitable intervention in the country's internal affairs and the reversal of the revolutionary process.

With the democratic and patriotic objectives of the revolutionary struggle thus clearly outlined what remained was the mobilization, organization and arming of the popular masses to implement the declared objectives. The purpose of the Provisional Office for Mass Organizational Affairs (POMOA) was precisely this. The agitational and organizational work done by the POMOA essentially composed of ME'ISONE militants, during the year 1976 was so effective that by the end of the year a situation of dual power developed in the country. For the first time in Ethiopian history, a new democratic power capable of taking the destiny of the country into its hand existed side by side with the

reactionary state bureaucracy of the former regime. A serious and life and death confrontation issued from this dual power situation.

The revolutionary camp lead by some of the progressive elements within the Derg, POMOA and ME'ISONE had a very dense network of democratic mass organizations which mobilized millions of peasants, workers, city dwellers, youth and women. These mass organizations had their own elected tribunals, executive committees and security forces. The counter revolutionary camp correctly perceived that the development of these democratic organizations and their vanguard forces constituted a mortal danger to its own survival.

It can be said that from 1976 to the end of 1978, the history of the struggle between revolution and counter-revolution in Ethiopia was essentially one of the life and death struggle between these two centers of power. The democratic forces struggled for the integral implementation of all the democratic and patriotic provisions of the NDRP, for the creation of a democratic and independent Ethiopia and for the strengthening of the democratic organizations working towards these objectives. The counter-revolutionary camp allied itself first with American imperialism in order to arrest the steady developemnt of the mass organizations and the vanguard forces and to reverse the revolutionary process. When these attempts failed, they allied themselves with the Soviet Union to persue the same counter-revolutionary objectives.

During the year 1976 and a part of 1977, American imperialism closely worked with the anti-NDRP forces in Ethiopia. It fomented a series of reactionary and fascistic coup d'Etats, most serious among which was the one attempted by Major Sisay Habte and general Getachew Nadew in July 1976. When this attempt was foiled, american imperialism not only continued to arm feudal bandits in the rural areas but also unleashed assassination squads to spread terror in Ethiopia's urban centers. What has been known as the "white terror campaign" thus started in September 1976. The declared aim of the counter revolutionary forces and the ultra "left" EPRP was the physical liquidation of all the vanguard elements of the revolutionary struggle and specially the members of ME'ISONE, the POMOA, elected leaders of the democratic mass organizations etc. During the following months terror raged in Ethiopia's cities and hundreds of progressives were murdered. Fully aware of the dangerous implications of "white terror" ME'ISONE agitated for the creation of "Committees for the Defence of the Revolution" (CDR) and the immediate arming of such committees. It also called for the immediate proclamation of the democratic rights bill that it prepared in early 1976. However, the Derg, which by this time was under the full control of the rightist forces gave a deaf ear to the popular demands. In fact at this time some Derg members were secretly providing arms for the EPRP.

The situation was further aggravated by the isolation of the revolution in the international field. In fact, international

imperialism waged simultaneously a vicious propaganda campaign aimed at discrediting the Ethiopian revolution in the eyes of world progressive forces. They spoke of fascism and terror knowing very well that the fascists and terrorists in the country were those very forces who had their political and material support. They said little about the white terror that was raging in Ethiopia and that was claiming the lives of hundreds of the country's valourous sons and daughters among whom the vast majority were members of ME'ISONE.

At this time the Soviet Union and its allies had their own reasons to fear the development of the revolution in Ethiopia. In fact, it was clear to every one that the democratic and patriotic camp was led by ME'ISONE and that this camp struggled for the integral implementation of the NDRP. The establishment of a democratic power in an independent Ethiopia run counter to the hegemonic designs of the Soviet Union. It was clear that the later interests would only be served by an anti-democratic and puppet regime, isolated from the people and entirely dependent on foreign powers. The Soviet Union understood that neither the "maoist" and "bourgeois nationalist" ME'ISONE nor any other democratic government that may come as a result of victorious revolution could be counted upon to serve this purpose. Just as american imperialism and internal reaction, the Soviet Union was therefore interested in the dismiss of dual power.

That is why one cannot even speak of moral and political support, let alone material support from the Soviet bloc countries. During these critical months, these countries repeatedly turned down demands for arms and other material and political support to the besieged revolution. In fact, the so-called "anti-imperialist" forces in the west was busy denigrating the revolution just as the imperialists were doing. Not only did these forces spoke of fascism and "counter-revolutionary" terror but also praised the terrorist EPRP for its "achievements" and "contributions" to the Ethiopian revolution. This was no accident. The Soviet Bloc countries and their allies in the west knew very well the anti-ME'ISONE EPRP would fall in the Soviet designs in Ethiopia. These "anti-imperialist" forces maintained good relations with the ultra "left" organization and extended both moral and material support in the hope of doing away with the "maoist" ME'ISONE and promoting its take over of the Derg itself.

The Soviet attitude changed however after the rightist coup d'Etat attempt was foiled in February 1977. Following the events of the 3rd of February, the limited arming of the CDRs, the promises of the immediate proclamation of democratic rights, the unprecedented development of the democratic mass organizations etc. left the rightist camp completely demoralized. But very soon, the development of the democratic organs of peoples' power under the leadership of the POMOA and ME'ISONE led the formerly progressive members of the Derg to reconsider the whole situation. Something had to be done to arrest the developments of these organizations which they did not control. Mengistu's organization, SEDED, opposed democratic demands of the people and

started to ally itself with the rightists. For the first time a serious breach was in the making between ME'ISONE and SEDED.

It is at this time that the Soviet bloc countries suddenly "discovered" the Ethiopian Revolution. Following the take over by Mengistu (and having lost all hope in the discredited EPRP) delegations from the Soviet bloc countries flocked to Addis Abeba to give support to the "Ethiopian Revolution". At the end of March 1977, Fidel Castro came to Ethiopia and offered the solidarity of the soviet bloc countries in Ethiopia's struggle against American imperialism. But what was becoming clear was that the new rightist alliance and the soviet bloc countries had the same basic interest in arresting the revolutionary development and putting an end to the process that would lead to the establishment of a democratic government in an independent Ethiopia.

The new situation brought forth new tasks. Ethiopia's democratic and patriotic forces had to defeat the continuous plots of american imperialism and arab reaction without going counter to the principles layed down in the NDRP and alienating the country's national independence. This meant an exposure of the dangers of Soviet "internationalism" and an intensive agitation built around the ideas of self reliance and national independence. A week after Fidel Castros visit to Ethiopia, the "Voice of the Masses", the official organ of ME'ISONE, outlined in no uncertain terms, the position that should be taken by Ethiopia's progressive forces.

ME'ISONE declared that this belated support of the Soviet bloc countries was positive because it would help to break the isolation of the Ethiopian revolution in the international field. But at the same time, ME'ISONE dwelt upon the necessary limits of this support and in no uncertain terms warned Ethiopia's progressive forces of the dangers that led ahead if we rely on Soviet "internationalism". It stated :

"No matter how serious the economic, political and social problems may be, no matter how many revolutionaries may fall, in short no matter how great the sacrifices or how protracted the struggle may be, revolutionaries must, under all circumstances, rely on the 28 million Ethiopians and on the resources of the country. The day we start to deviate from this correct path and put our hope on foreign forces, let us stand warned that we are contributing towards the crippling of our revolution, endangering our age old national independence and preparing the country for the day of a new enslavement".

The development of events after the soviet intervention in Ethiopia clearly showed that this assesment was correct. Soviet intervention not only crippled the on going Etiopian revolution but also meant a naked violation of the motherland's national independence.

(To be continued)