

AN INTERVIEW TO THE B.B.C.

The following is the text of an interview given to the B.B.C by comrade Negede Gobezie, foreign affairs spokesman of the ME'ISONE. It was played on the programme of "Focus on Africa" on the 31 December 1979, and on "This week and Africa" on Saturday 5-1-80 in the morning and afternoon programmes.

B.B.C's INTRODUCTION TO THE INTERVIEW

ME'ISONE, one of the left wing groups in Ethiopia that has found itself in opposition to the ruling Council, the Derg, is claiming that its supporters are still being arrested and that thousands are being held in jail. In the early days, after the military coup five years ago, ME'ISONE cooperated with the Derg. But in 1977, ME'ISONE fell out with the Derg accusing it of abandoning the principles of the National Democratic Revolution Programme and went underground. ME'ISONE was then badly hit by the Derg's Red Terror campaign and many of its leaders and supporters were rounded up and detained. One ME'ISONE leader who escaped the "Red Terror" was Dr. Negede Gobezie who is now ME'ISONE's foreign affairs spokesman. Patrick Gilks asked him why ME'ISONE had broken with the Derg in 1977 and how many ME'ISONE supporters were lost during the Red Terror campaign.

P.G. What in fact are your differences with the PMAC ?

N.G. We did not ally ourselves with the Derg for opportunist reasons. It was a principled alliance based on the acceptance by the military government of the National Democratic Revolution Programme. This Programme, which we still consider as the comprehensive guide line for the Ethiopian revolution provides among other things, full exercise of democratic rights for the Ethiopian people including the right to organize in many political parties. It provides the right for all Ethiopian nationalities to self-determination and national regional autonomy. It provides for a foreign policy based on strict non-alignment as understood to mean a policy independent from all foreign powers.

During the time of our alliance the Derg more or less

respected all these. But starting from April 1977 it became clear that the Derg was betraying all this commitments. And given this fact the choice we had at that time was either to accept this betrayal and maintain our alliance or break this alliance and go underground.

P.G. Not too many of your people were arrested in August 77 but subsequently the next year there was a red terror organized by the government and the other organizations against ME'ISONE or against people thought to belong to ME'ISONE. Did you loose a lot of people in this red terror?

N.G. I think it would be fair to say first that the red terror was not organized against ME'ISONE alone. It was organized against all opposition to the military. It was organized to terrorize the whole Ethiopian people into submission. Hundreds and specially from among the youth and the workers have perished during this period and many others were forced into exile. Thousands, among whom we have 20.000 comrades were thrown into the Derg's jails.

Some people tend to think that with the red terror period over in March 1978, the Derg has grown less repressive and that things have developed for the better in Ethiopia. In fact a new and more subtle repression, specially and mainly directed against ME'ISONE and patriotic and democratic forces has developed in the country. I think it is important to note this point because out of the 20.000 prisoners that we have in the Derg's jails, more than half were arrested after the end of the "red terror" period.

P.G. So in a sense arrests are still going on ?

N.G. Yes they are still going on.

P.G. And killings ?

N.G. Killings, not as they used to be during the "red terror" period.

P.G. Given the number of people whom you say have been arrested and killed during the "red terror" period and subsequently do you still have a functional organization inside Ethiopia ? I mean how strong would you say ME'ISONE actually is now ?

N.G. We can't deny that the organization has been weakened, but we have now a completely secret leadership which works smoothly and we continue, even under this repression to put out our paper "The Voice of the Masses". We are reorganizing the cells in the factories, in the kebelles, in government offices, in schools. We are very carefully working within the army and the militia. We are now, you know, really engaged in organizational and political tasks. Honestly, I should say that a lot remains to be done.



P.G. Given all this do you think that there is any chance now of reconciliation between you and the Derg, the military council ?

N.G. Will you see, we are fighting for the realization of clear objectives. We allied ourselves with the Derg when we thought that this would advance the cause of the Ethiopian revolution. We broke this alliance when we considered that it was self defeating. The Derg taken as a whole is no more considered by Ethiopian progressives as a democratic and patriotic force and no reconciliation is possible with it.

P.G. Now, you yourself returned some months after ME'ISONE had in fact gone underground and you returned in secret and spent a little time in the Cuban embassy in Addis Abeba, was this in fact an attempt at reconciliation and were you going back to try and see if there can be any agreement between you and the Derg.

N.G. The Cubans at that time took the initiative to help in negotiations between the progressive elements within the Derg and ME'ISONE. We were not opposed to negotiations. But we had our principled positions for this negotiations. We demanded the release of all progressive prisoners including those democrats and patriots who were not members of our organization. We wanted a return to unity on the basis of the National Democratic Revolution Programme. But the rightists within the Derg opposed this attempt at reconciliation.

P.G. You could'nt find enough support for reconciliation within the Derg ?

N.G. No we did'nt.

P.G. There were reports at that time that you had received help in going back to Addis Abeba from both Cuba and USSR, from Russia. What in fact are ME'ISONE's relationships with Cuba and Russia ? Do you have close relations with these two countries ?

N.G. The Soviet Union had nothing to do with this. As an organization we never had relations with the Soviet Union. As clearly indicated in our programme and the National Democratic Revolution Programme, we stand for a foreign policy based on strict non-alignment, we did not fight american imperialism to fall into the sphere of Soviet influence.

This patriotic and revolutionary stand of strict non-alignment has always been an obstacle to good relations with the Soviet Union. You should not forget that counter-revolution and repression against our organization and other democratic and patriotic forces have grown hand in hand with growing Soviet involvement in Ethiopia.

P.G. Do you in fact cooperate with other organizations who are opposed to the Derg ?

N.G. You see, there are two kinds of opposition to the military. As a matter of principle cooperation with the rightist opposition, the Ethiopian Democratic Union and other forces that we consider as reactionaries is out of question for us. But we have made a call to all progressive and democratic forces to unite on the basis of the National Democratic Revolution Programme of April 1976, and to coordinate their struggle for democracy and the national independence of Ethiopia. At this early stage, all we can say is that the response we have received from these democratic and patriotic forces is really encouraging.

P.G. Do you actually see any possibility of a successful broad based opposition movement taking over from the military regime ?

N.G. Will you see, there is actually a broad based opposition to the military regime. It exists. There is no region in Ethiopia where the people are not rising in defense of their revolutionary victories gained during the years 1974-77. The problem, I think, is not one of the inexistence of this broad based opposition but of its unity. We are trying to bring all these forces, all this democrats, all these patriots into a truly national revolutionary front on the bases of the National Democratic Revolution Programme of 1976.

P.G. Who would be organizing, who would run this front, is it a vehicle for ME'ISONE to try to take power itself ?

N.G. No. It will be a national front in which all democratic and patriotic forces could participate equally.

P.G. Negede Gobezie of the Ethiopian opposition movement : ME'ISONE.

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HAVE YOU READ OUR LAST ISSUE ?

The March 1980 issue of "New Ethiopia" contains the full text of the interview given to two foreign journalists by FREWE ABAYNEH, a representative of the underground leadership of ME'ISONE at a meeting in Addis Abeba in September 1979. It gives a brief outline on ME'ISONE, an analysis of the present situation in Ethiopia, our perspectives for the struggle, ME'ISONE's stand on Soviet bloc intervention in Ethiopia, its position on the Eritrean question, etc. If you have not read this historical document, please write to us. We shall send you a copy.