

September 12 : Six years after

On September 12, 1974, the revolutionary upsurge of the Ethiopian people that started six months earlier registered one of the earliest and important victories on the path of liberation of Ethiopia. On that day, the tyrant Haile Selassie was deposed following tremendous pressure from the popular movement. This victory, spectacular as it might have been was neither the last nor the most significant. But it is celebrated every year as an important land mark on the path of Ethiopia's liberation.

This year's celebration however, gave no cause for rejoicing to the military dictatorship and still less to the Ethiopian people. Six years after the deposition of the tyrant and three years after the post 1977 counter revolutionary developments, the Ethiopian peoples find themselves at grips with one of the most ruthless military dictatorships in independent Africa. Under the military's "Socialism" and soviet "internationalism" today's Ethiopia is deep in a serious economic, social, political and moral crisis that has no parallel in its history. It has become a country which holds all the gloomy records in terms of repression, human rights violations, famine and misery. In all respects, the present dictators and their Soviet masters have amply demonstrated that they have no lessons to receive from the tyrant Haile Selassie and American imperialism.

Haile Selassie's Ethiopia was ravaged by a deep economic crisis whose most accute manifestation was the 1973 Wollo famine which claimed the lives of 200 000 poor peasants. According to figures given by the dictatorship itself "socialist" Ethiopia does not fare better. In fact the opposite is true. Since 1978, famine has constantly been on the rise and now the number of famine stricken people in the country stands at 5 089 000 ! This figure has no parallel in the country's history. It is also the most serious case of mass starvation in the present world.

In the cities misery and unemployment were rampant during the feudal days. Now, not only new jobs have not been created to absorb the growing army of unemployed, but the closing of factories and other services is provoking mass lay offs and increased unemployment in Ethiopia's urban centers. Systematic persecution of small private contractors is driving dozens of Ethiopians out of the business. The repression against qualified workers and intellectuals coupled with the corruption and mismanagement of the ruling clique has completely disorganized the national economy.

This deep economic crisis is of course closely linked with the unprecedented political repression that has come along with the counter revolutionary developments of the last three years. If Haile Selassie's Ethiopia was indeed a feudal tyranny, the present "socialist" regime has turned it into a prison state. Well over 20 000 prisoners are languishing in the Derg's prisons. During the past three years, and specially during the 1978 "red terror" campaign, thousands of Ethiopia's democrats and patriots have been summarily executed. The human rights records of the present regime are so poor, to say the least, that concerned international organizations, including Amnesty International and the UN Human rights commission have been regularly condemning the regime for its "gross human rights violations".

Famine and repression have also forced about 2 million people to leave their homes and seek exile in the neighbouring countries. According to figures of the UNHCR one out of every ten refugee in the world is an Ethiopian. This makes the refugee problem in the horn of Africa the most serious case of famine and misery facing the international community.

But all this is not going unchallenged. In fact the other side of this gloomy picture is the rising tide of popular and patriotic resistance that is manifesting itself in almost all regions of the country. Unprecedented chauvinism and repression against Ethiopia's oppressed nationalities has given rise to determined national resistance that has no parallel in the country's history. The past year has witnessed the intensification of the political and armed struggle of the Tigray, Oromo, Sidama and other nationalities. In Eritrea, the promises and illusions of a "quick victory" and the euphoria attending the "victories" of late 1978 have all vanished into the air. The difficulties encountered at the Nakfa front held by the EPLF forces and the subsequent demoralization of the troops stationed in the region have driven home the failure of the regime to "crush" the Eritrean revolution. Economic crisis and political repression have brought about a general upsurge of democratic opposition and an increasing contradiction within the armed forces.

Concerning the democratic forces, one important development of the past year is the growing awareness of the necessity of unity in order to do away with the chauvinist military dictatorship. Up to now all the democratic forces which, taken together, would have formed a tremendous opposition, have not been able to unite. The survival of the dictatorship, which is completely isolated from the people, has been rendered possible not only by the flow of arms from the Soviet Union and the presence of foreign troops on Ethiopia's soil, but also by the dispersion of the democratic opposition forces. This fact is being realized by more and more revolutionaries. Discussions with Eritrean progressives that have been going on for some time have given some encouraging results and have paved the way for a principled alliance. Contacts with nationality movements are underway and the prospects for the creation of the long overdue democratic front have never been so promising. During the coming year, ME'ISONE intends to continue on this path which is the only



guarantee for a lasting victory and complete liberation.

These developments, which are taking place against a background of a steadily rising tide of popular resistance are having their demoralizing effects on the chauvinist dictatorship. They account for the low profile maintained by the otherwise pompous and extravagant regime during this year's september 12 celebrations. Not only the usual rhetoric on the "great achievements" of the regime was curbed, but also Mengistu himself was obliged to acknowledge before a group of foreign journalists that the dictatorship's troubles were far from over. In addition to the two war fronts in Eritrea and the Ogaden, Mengistu declared that "the country" was also fighting a third war in Tigray. Other developments, not yet acknowledged by the regime are, however, equally important and would surely have far reaching consequences during the coming months. Growing militancy of workers and peasants and signs of unrest within the armed forces, of which some recent examples will be given in this issue of "New Ethiopia" are unmistakable signs of the impending tempest.

Encouraged by these bright perspectives, ME'ISONE will continue to intensify its struggle on the side of the Ethiopian people. It calls upon all progressive and peace loving forces in the world to express solidarity with the peoples of Ethiopia in their struggle to achieve the noble objectives cherished by all progressive mankind : peace, democracy and social justice.

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