

FOCUS OF THE MONTH : THE EMERGING ETHNO-CENTRIC ONE-PARTY RULE

On Monday 23 August, the Council of Peoples' Representatives replaced the TGE's Council of Representatives and assumed legislative power in the country. The four-day session of the first legislature of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia ended after electing a number of prominent personalities of the now defunct TGE to the highest posts of government as provided by the new Constitution.

WHO HOLDS REAL POWER UNDER THE STALINIST CONSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENT ?

Although EPRDF's Constitution has been acclaimed as «democratic» in a statement issued by 18 Western ambassadors in Ethiopia, many Ethiopians have already labelled it as a «text book case» of Stalinist constitutional theory and practice and as such a dangerous document to peace and democracy in Ethiopia.

Criticism by Ethiopian constitutional lawyers has focused on the basic mark that distinguishes democratic constitutions from Stalinist constitutional theory and practice: ie the question of separation of powers. This principle which in most democratic countries defines the respective responsibilities of the executive, the legislative and the judicial branches of government is rejected by all Stalinist constitutions as a clear case of «bourgeois hypocrisy» and replaced by what Soviet constitutionalists called the principle of the «unity of state authority». This is essentially the constitutional expression of the Leninist revolutionary call «All power to the Soviets». According to this theory a genuinely democratic constitutional arrangement has no room for three separate powers which can be put on equal footing but one and only one authority which in all Stalinist constitutions, is called: «the highest organ of state authority». All Stalinist constitutions including those of Mengistu Haile Mariam and Meles are based on this theory.

According to Article 108 of Stalin's 1936 Constitution «In the USSR, the Supreme Soviet is the highest organ of State power».

Article 62 of Mengistu's 1987 Constitution: «The National SHENGO is the supreme organ of State power in the People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia.

Article 50(2) of EPRDF's Constitution: The Council of People's Representatives is the supreme organ of State authority of the Federal Government.

Theoretically at least, power is concentrated in this «supreme authority». In all Stalinist constitutions, this «supreme organ of state power» is invariably the

parliament, albeit under different names, composed of «elected representatives of the people». Over and above its functions as the legislative branch of government, it appoints and dismisses the executive, has the final say in the appointment, promotion and removal of judges, conducts judicial review by giving the legislative branch final jurisdiction over all matters relating to the interpretation, protection and enforcement of the Constitution, etc.

In practice, however, the «supremacy» of this «supreme organ of State authority» is non-existent. This constitutional arrangement invariably leads to one party rule and, in the final analysis, to dictatorship by a tiny minority.

Stalinist theory of «unity of State power» is also based on the concept of «vertical delegation of power». This means that the people «delegate» power to their «freely elected representatives» in the «Soviets», the «Shengo» or Meles' «Meker Bet». These representatives in turn «delegate» power to the ruling party which overwhelmingly controls the parliament. Operating as it does on the basis of «Democratic Centralism», the «ruling party» then «delegates» its powers to its Central Committee which in turn surrenders authority to the saint of saints which is the politburo. In practice, therefore, it is not the so-called «supreme organ of state authority» which is in control but rather the ruling party and in the final analysis the clique or individual at the head of this party. Such being the case, one does not have to read between the lines to understand that the sweeping powers recognized to the «supreme organ» are in fact surrendered to a handful of individuals or even one single autocrat.

THE PRIME MINISTER: DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Immediately after Meles was named Prime Minister, Ethiopian TV listed his new responsibilities. The following is the text of the report by Ethiopian TV on 23 August.

The duties and responsibilities of the prime minister are as follows:

1. The prime minister is the country's executive head, the chairman of the Council of Ministers and the Commander-in-chief of the armed forces.

2. The Prime Minister will nominate cabinet ministers from among the members of the two councils

or other capable individuals and will approve their appointment after presenting their candidature to the Federal Council.

3. The Prime Minister follows up and ascertains the implementation of the laws, policies, directives and resolutions adopted by the Federal Council.

4. He directs, coordinates and represents the Council of Ministers.

5. He follows up the implementation of the policies, regulations and directives issued by the council of ministers.

6. He carries out the country's foreign policy.

7. He nominates commissioners, the president and deputy president of the Central High Court and the auditor-general and approves their appointments by presenting them to the Federal Council.

8. He follows up the efficiency and effectiveness of the administration and takes corrective measures when found necessary.

9. In addition to Articles No 2. and No. 7, he will also appoint senior civil government officials.

10. In accordance with the laws and decisions made by the Federal Council, he submits to the president nominees for the award of medals.

11. Periodically, he will present his report on the state of the nation, the achievements of the government and its future plans to the Federal Council.

12. He will carry out every duty stated in the constitution and other duties which are stated in other laws.

13. He will respect the constitution.

These are the duties and responsibilities of the prime minister.

THE MULTI-ETHNIC CABINET : IS THE TPLF MAKING HISTORY?

On presenting his 17-man cabinet, Meles made it a point to disclose each minister's ethnic origin. Western governments, NGOs and media, once again impressed by TPLF's rhetoric, picked this up and are now claiming that for the first time in the hitherto Amara dominated state, the country has a government which «genuinely reflects its ethnic diversity».

The fact is that even the casual observer of Ethiopian politics, let alone those western governments and NGOs with a long history of meddling in the affairs of the country, know there is nothing new in what TPLF tries to present as yet another historic innovation. Political hegemony and «leadership» in Ethiopia has always been a multi-ethnic affair. Class background and loyalty to the inner circles of the privileged groups and not ethnic origin have always constituted the decisive criteria in appointing people to important posts. All the country's ministerial cabinets - since the first Council of Ministers set up by Emperor Menilik in the early years of the century - were multi-ethnic cabinets. To drive our point home we can take the example of the composition of Mengistu's 1st cabinet and compare it to the new «historic cabinet» set up by Meles.

THE GOVERNMENT OF THE FEDERAL DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF ETHIOPIA (FDRE)

| OFFICE | OFFICE HOLDER | ETHNIC GROUP |
|---|------------------------|--------------|
| President (largely ceremonial) | Dr. Negasso Gidada | Oromo |
| Prime Minister and C-in-C of armed forces | Meles Zenawi | Tigran |
| Vice Prime Minister/ Minister of defense | Tamerat Layne | Amara |
| Vice Prime Minister (Economic Affairs) | Kassu Ilalla | Gurage |
| Minister of Agriculture | Dr. Teketel Foprssido | Kambatta |
| Transport and Communications | Dr. Abdulmejid Hussein | Somali |
| Finance | Suffian Ahmed | Oromo |
| Trade and Industry | Kassahun Ayele | Amara |
| Water Development | Shifferaw Jarso | Oromo |
| Mines and Energy | Ezedin Ali | Adere |
| Economic Development and Cooperation | Girma Birru | Oromo |
| Works and Urban Development | Haile Assegid | Gurage |
| Education | Guennet Zewde (F) | Amara |
| Health | Dr. Adem Ibrahim | Oromo |
| Labour and social affairs | Hassen Abdela | Afar |
| Foreign Affairs | Seyoum Mesfin | Tigray |
| Justice | Mahitome Solomon | Amara |
| Information and Culture | Wolde Michael Cahmo | Wollayita |
| Revenue Collection Board | Desta Amare | Hadiya |

THE GOVERNMENT OF THE PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF ETHIOPIA (PDRE) (Mengistu's last cabinet)

| OFFICE | OFFICE HOLDER | ETHNIC GROUP |
|--|---------------------------|------------------|
| President / C-in-C of armed forces | Mengistu Haile Mariam | Konso |
| Vice President | Fesseha Desta | Tigray |
| Prime Minister | Tesfay Dinka | Oromo |
| Deputy Prime Minister (Economic Affairs) | Youssef Ahmed | Adere |
| Deputy Prime Minister (Administration) | Shimelis Adugna | Oromo |
| Interior | Tesfaye Wolde Selassi | Kulo (Keffa) |
| Interior (Minister of State) | Zemene Kassegne | Amara |
| Information | Abdul Hafez Youssef | Adere |
| Foreign Affairs | Tesfaye Tadesse | Mixed (Keffa) |
| Agriculture | Mersie Ijigu | Amara |
| Agriculture (Minister of State) | Gizaw Negussie | Amara |
| Mines and Energy | Tekeze Shewa Aitenfisu | Amara |
| Justice | Wondayen Mehretu | Tigray |
| Education | Yayeirad Kitaw | Amara |
| Health | Afewerk Berhane | Tigray (Eritrea) |
| Transport and Communications | Mersha Wodajo | Gurage |
| Plan | Aklilu Afework | Amara |
| Urban Development | Tadesse Kidane Mariam | Amara |
| Industry | Tadios Haregework | Mixed |
| Internal and foreign trade | Hambissa Wakwaya | Oromo |
| Finance and foreign eco. relations | Bekele Tamirat | Amara |
| Labour and Social Affairs | Zegeye Asfaw | Oromo |
| Construction | Aragaw Tiruneh | Amara |
| Culture and sports | Tewelde Berhan Egziabhere | Tigray |
| Environment | Tsegaw Ahele | Amara |

Judging from the above, the least one can say is that Mengistu's cabinet is no less «diversified» than that of Meles'. One can even say that, more in line with the country's ethnic reality, two of Mengistu's cabinet members could be classified as «mixed» as they could not be identified with any ethnic group in the country since their parents were from different ethnic origins as is the case for millions of other Ethiopians. The highly strategic posts of Commander-in-chief of the armed forces, the Ministry of the Interior and Foreign Affairs were in the hands of a Konso, a Kulo and an Ethiopian of «mixed» origin respectively. As these strategic posts are now occupied by Meles and Seyoum, both from Tigray and politburo members of the Marxist-Leninist League of Tigray, it can reasonably be argued that as far as strategic posts are concerned the new «historic» cabinet is less «ethnically diversified» than its predecessor.

If anything, TPLF's and some Westerners' high profile campaign about «ethnic diversity» would have a negative effect on the political process in Ethiopia because, if it is to be taken seriously, it is bound to raise problems rather than help solve the country's political crisis.

1. If Meles and his Western apologists go on claiming that cabinet members are there to represent their respective ethnic groups, they will have to address a series of embarrassing questions. We have more than 90 ethnic groups in Ethiopia. If the 17-man cabinet has been set up «taking into account the country's ethnic composition» there is an obvious need to select among these in order to determine which ethnic groups are to be «represented» in the country's central government and which groups are to be left out. To make this difficult choice, the most obvious criterion would seem the numerical and percentage distribution of the population. If this is the case, why is it that the Sidama, the Agew, the Guji, the Gamo, the Kaffa (each representing more than 1% of the population) were «unrepresented» while the Harari, accounting for 0.069% of the population were given a ministerial post?

2. If, according to TPLF's claims, these ministers «represent» their respective ethnic groups, why were the Oromos (29% of the population) left with a largely ceremonial presidency and why did the most important offices—defense, security and foreign affairs—go to

«representatives» of the Tigrean people which after all constitute less than 6% of the population?

These are of course questions which Ethiopia's democrats do not bother to ask as they do not recognize that members of the ruling clique represent ethnic groups as they claim. But this does not mean that the unwarranted claims and the orchestrated campaign about «ethnic representation» will not exacerbate ethnic tensions in the country.

DEFENSE AND SECURITY: ETHNIC HEGEMONY

Real political power in Ethiopia, always secured through force, was maintained through control of the army and the security forces. Mengistu was the Commander-in-Chief of the army and had the last word over matters relating to internal and external security. He exercised power through the use of the Workers' Party of Ethiopia, the Revolutionary Control Committee, the Revolutionary Defense squads, the labour unions, peasant Associations, etc. Meles is the Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces, controls the new Security Authority and exercises power through TPLF cadres and executives who control the umbrella organization EPRDF, peasant associations, etc.

A superficial look at the composition of the new cabinet may suggest that TPLF leaders are serious when they claim the distribution of ministerial posts takes into account the country's ethnic composition. Apart from Meles, there is only one Tigrean (Seyoum Mesfin) in the 17-man cabinet. But many more Tigreans appear at the assistant minister level in many ministries. These «Vice-Ministers», who are all members of the ethnic-based TPLF, seem to wield more power than the ministers themselves.

Notwithstanding TPLF's rhetoric about «ethnic equality» and «fair representation of ethnic groups», real power in the country still rests in the hands of individuals from the minority Tigrean ethnic group who control the country's defense and security apparatus.

TIGREAN HEGEMONY IN THE COUNTRY'S DEFENSE FORCES: If there is anything historic and

unprecedented in the the country's political history, it is surely the hegemony of one minority ethnic group over the country's defense apparatus:

The Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces is Meles Zenawi, a Tigrean and Chairman of both the ethnic based MLLT and TPLF. Although the post of Minister of Defense has gone to Tamerat Layne - a «representative» of the Amara ethnic group, his role is seriously undermined by the composition of the high command of Ethiopia's armed forces:

- **Minister of State for Defense in the Prime Minister's Office:** Gebre Tsadkan Gebre Tensay, a Tigrean, member of TPLF and MLLT and former Chief of Staff of the armed forces

- **Chief of Staff of the armed forces:** Yemane Kidane, a Tigrean, member of TPLF and MLLT and former deputy Chief of Staff,

- **Ground Forces Commander:** Mohammed Yonis, a TPLF commander,

- **Commander of the Ethiopian Air Force:** Abeba Tekl Haimanot: a Tigrean member of TPLF

- **Chief of Operations:** Hadish Araya, a Tigrean, member of TPLF.

TIGREAN HEGEMONY IN THE COUNTRY'S SECURITY APPARATUS:

Here again, ethnic hegemony is the characteristic feature of the country's security arrangements. Over the last months, several thousand demobilized TPLF fighters have become policemen, with a 50% pay rise for the ranks. The most reliable of these demobilized soldiers are to serve as security agents while the majority have joined the Ministry of Justice which has now taken over the police. The Interior ministry has been abolished, replaced by a civilian-sounding new Security, Immigration and Refugee Affairs Authority under a «general manager».

The «manager» of this Authority is Mr. Kinfe Gebermedhin, a Tigrean, previously Deputy Minister of the Interior and head of TPLF security. Kinfe will report directly to Meles who retains his own security team under Mulugeta Alemseged, another Tigrean and member of the TPLF Central Committee.

POLITICS

47 NGO LICENCES REVOKED: WHAT NEXT?

Forty-seven non-governmental organizations operating voluntary, charity and disaster relief programmes in Ethiopia were ordered to terminate their activities, close their offices and turn in all financial and material resources in their possession to the government's RRC.

In an official public notice which appeared in the State daily, the Ethiopian Herald (22 August 1995), the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission - RRC - acting on behalf of the government declared that the 47 NGOs failed to comply with the provisions of the bilateral agreements they had signed with it and that they did not meet the criteria set for re-registration.