

EDITORIAL

The Pyromaniac shouting "Fire !"

For the fifth time in as many years the people of Ethiopia are at grips with a disastrous famine. As usual, the Addis Abeba regime, "Armed by the east and fed by the west" as one observer put it, has appealed to the International Community for assistance. Over 3 million people in the war affected areas in the North are directly threatened by the present famine which some observers describe as the worst since 1973. The governments paper "Ethiopian Herald" disclosed in January that the famine had already started to take lives. It urged the International Community to assist the regime to cope with what the paper calls "a desperate situation".

The alarming ton used by the otherwise boastful and secretive Addis abeba regime has led some to suspect that this may be after all a false alarm. They fear that this might be yet another trick used by the wily DERGE to extort funds from the International Community. Judged against the background of past embezzlement of assistance funds and material this fear is quite justified. But this does not help much in view of the hard realities that the people of Ethiopia are facing. Famine has again struck the country. According to a UNICEF spokesman, "Dozens of thousands risk death" if international aid is not dispatched urgently.

ME'ISONE urges all governmental and non governmental organisations to continue and increase their assistance to the famine victims in Ethiopia. But the regimes responsibility in the past and present famines should never be over looked. In the past the DERG's appeal for help is that of a pyromaniac shouting "Fire !".

Just as the land tenure system that prevailed during the days of the Empire was unanimously held responsible for the famine that ravaged the country in 1973-74 now all observers agree that the problem is essentially (of the regimes' making. As early as 1980, ME'ISONE issued a memorandum that exposed the political and military factors that are the roots of the problem.

The famine in the country is attributed to two main factors. The fall in agricultural production and the collapse of the distribution system both of which are the result of the political military conflicts that ravage the country. The Memorandum cites some significant figures to drive home its point. The 2 million refugees and the 2.4 million "displaced personnes" together with over 200.000 young peasants forcibly conscripted for the armed forces represent a 18 % fall in the peasant productive force. The decrease in total production combined with an increase in subsistence consumption by the peasants resulted in a much smaller surplus for the market. But even when there is a surplus to be marketed the peasants demand manufactured goods in exchange for their grain. Here again, the general breakdown of the economy due to repression and the heavy cost of the different military conflicts has resulted in the fall of industrial production, thus making it difficult to satisfy the demands of surplus producing peasants. Considering this and many other factors which clearly show the regime's responsibility for the famine in the country, the memorandum stated "As long as the military dictatorship holds to Addis Abeba, there is no end in sight to these adverse political developments and the famine that they generate. One thing is already sure. As the famine generating factors are mainly of the regime's making the situation is bound to deteriorate even more" (1).

(1) Famine in Ethiopia : Memorandum prepared
ME'ISONE, July 1980

For the people of Ethiopia, the struggle to stamp out famine cannot be envisaged in isolation from the overall battle for democracy. And this popular struggle needs and deserves the support of all progressive and peace loving forces in the world. But the immediate task is that of saving dozens of thousands of Ethiopians from starvation and death. That is why ME'ISONE renews its urgent appeal to the International Community to :

1) Demand an end to the famine generating policies of the military dictatorship. We consider this as an indispensable step to create favourable conditions for an efficient relief work and to curb the effects of the disaster.

2) Increase assistance to the victims in the famine stricken areas.

3) See to it that the assistance reach the people in need by channeling their aid through International relief organisations operating in the country rather than using the official channels.

The "Red Star" Campaign a year later

It was on the 25th of January 1982 that Mengistu Haile Mariam announced in a widely publicised speech that the government was launching an ambitious campaign aimed at "The political and military reorganisation of Eritrea. From the outset, it was clear that the so called "Red Star Revolutionary Development Campaign" was an euphemism for the "final" military solution in Eritrea. The billions of dollars worth of investment for the "reconstruction of Eritrea" promised by the government as "part and parcel" of the Red Star Campaign were only meant for international consumption.

The declared objective of the government was to crush "The bandits" within "3 months" and to usher in an era