

EDITORIAL

The Urgency of A Democratic Alternative  
For Ethiopia

Many observers of the Ethiopian political scene and even many Ethiopians are baffled by the current state of affairs in Ethiopia. A decade ago the famine in the province of Wollo which claimed the lives of 200,000 Ethiopians served as the immediate cause triggering the Revolution in February 1974 leading to the downfall of Haile Selassie's regime. Once again, Ethiopia is suffering from a famine which has already claimed more than 300,000 lives; national liberation wars are raging in almost all corners of the country; the economy is in shambles. Yet, no significant and credible country-wide opposition has emerged to win the support of the Ethiopian peoples as a whole and to inspire confidence in the international democratic community that the infamy being perpetrated by the present regime is to be brought to an end soon.

Of course the famine in Wollo a decade ago did not by itself precipitated the downfall of Haile Selassie's regime. It was a convergence of revolutionary conditions with social and political nature that confronted an old decayed social order simultaneously such that the ancien regime could no more withstand the onslaught of the revolutionary pressures across the entire social and political spectrum.

The present situation prevalent in Ethiopia despite appearances of similarity with the last years of the pre-revolution era is qualitatively different. Subsequent to the euphoric years of the revolution which shattered the old feudal order, an era of night-

mares has set in beginning in mid-1977. By 1977 the convergence of several internal, regional and international factors brought the progress of the revolution to a halt and subsequently created the conditions for the total reversal of the Ethiopian revolution.

The current super-famine is nothing but the direct consequence of the defeat of the Ethiopian revolution.

The defeat of the Revolution led to the decimation of a whole generation of intellectuals, young farmers and workers: thousands killed, tens of thousands imprisoned, and many more thousands exiled.

The defeat of the revolution has meant misery for the millions of Ethiopia's peasantry and low-income city dwellers; it has meant the country's economy has gone down the drain. While it is an indisputable fact that the first two years of the revolution saw an impressive increase in over-all food production in the country-side, the misguided policies of the regime's so-called Agricultural Development Campaign, the persecution of the very beneficiaries of the revolution as Kulaks, the drive to collectivize peasant farms, the militarization of the peasantry, and the conversion of the country's farm-lands into perpetual battle grounds have inevitably resulted in the disintegration of the economy.

The defeat of the revolution meant the obliteration of the democratic experiment by the Ethiopian people through their local organizations which have now been converted into an extension of the repressive state apparatus.

It also meant an unprecedented build-up of the regime's war arsenals. A feudal army of 40,000



soldiers has grown ten-fold since 1977. The primary target of such a disproportionately oversized army are none other than the Ethiopian peoples of various nationalities who have taken up arms to assert their rights.

And, the defeat of the independent Ethiopian revolution has been made possible thanks to the massive Soviet and East-European intervention since 1977 in behalf of the military regime against the peoples of Ethiopia. The Soviets and their allies are so committed to the sustenance of the regime that they are involved not only as advisors to the government, but they have also acquired numerous operational positions in the armed forces, the secret service and the other branches of government.

Briefly, such is the current situation in Ethiopia. It is in this context that the present super-famine's effect on the regime must be weighed. Circumstances such as these and the extremely brutal character of the military regime have stifled overt political opposition other than national liberation movements.

Repeated indiscriminate and massive reprisal against suspected opposition elements have made overt opposition very difficult. The Ethiopian left and democratic forces, which still have the potential for mounting a viable opposition, remain divided not so much about what should be done now but because of their antagonistic positions in the past. No less important is the regional and international geopolitical factor which while offering fertile ground for every form of national liberation overture, militates against the development of strong multi-national opposition movement whose objective is the overthrow of the military regime and the establishment of a democratic state composed of all the peoples of Ethiopia.

On the other hand, the national liberation movements, despite decades of armed struggle, have been unable to achieve the goals they set for themselves. While it is true that national liberation fronts are the strongest and best organized opposition forces in present day Ethiopia, the scope of their struggle is inherently limited both by their objectives and their social bases. They wage their struggles as Eritreans, Tigreans, Oromos, Somalis, etc. .

Nevertheless, as the Ethiopian experience amply demonstrated, no single national liberation movement however long and however heroically it may struggle, can attain independence in isolation from the rest of the Ethiopian peoples. The military regime and Soviet interventionists can be defeated once for all only if we develop a broad-based multi-national democratic movement encompassing all democratic and patriotic multi-national organizations as well as national liberation movements which would be capable of conducting a coordinated struggle throughout the country. The express purpose of such an organization would be the overthrow of the present military dictatorship and the establishment of a democratic, independent, and non-aligned Republic in Ethiopia.

It is the firm belief of Me'isone that the initiation of such a broad-based multi-national struggle will from the outset constitute a democratic alternative to the present military dictatorship. To drag one's feet on this decisive question and to impede the the initiation of such a broad-based multi-national struggle due to sectarian causes of whatever kind is to prolong the life of the present military regime which is the formidable enemy of **all** the peoples of Ethiopia.

Therefore, Me'isone once again calls upon all progressive, democratic, and patriotic forces in Ethio-

pia to make a genuine effort toward the attainment of this objective which is the only path to the victory of the Ethiopian peoples over the military dictatorship.

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