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Focus on Africa Rm 345 CB, Bush House

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Dear Dr. Negede,

, Here's a list of suggested questions which I think it would be both interesting and valuable to discuss in a formal interview. They are only intended as a guide, and if they cover areas that you do not want to talk about we can easily leave things out. But as regards a formal interview over the BBC I would think that these subjects would need to be covered in some form, though not necessarily in these words.

I have spoken in general terms to our French African Service about interviewing you, and they would also like to do an interview along the same general lines.

Whatever you feel about these possible questions, I very much look forward to seeing you soon. I, at any rate, have a great deal that I would like to discuss with you.

with best wishes

Patrick Gilkes

1. Just how many of your people were arrested in August 1977 when MEISON went underground ?
2. What happened to them ?
3. What about Haile Fida; is he still alive; do you know what sort of condition he is kept in ?
4. Did you lose a lot of people in the subsequent "red terror" organised by the military government against MEISON ?
5. Do you in fact still have a functioning organisation inside Ethiopia ?
6. What is it doing - are you involved in armed struggle against the military ?
7. Do you co-operate with other organisations opposed to the government, such as the Eritrean groups or the Oromo Liberation Front ?
8. What about the EPRP since they also oppose the government from the left, or do they still regard you as being the people mainly responsible for the "red terror" launched against them in 1976-77 ?
9. Do you in fact see any possibility for a broad based opposition movement against the military regime - if so who might be involved, and are you working on this ?
10. What in fact are your differences with the PMAC ?
11. Why did it take you so long to break away from your pre August 1977 position of critical support for the PMAC ?
12. MEISON has been accused, by the PMAC, of deserting the Ethiopian Revolution at the most critical time, during the Somali invasion - what is your response to this ?
13. Do you think there is any possibility that MEISON and the PMAC could be reconciled - if so how ?
14. You yourself returned to Addis Ababa early last year - was this an attempt at reconciliation - ?
15. There were reports at that time that you had received help from both the USSR and Cuba - what are MEISON's relations with these two countries ?

The following is the text of an interview given to the BBC by comrade Negede Gobezie, foreign affairs spokesman of 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 programme.

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 these 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 lose 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 Derg's jails.

Some people tend to think that with the red terror period over in March 78, 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 kebbels, 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 and 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 Ababa, 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 these 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 revelutionary stand of strict non-alignment has always been an obstacle ot 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 the 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 76, and to coordinate their struggle for democracy and the national independance in Ethiopia. At this early stage, all we can say is that the response we have recieved from these democratic and patriotic forces is really encouraging.

P.G. Do you actually see any possibility of a successfull 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 these forces, all these 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 equality.

P.G. Negede Gobezie of the Ethiopian Opposition Movement ME'ISONE.