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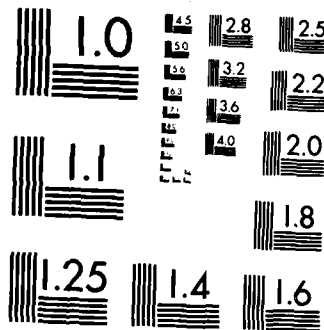
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COMMUNIST ETHIOPIA--IS IT SUCCEEDING?

Paul B. Henze

January 1985

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COMMUNIST ETHIOPIA--IS IT SUCCEEDING?

Paul B. Henze

January 1985

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SUMMARY

The 1974 revolution in Ethiopia was a genuine popular uprising with the small urban segment of the population and the military the prime movers. There was a widespread desire in the country for accelerated economic development and broader political participation. The military junta which deposed Haile Selassie frustrated these aspirations and locked the country into Moscow-style "socialism" without even going through the motions of sham elections or any other form of lip service to public opinion. Radical land reform was not a response to demands by the peasants, who were passive during the revolution, but represented a strategy of the regime to create a reliable political base. The tactic has not worked. Antipathy to collectivization and coercive pricing, combined with lack of consumer goods, have discouraged peasants from producing for the market. Almost all investment in agriculture has gone into state farms which are giving a poor return. Bureaucratic remedies cannot solve the contradictions of Ethiopian agriculture which is the basis for livelihood of 90 percent of the population and supplies almost all the country's exports. There has been no significant industrial development in Ethiopia since the revolution.

Fearful of the commotion resulting from personal rivalries and political experiments in the late 1970s, Mengistu was slow to respond to Soviet pressures to set up a communist-style party. The Ethiopian Workers' Party proclaimed in September 1984 is merely a facade of bureaucrats and military officers with no mass following. It does not constitute an independent source of strength for either the military leadership or for the Soviet Union. Mengistu has obsequiously imitated Soviet practice in all areas except those where the immediate consequences would be disastrous--reorganization of the country along nationalities lines, for example. But he has not permitted the Soviets (or Cubans, who have been drastically reduced in numbers) to get a stranglehold on the military or security services. These are still firmly under Ethiopian control. They represent potential areas of nationalistic reaction to present policies. Mengistu has been sensitive

to possible Soviet efforts to cultivate alternative leaders. The longer he persists in his present policies, however, the more difficult it is likely to become for him to change course without suffering retribution from his own military or alternative civilian leadership.

The Soviet Union has been unable to create any dependably pro-Soviet centers of strength in Ethiopian society. It has attracted no enthusiasm among intellectuals. There is no creative application of Marxism-Leninism in the country. Slogans mask apathy and continued adherence to Western norms. The pro-Soviet orientation of the country depends on a small inner group in the Derg. No element in Ethiopian society and no identifiable power group within the governmental structure would constitute an obstacle to a break with the Soviets should Mengistu decide to change course or should he and his pro-Soviet colleagues be ousted.

Antipathy to military-imposed "socialism" has alienated large parts of the country. The regime's control is tenuous in the north in all respects and its economic hold over many outlying parts of the country is weak. The rebellion in Eritrea is farther than ever from settlement by force and is now compounded by rebellion in Tigre which has spread into neighboring Gondar and Wollo provinces. The largest army in Africa (approximately 300,000 men under arms) thus brings revolutionary Ethiopia no real security against internal and external threats, most of which are self-generated. As famine spreads and economic development has slowed to a level of almost zero--while population, recently estimated at more than 42 million, continues to increase--military expenditures take up a growing proportion of limited budgetary resources. Ethiopia faces a major systemic crisis.

CONTENTS

SUMMARY	iii
Introduction	1
Causes of the Revolution	2
The Course of the Revolution	8
Ethiopian Socialism	10
Contradictions and Conflict	16
Full Soviet Embrace	19
Politics Postponed	21
Nationalities: The Illusion of Self-Determination	23
The Appeal of Communism	28
The Peasantry--The Ultimate Test of the Revolution	37
How Communist Is Ethiopia?	43
The Military Conundrum	47
Could the Russian Tie Be Severed?	49

INTRODUCTION

The famine in Ethiopia has already triggered a political crisis of major proportions, exposing both the incompetence and the crassness of the Moscow-oriented military regime. Ethiopia's military leaders tried to suppress knowledge of growing famine during the first nine months of 1984 while they concentrated on preparations for celebrating the 10th anniversary of the revolution and proclaiming a new communist party. It is easy for the visitor to Addis Ababa to see what the regime's priorities were: a huge conference hall, a towering red star-topped monument of stone and bronze, hundreds of triumphal arches, obelisks and billboards extolling communism and Mengistu Haile-Mariam. Every building in the capital that rises more than four stories is crowned with huge revolutionary slogans. All this revolutionary "construction" and large sums spent on TV, whiskey, food, accommodations and other inputs into the great celebrations in September were utterly unproductive expenditures for a country whose foreign exchange reserves are almost exhausted and where 7 million people are on the verge of starvation.

Drought is only a minor contributory cause of the famine. Agricultural policies designed to promote collectivization have left farmers with neither the means nor the incentive to produce in a country that has the potential to be the breadbasket of Africa. The Ethiopian regime's attempt to blame the famine on the slowness of Western donors to react is a measure of its own desperation. Such accusations are given no credence by the majority of Ethiopians, who show less and less fear of the regime.

The population keeps itself informed by VOA, BBC and Deutsch Welle broadcasts and the regime itself is visibly uneasy. The Soviets scold Mengistu for permitting Western journalists and aid officials too free rein, but send in very little help themselves. Soviet aid has consisted primarily of air transport for the dubious resettlement program.

The Ethiopian regime will come under increasing pressure in 1985 to change policy and orientation. If it proves unable to do so, it is unlikely to be able to survive.

CAUSES OF THE REVOLUTION

One of the most astute analysts of Ethiopian politics during the past 20 years, Christopher Clapham, wrote of the Ethiopian military in 1972:

...there is a potential split between senior officers associated with the Emperor and the large majority of junior officers...who have no special connections with the present regime.... A radical nationalist military regime of the kind familiar in Arab states is by no means out of the question. This would be no more likely than the present government to submit to Eritrean or Somali demands for secession. It would...be likely to intensify nationalist demands on the peripheral areas and so either polarize and militarize the latent conflicts, or else incorporate the periphery into a more radical and inspiring definition of Ethiopian nationhood than the present government can provide.¹

What Clapham foresaw 13 years ago seems to be essentially what has happened in Ethiopia since 1974. The process is still unfolding.

Clapham did not pass judgment on the East-West dimensions of the developments he envisioned. Why the Ethiopian revolution quickly turned pro-communist in a context where communism was extremely weak is a question to which it is still impossible to give a definitive answer. Hypotheses range from speculation that the revolutionary process was skillfully manipulated by eastern agents to the allegation that the United States, out of hostility to the idea of fundamental change in Ethiopia, alienated the officers who formed the Derg and gathered political power in the summer of 1974; thus they were forced to turn East. These hypotheses include several subthemes.

¹*Ethiopia and Somalia*, Adelphi Paper No. 93, London, IISS, 1972. Clapham's *Haile Selassie's Government*, Longmans (London), Praeger (New York), 1969, stands as the best analysis of the functioning of the prerevolutionary system in Ethiopia.

- Mengistu, because of unpleasant experiences during military schooling in the United States, became intensely anti-American.
- Mengistu came to admire Castro and consciously sought to imitate his technique of putting his revolution at the service of the Soviet Union and gaining Soviet backing.
- The political deterioration of the United States in the first half of the 1970s, because of Vietnam and Watergate, so reduced its standing in Ethiopia that intellectuals no longer felt they could depend on it and turned eastward.
- The failure of the West to encourage land reform and fundamental economic change in Ethiopia generated massive rural discontent which made radical change unavoidable.
- Ethiopia's multiethnic character--the fact that it was an old empire dominated by the Amhara--created intolerable strains which made revolution inevitable when military measures, in themselves futile, became necessary to contain ethnic conflict as in Eritrea and the Ogaden.

None of these hypotheses stands the test of serious examination. We simply do not know (and may never learn) enough to judge whether the quick turn toward radicalism that came at the end of 1974 was the result of skillful Soviet or East European clandestine operations. What we do know is that the Russians had never abandoned their long-standing goal of gaining much greater influence in Ethiopia and had worked steadily and patiently to advance their interests ever since Ethiopia's liberation in 1941.² The notion that the United States was alarmed by the Ethiopian Revolution and tried to prevent it has become a favorite thesis of leftist and emotional liberal writing on the subject. This thesis has also been echoed by more objectively inclined writers who have not bothered to examine the facts. It cannot be sustained except by ignoring and twisting solid evidence to the contrary. The United

²See my *Russians and the Horn*, European American Institute for Security Research, Marina del Rey, CA, 1983; "Getting a Grip on the Horn" in W. Z. Laqueur (ed.), *The Pattern of Soviet Conduct in the Third World*, Praeger, New York, 1983, pp. 150-186; also "Christian Brothers and Imperial Ambitions" (forthcoming).

States made no effort to stem any phase of the revolutionary process in 1974, accepted the deposition of Haile Selassie and the killing of 59 officials of his government in November 1974 (many of whom had been closely associated with the United States for years) without threat of break in relations. U.S. economic aid programs continued without interruption and U.S. military support for Ethiopia was sharply *increased* after 1974. One-third (in dollar value) of all military aid provided by the United States to Ethiopia over the 25-year period 1953-1978 was delivered *after* the revolution. These deliveries included what was then one of the most advanced American aircraft, the F5-E. A squadron of these was originally promised to Haile Selassie. Deliveries were made in the summer of 1976. Without these effective fighter-bombers, the Ethiopian air force would not have been able to stem the Somali invasion a year later.

The causes and depth of Mengistu's alleged anti-Americanism remain hard to judge. Mengistu and his fellow Derg members from the very beginning displayed a distinct aversion to consulting or socializing with U.S. or other Western diplomats, military advisers, or economic aid personnel. They avoided Western journalists and academics. Their behavior might only have reflected an inferiority complex or expectation that the West would deplore their overthrow of Haile Selassie. As far as we know, they were less xenophobic toward the East, but the Derg's methods of doing business have always been extremely secretive, so very little is known about specific sources and channels of advice.

Though the possibility cannot be excluded, only a weak case can be made that Mengistu deliberately "did a Castro" when he turned sharply left at the end of 1974 and continued with nationalization and drastic reforms in 1975. Little evidence exists of any orientation toward Cuba on Mengistu's part. Cuba was never a priority interest in Ethiopia, even of radical intellectuals. Mengistu has never displayed any of the continent-wide and global ambitions that motivated Castro to try to spread his revolution throughout the hemisphere and the entire developing world. During its early phases, the Ethiopian revolution was more Maoist than Cuban in style, but always concerned only with Ethiopia. In spite of Mengistu's desire to consolidate a close relationship with the East, the Soviet response was confined almost

entirely to rhetoric and propaganda until the end of 1976. This may, of course, be accounted for by fear of provoking an American reaction to challenge in a country that had for so long enjoyed a special American relationship.

This is not the place to attempt an exhaustive evaluation of the causes of the Ethiopian revolution or the motivations of those who carried it out and still lead it. To understand their actions and policies, however, to assess the revolutionaries' success in terms of their announced objectives and to judge probable future developments, it is necessary to pass judgment on some of the theories that have developed about the revolution's causes. All the more so because so much of what has been written about the Ethiopian revolution has been based on emotional predilection rather than data, on shallow experience of the country, and limited knowledge of its history.³

Psychologically, Ethiopia suddenly found itself adrift as 1974 opened. This was an unsettling experience for a country that had been guided for more than 30 years by an energetic leader who enjoyed worldwide respect and who brought it through an unprecedented period of change. As one eminent Ethiopianist observed a few years ago, "For two-thirds of his life all the problems Haile Selassie had to face arose from the fact that he was in advance of his time."⁴ All the groups who competed for power in the revolutionary commotion of 1974-1978 had been consciously created and encouraged by the old emperor: the officers and soldiers of the armed forces and police, the students, teachers, technicians, civil servants, labor leaders.

Haile Selassie had spread Ethiopia's foreign relationships across a broad spectrum. For example, money and advice were accepted from more than a dozen nations; all of the most important of them formed part of the Western democratic world. Two were more significant than the rest: the United States and Israel. This significance was not simply material; the psychological/political dimension was at least as important. In the

³See my "History and the Horn," *Problems of Communism*, January-February 1983, pp. 66-75.

⁴Edward Ullendorff (trans. and ed.). *My Life and Ethiopia's Progress, the Autobiography of Emperor Haile Selassie I*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1976, p. xiii.

wake of the Yom Kippur war, the aging emperor was persuaded to break relations with Israel. In Washington, the Nixon administration, falling victim to Watergate, had no time to worry about Ethiopia. A sense of being adrift in a world that was no longer calculable clearly gripped the Ethiopian leadership and alarmed the most modernized and articulate elements in the country as the strains which led to revolution became apparent in the first weeks of 1974.

There is almost no evidence, however, that intellectuals as a group turned suddenly eastward. Even the small minority that considered themselves Marxists was extremely modest about expectations of Russian support. None had high hopes that the Russians would have much of a role to play in the Ethiopia of the future. No significant group could then have been identified in Ethiopia in 1974 as a "pro-Russian faction." This remained true during subsequent years. Except for a few dozen Derg survivors and a few other opportunists, it remains true today. The close overt relationship with the Soviet Union which has developed in Ethiopia since 1977 has not resulted in any grouping or faction anywhere in the country that could be characterized as basically pro-Russian. No one studies Russian or affects an interest in Russian culture. More on this in due course, but let us first examine two other faulty hypotheses about the causes of the Ethiopian revolution, because their lack of validity has to be understood if we are to have much prospect of gauging future developments.

Was there an upwelling of rural discontent polarized by the famine in the north-central region of the country? Many things about the events of 1974 are unclear, but to this question a very straightforward answer can be given: most emphatically not. Allegations by Marxist publicists that rural discontent caused the revolution represent an effort to invent fact to justify theory. The Ethiopian peasantry--who account for 90 percent of the population--were entirely passive during the revolution. Famine, which afflicted only a small portion of the population, caused embarrassment among intellectuals and confusion among bureaucrats, as well as extreme hardship for those parts of the country directly affected, but it did not confront the government with a public security problem. Governmental authority in the countryside was exercised primarily through the traditional leadership structure, not

through bureaucrats or gendarmerie. There are important regional contrasts, but, taken as a whole, the Ethiopian countryside was more peaceful until (and during) 1974 than it has ever been since.⁵

The long-standing Eritrean insurgency, which had been heated up since the late 1960s by substantial input of arms, funds, and training from multiple communist and communist-friendly sources, was a contributing factor to the revolution, but not in the sense that the armed forces sympathized with the Eritrean rebels. Termination of communist Chinese support for the Eritreans in 1972 and settlement of differences with Sudan by the Ethiopian government in 1971-1972 weakened them. Israeli advisers were successful in helping the Ethiopian armed forces contain the Eritrean rebellion in 1972-1973 at a cost of no more than 15 percent of the manpower, arms, and budgetary outlays required to effect much less effective containment since the revolution. Difficulties that developed in the Ethiopian army both in Eritrea and in the south during early 1974 reflected concrete grievances over pay and level of logistics support, but behind them lay apprehension that the country was starting to drift and realization that military priorities were no longer clear. The cleavage Clapham identified between attitudes of younger, better educated junior officers and more traditional military leaders of higher rank was becoming operative.

There were no differences between any element in the military and the civilian leadership over the need to meet any potential or actual threat from Somalia to Ethiopia's territorial integrity, but there was no insurgency in the Ogaden in 1974. There was no other ethnic strain in 1973-1975 sufficiently advanced to have been a causative factor in the revolution.

⁵Nothing demonstrates the contrast between pre- and post-revolutionary security conditions in the Ethiopian countryside better than the fact that travelers and researchers roamed freely through the Tigrean countryside in the early 1970s surveying rock churches and discovering manuscripts. These included several British and American ladies--Ivy Pearce, Ruth Plant, Marilyn Heldman--who traveled unescorted for weeks at a time. Since 1975, Tigre, largely under control of the Tigre Popular Liberation Front, has been unsafe for all visitors.

One more dramatic internal political crisis occurred within the Derg just as the Soviet air- and seairlift of weapons and Cuban troops was about to begin. It was announced on November 13, 1977, that "a revolutionary step" had been taken against Mengistu's deputy--and many said chief rival, Lt. Col. Atnafu Abate--the previous day.²³ He had been executed, accused of "providing solace to counterrevolutionaries, of fear of politicization and arming of the masses, of opposing the National Democratic revolution, of failure to believe in the ideology of the working class and of making constant contacts with internal and external enemies of the Revolution, including CIA agents."

What Atnafu's crimes really were is not yet certain. The argument must have revolved around the nature of the relationship with the Soviets and Cubans. There may have been contention about commitments made to them in return for the aid they were about to supply. Did they set conditions for establishment of a political party which Mengistu found acceptable and Atnafu did not? These questions remain to be clarified.

POLITICS POSTPONED

If commitments to Moscow for regularization of the Ethiopian political situation were made or implied in 1977, Mengistu was in no hurry to carry them out once the Somalis had been defeated. Like most Ethiopians, Mengistu and other Derg members emerged from this period of intense *Sturm und Drang* with a positive distaste for party politics. The Politburo was only a dim memory. Haile Fida had fled the capital in August 1977 with a small band of like-minded Marxists and taken refuge in Wollega. They were soon captured and imprisoned. Hundreds--some say thousands--of genuine or suspected EPRP members were killed in the months that followed; others fled abroad or to the northern mountains.

²³Atnafu, a Gojjami Ahmara promoted to lieutenant colonel in April 1975 (7 months before Mengistu) had been active in the Derg before Mengistu. He was a conservative nationalist, said to be religious. He and Mengistu were uneasy allies in the Derg from its earliest stages. The nature of their rivalry is poorly understood, however. As more information comes to light it is likely to provide further insight into Mengistu's and other Derg members' attitudes toward, and relations with, the Soviets.

more. It was a gamble of the kind only a crass authoritarian regime could take.

To Moscow the highest strategic priority was to get the United States out of Ethiopia. If one of the reasons for Moscow's hesitancy to move rapidly into a military relationship with Ethiopia in 1976 was fear of an unpredictable U.S. reaction,²¹ that danger seemed much lessened once the 1976 election was past and a Carter administration, conciliatory on Angola and in favor of reducing U.S. military commitments abroad, was in the offing. So the first Soviet-Ethiopian military aid agreement was signed on December 14, 1976. Full implementation was apparently made contingent on severance of the U.S. military link.

Rising American concern about terror and killings in Ethiopia resulted in an extremely negative annual human rights report released shortly after the Carter administration took office.²² When the U.S. government officially informed the Ethiopian government that Kagnev Station would be closed by the end of 1977, Mengistu feigned anger and ordered the U.S. military relationship terminated. During April and May 1977 most U.S. facilities and programs in Ethiopia were closed down, personnel expelled, and the military aid program terminated. Only a truncated embassy staff and a modest economic aid program remained. The way was clear for a Soviet buildup, which nevertheless developed slowly until it became necessary to avert Ethiopian military collapse after the fall of Jijiga on the eve of Revolution Day 1977.

²¹The U.S. had never had a military relationship or made any military investment in Angola; nevertheless, Angola became a subject of serious political contention in the U.S. Congress. U.S. involvement with Ethiopia, on the other hand, dated from World War II and had been formalized in a 25-year treaty in 1953. The Russians were aware that there were, in addition, strong emotional ties between the two countries.

²²The report had been prepared during the Ford administration, which, along with the Congress (which held hearings in August 1976) had become deeply concerned about human rights violations in Ethiopia. The allegation that Carter's intemperate and ill-timed criticism of Ethiopia out of overzealousness about human rights precipitated a break, popular both among Ethiopians and U.S. critics of Carter, is not tenable. The human rights report, along with U.S. action to withdraw from the Kagnev communications station in Eritrea (long planned, motivated purely by technical considerations) simply gave Mengistu the pretext he needed

which continued to rage against the EPRP and all others considered opponents of Mengistu, politics ceased in Ethiopia during this period. Implementation of many revolutionary "reforms" was halted.

FULL SOVIET EMBRACE

The Kremlin showed both patience and persistence in advancing its cause in Ethiopia during 1976-1977. The Soviets knew they were playing a game for high stakes. Their unexpected success in Angola in 1975-1976, when the Cubans first came into their own as mercenaries who could change the course of history, no doubt whetted Soviet appetites in the Horn. The Soviets had a strong position in Somalia in which they had invested heavily.²⁰ But politically Somalia was a dead end. Ethiopia was a much larger prize, with far greater potential. Russian expansionists had dreamed about it since the 19th century. The Soviet desire to see the Derg create (or be replaced by) a classic Soviet-style party to lock Ethiopia into "socialism" had to take second place to the more elementary necessity of simply maintaining a Soviet position there. Characteristically Moscow wanted to preserve its existing assets and gain more, i.e., keep Somalia and take Ethiopia too, and perhaps add Djibouti to the bargain.

Three months before the Somalis unleashed their full-scale offensive against Ethiopia, Moscow sent Fidel Castro on a grand tour of the Horn (including South Yemen) to try to get all the countries of the region to federate as a solution for the conflicts in the area. He did not succeed. Moscow was thus confronted with the possibility of armed conflict but took no known steps to restrain the Somali attack. Did the Soviets foresee what was likely to happen during the next few months and let matters run their course so as to be able to emerge with a preeminent position in Ethiopia? Some anti-Russian Ethiopians profess to see such a master plan being applied. The fact remains that Moscow did not withdraw from Somalia until she was expelled by Siad Barre in November 1977 in face of overwhelming evidence that she valued Ethiopia

²⁰For statistics see my "Arming the Horn, 1960-1980," *Proceedings of the VIIth International Ethiopian Studies Conference*, Lund, Sweden, 1984, originally published in draft as Working Paper No. 43, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C., August 1982.

In a February 4 victory speech, Mengistu condemned those who had been killed as supporters of the three anti-Derg political movements: the EPRP, the Ethiopian Democratic Union¹⁹ and the Eritrean Liberation Front, and declared that the revolution would now go on the offensive against them, arming the masses to defend the government. This marked the official beginning of the "Red Terror," officially directed against "reactionaries and anarchists" but in practice primarily against persons known or suspected of belonging to the EPRP.

Near chaos ensued. The Somalis, who had signed a friendship treaty with the USSR in 1974 and had been supplied with nearly \$300 million in additional Soviet weaponry by 1977, found the temptation to attack irresistible. Somali preparations for operations against Ethiopia had been under way in earnest for more than a year. It is impossible to believe, given the high degree of Soviet presence in the Somali armed forces and security service (more than 4000 advisers), that the Russians were not informed of what the Somalis were planning. If they had objected seriously, they could have halted aid and taken other steps to impair the Somalis' ability to attack. Nothing of the kind happened. President Siad Barre wishfully assumed that Mengistu had botched his revolution so badly that Ethiopia was falling apart. His guerrillas cut the Addis Ababa-Djibouti railway in June and by July, backed by thinly disguised Somali army regulars, launched an invasion along the entire southern and eastern borders of Ethiopia.

The Ethiopian armed forces, deeply affected by the political confusion that had engulfed the country during the previous year, came close to collapsing. South Yemeni troops were brought in to defend the crucial Direedawa-Harar area and the F5-Es delivered by the United States the previous year gave skilled Ethiopian pilots the capacity to destroy the Soviet-supplied Somali Air Force. Time was thus bought for the Soviet-Cuban intervention which enabled Mengistu to regain all territory taken from the Somalis by early March 1978. Except for the Red Terror,

¹⁹A group which included several prominent military and civilian leaders from the imperial government, based in London and Khartoum, but with considerable strength in the provinces of Tigre and Gondar (formerly Begemder). During 1977-1978 its military forces held substantial territory in the northwest.

The Soviet Union was not yet prepared to back either Mengistu or the Derg militarily. It was not clear whether Mengistu could maintain his position and emerge as unchallenged Derg leader. From the Soviet viewpoint it was also far from clear that the Derg¹⁸ was the most desirable organization for building a permanent Soviet-style regime in Ethiopia. A more ideological, civilian-based group would have been more attractive, and more amenable to Soviet direction. Different elements among the Soviet power structure may have favored different groups in Ethiopia. It is instructive to compare political developments in Ethiopia during the years 1975-1978 with what happened in Afghanistan during the 1970s where the Russians also seem to have had difficulty choosing groups and leaders most likely to suit their purposes--until matters got out of hand and the invasion of December 1979 became the only way of maintaining the Soviet position.

Mengistu's "national democratic revolution" was to be implemented by a Provisional Office of Mass Organization Affairs (POMOA) whose relationship to the Politburo was unclear. It proceeded to set up an "All-Ethiopia Socialist Movement" (which became known by its Amharic initials MEISON). Meanwhile the EPRP had been gaining strength and several other groups emerged. In the provinces dividing lines between representatives of the two Derg bureaus and the various political organizations were often quite different from what they seemed to be in Addis Ababa. The situation became steadily more confused during the summer and fall of 1976. Rivalries intensified and led to assassinations. Meanwhile open rebellions in outlying parts of the country had become more serious. The Eritrean situation, in particular, had deteriorated badly. We do not know all the contributing factors but tensions came to a head on February 3, 1977, when a spectacular shoot-out occurred in the Grand Palace. When it was over eight Derg officers were dead, including Chairman Teferi Bante, and Mengistu emerged into the open as Derg chairman. The Soviet ambassador called on him to deliver personal congratulations.

¹⁸ Its English title remained *Provisional Military Administrative Committee* (PMAC).

increased substantially in 1975-1976) and on the U.S. and a wide variety of other Western and international donors for economic assistance. Mengistu was reported as having stated during the summer of 1976 that he would greatly prefer shifting to a Soviet military relationship but was frustrated that the Russians did not seem eager to commit themselves.¹⁷

CONTRADICTIONS AND CONFLICT

While in the declarative dimension and to a marked degree in economic organization and the creation of institutions, the Ethiopian revolution moved rapidly in a pro-communist direction, there were at least two fundamental exceptions: party organization and handling of the nationalities issue. In these areas difficulties became apparent very early in the revolutionary process. As early as the eve of the celebration of the first anniversary of the revolution, on September 11, 1975, General Teferi Bante, Derg chairman, announced that a political party would soon be formed. It was envisioned as evolving naturally out of the process of organizing peasants into associations in the countryside and urban dwellers into *kebeles*. This was more easily said than done. The job of setting up a party was entrusted to a secretive Politburo set up by the Derg in December 1975 and headed by Haile Fida, a French-educated Marxist, recently returned from exile. He faced, and was ultimately overwhelmed by, two problems: fractiousness among Ethiopian intellectuals and hostility of a sizable body of Derg members including Mengistu himself. He is also said to have been deficient in organizational talent.

These difficulties were exacerbated by Haile Fida's arrogance and overconfidence--perhaps a consequence of a direct relationship with the Soviet advisers or East-European surrogates operating behind the political scene in Addis Ababa during this time. We know the least about this latter factor, but it is difficult to explain the extraordinary political confusion which developed in Ethiopia during the next three years without postulating a substantial degree of Soviet effort to manipulate the situation coupled with indecision as to how to proceed.

¹⁷See my *Russians and the Horn*, pp. 32-33.

workers and students shouted anti-Derg slogans, "Down with the military," "Free the political prisoners," "Free students."¹⁴ Political tension grew steadily during the next few months. CELU was dissolved in December and replaced by the All-Ethiopia Trade Union (AETU), a governmentally controlled entity similar to "labor unions" in the communist world. ETA gravitated more and more toward the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Party (EPRP)¹⁵ which was becoming increasingly active and soon found itself in open conflict with the Derg.

Though there was increasing evidence of dissension within the Derg itself during this period, the bureaucratic consolidation of "Ethiopian socialism" continued. At the same time it became clear that the most dedicated advocate of the concept was Major Mengistu Haile-Mariam,¹⁶ who emerged seldom in public, which gave his rare appearances marked significance. On April 20, 1976, he appeared on television to announce the launching of the "National Democratic Revolution" which would create the prerequisites for application of "scientific socialism" to all Ethiopian life and make possible the establishment of a "people's democratic republic."

This announcement left no room for doubt that he aimed to consolidate the revolution along strictly Soviet-style lines. Pro-Soviet propaganda and imitation of Soviet and East European techniques had become routine by this time. Nevertheless Ethiopia still remained dependent on the United States for military aid (which was

¹⁴Ottaways, op. cit., p. 109.

¹⁵This group is a direct descendant of a shadowy organization called the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Movement (EPRM) which arose among Marxist students in the late 1960s and claimed to have its seat abroad, among Ethiopian students in Europe and North America. It almost certainly enjoyed direct or indirect Soviet support. Other than occasional leaflets, little was heard of it until 1975, when it emerged as a "party." Its structure and leadership were never clear, nor were its sources of funds. It may have represented an early Soviet experiment in party formation, or a form of reinsurance against the possibility that pro-Soviet elements in the Derg would not be able to prevail and it would be desirable to have an alternate revolutionary leadership in the wings. It eventually became the object of intense Derg hostility and the main target of the Red Terror which was unleashed in 1977-1978. See my discussion of this period in "Communism and Ethiopia," *Problems of Communism*, May-June 1981.

¹⁶Promoted to lieutenant colonel in November 1976.

rent additional land or to employ others to work for them. To enforce these arrangements, peasant associations were organized. These were envisioned as the primary instrument of governmental authority in the countryside. They were also seen by some Derg officials as a first stage toward collectivization. Though tenancy was abolished, all peasants became in effect tenants of the socialist state.

The peasants could not be relied upon to put the system into effect. The only instrument the Derg had available was students. Fifty thousand high school and university students were sent to the countryside to help set up peasant associations and implement land reform. So ill-prepared a campaign (called the Student *Zemecha*, i.e., "campaign") was bound to cause problems. It was only with the arrival of the students in the wake of the land reform proclamation that the Ethiopian countryside was caught up in the revolutionary commotion that until then was largely confined to the capital.

The next major step in the socialization of Ethiopia was urban "land reform." It was decreed in July 1975 when all urban land and rented houses and apartments were nationalized. Families were allowed to retain only houses in which they resided. Neighborhood associations, called *kebeles*, were established to control the newly nationalized dwellings. In subsequent years the *kebeles*, soon organized into a hierarchy of "higher" *kebeles* grouping all those in a district, became instruments of control and were given governmental and political functions far beyond the administration of nationalized property. During the revolutionary commotion of 1976-1979, when terror against actual or presumed opponents became government policy, the *kebeles* were used to mobilize the "proletariat" for action of many kinds, including campaigns against individuals and groups who were considered opponents of the Derg.

During 1975 two organizations which had preserved both autonomy and strength during the revolutionary process, the Confederation of Ethiopian Labor Unions (CELU) and the Ethiopian Teachers Association (ETA) found themselves increasingly at odds with the Derg. The basic problem was that they objected to the Derg's secretive and authoritarian methods and wished to have open debate about changes and reforms. During the first anniversary of the revolution on September 12, 1975, parading

group that was cautious about land reform. The enormous variety of land tenure systems that had evolved in Ethiopia through its long history and the extreme variations of terrain and farming conditions made it a difficult subject to legislate on a national basis. With the support of foreign aid donors, several regional experiments were under way at the time of the revolution. Most were successful in some degree but success generated heated arguments about the ultimate purpose of land reform-- who was to benefit and to what end? In some parts of Ethiopia too many people were trying to scratch a living off too little land (in Wollo and Tigre, for example); in others vast areas remained uncultivated because of sparse population or lack of irrigation (in Bale and the Ogaden, for example.) The prerevolutionary government encouraged medium- and large-scale commercial farming (including large sugar estates in the Awash valley developed with Dutch capital and several Italian-financed developments in Eritrea) as the fastest means of creating an agro-industrial base and production both for urban markets and export.¹³

In the northern provinces, communal land tenure systems prevailed and large-scale landlordism was unusual. In the center and south, large agricultural holdings, many of which were based on grants first made at the time of the consolidation of imperial control over these areas in the late 19th century, were common. In these regions, when land reform was decreed, most landowners fled and tenants took over their farms. As soon as government control was reestablished, tenants' actions were ruled invalid and most commercial farms were quickly transformed into state farms on the Soviet *sovkhoz* model. In eastern and southeastern semidesert regions nomadism prevailed. Land reform provoked apprehensions and confusion and brought the regime no clear advantages.

The land reform proclamation of March 4, 1975, nationalized *all* rural land, abolished all existing forms of tenancy and allocated each farm family a plot no larger than ten hectares. Peasants were only given *use* of the land, not title to it. They were forbidden to buy or

¹³There is an enormous literature on agricultural problems in Ethiopia. Most of the most significant works are cited in the comprehensive footnotes to John M. Cohen, "Foreign Involvement in Land Tenure Reform: The Case of Ethiopia," in John D. Montgomery (ed.), *International Dimensions of Land Reform*, Westview, Boulder, Colo., 1984, pp. 169-217.

It was a classic communist-style justification, but there is no reason to assume that the majority of the officers who approved it necessarily understood it as that (as subsequent Derg-infighting demonstrated) or that they were not motivated by a genuine desire to see the country's economy benefit. At this stage in the revolution the desire to gain *control* over the economy and the society and the desire to make it more productive did not conflict.

Motivations for the sweeping rural land reform--"unequivocally radical, even in Soviet and Chinese terms"¹¹--that was decreed on March 4, 1975, were more complex. The move was classically Leninist in the sense that it imitated the "all land to the tillers" slogan Lenin adopted soon after returning to Russia in 1917. The Ethiopian situation was very different, however, from that which had prevailed in Russia at that time. The peasants in Ethiopia became the first beneficiaries of the revolution without having played any role in it. The motivation was to make them supporters of the revolution, which lacked a broad popular base. The peasants did not need to be placated or have their demands satisfied. They had, with rare exceptions, been passive onlookers during the revolutionary process.¹²

During the decade before the revolution, land reform had become a subject of great interest to Ethiopian intellectuals and foreign aid advisers, a few government officials and some Marxist students. Traditionalists were apprehensive about it and moderate preparatory measures introduced by the government encountered opposition and stalling tactics in parliament. But conservatives were not the only

¹¹Ottaways, op. cit., p. 67.

¹²The thesis of Fred Halliday and Maxine Molyneux, *The Ethiopian Revolution*, New York (Schocken), London (Verso), 1981, that the Ethiopian revolution was caused by an upwelling of agrarian discontent is, like most of the analysis in this book, based on theoretical wishful thinking rather than evidence or knowledge gained from experience. Numerous studies by Western specialists sympathetic to the Ethiopian peasantry attest to their passivity and limited political consciousness at the time of the revolution. One of the best is John M. Cohen and Dov Weintraub, *Land and Peasants in Imperial Ethiopia, the Social Background to a Revolution*, Assen, Netherlands (Van Gorcum) 1975.

system of government. Organized interest groups characteristic of pluralist societies had begun to form: labor unions joined in a national labor federation, professional organizations of teachers, lawyers and businessmen, were gaining strength. A seemingly natural course for revolutionary developments to take would have been to build on the existing system, permitting the organization of political parties, holding elections with broadened franchise, making ministers directly responsible to parliament. Instead the constitutional parliamentary structure was swept away. There was no resort even to the pretense of manipulating it to produce an orderly transformation into a "socialist" style state. No such theatrics were considered necessary--or desirable--for the Derg's own precarious unity would in all likelihood not have survived such maneuverings.

Though the Ethiopian revolution was made in the name of the united people (its slogan "Ethiopia Tikdem" means "Ethiopia First" and implies a unified country), the Derg permitted the people no voice in the process. No nationwide congress was called, no groups were assembled even to go through the motions of defining what the revolution's aims were and whether "socialism" was in fact desired. Thus from its inception "Ethiopian socialism" was the antithesis of an expression of popular will.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the measures taken to implement "Ethiopian socialism" corresponded less to popular pressure or agitation (there was practically none) than to the Derg's desire to neutralize and eliminate autonomous institutions, to weaken potential opposition and build up a constituency of supporters. All banks and insurance companies were nationalized on January 1, 1975. On February 3, 1975, 72 industrial and commercial companies were nationalized and the government took majority control of 29 others. In a statement issued shortly afterward the Derg maintained the nationalizations were necessary to eliminate poverty and exploitation which, it maintained:

can be achieved only when the government, as the representative of the people and in the interest of the mass of Ethiopian workers and peasants, directly owns and controls the natural resources and key industrial, commercial and financial sectors of the country.¹⁰

¹⁰Ottaways, op. cit., p. 65.

already published elsewhere or what others have written about this dramatic and fateful sequence of events, which at times seems to have got out of control of all of the actors participating, but will merely summarize some of the most significant developments and trends to provide background for consideration of the basic questions to which this essay is directed.⁷

The period of most dynamic change in Ethiopia, and in its international position, encompassed four years, 1975 through 1978. During this period the Ethiopian Provisional Military Government (EPMG), as the Derg continuation of the former Imperial Ethiopian Government (IEG) designated itself, took several steps which moved it quickly toward a communist-style system. It avoided others, however, which left it in the curious position of being very pro-communist in theory but markedly deviationist in some important areas of practice.⁸ Let me sum up these measures briefly.

ETHIOPIAN SOCIALISM

The doctrine of "Ethiopian socialism" was proclaimed on December 20, 1974. It was defined as

equality; self reliance; the dignity of labor; the supremacy of the common good; and the indivisibility of Ethiopian unity.⁹

What is noteworthy here is not the definition itself--it was purposely vague--but the absence of any lip-service commitment to Western-style representative democracy. The framework for a Western constitutional system already existed in Ethiopia, with a constitution originally granted in 1931 (and revised in 1955), a parliament and a ministerial

⁷See my "Communism and Ethiopia," *Problems of Communism*, May-June 1981, pp. 55-74.

⁸This is a primary theme of one recent uneven evaluation of the Ethiopian revolution. Rene Lefort, *Ethiopia, An Heretical Revolution*, ZED Press, London, 1983.

⁹David and Marina Ottaway, *Ethiopia--Empire in Revolution*, Africana, New York/London, 1978, p. 63. The authors go on to observe: "The Derg's hand had not been forced by a revolutionary groundswell among workers or peasants," p. 64.

portion of the leaders of the various Eritrean factions (who had never been united) could have been drawn into serious negotiations with the revolutionary government. There was some chance that these could have led to a settlement based on a revised formula for autonomy going back perhaps to that which had been adopted in 1952.

Other more fundamental differences about the political course of the revolution must, however, have contributed to the crisis which erupted in November. The killing of Aman, and even more so the execution of the 59 former regime officials, marked a profound break with the course the revolution had taken to this point in at least four respects:

- It marked the eclipse of the old military leadership and the emergence of a young nationalist officer group. This group was not yet united and Major Mengistu Haile-Mariam, though to some degree already *primus inter pares*, either did not want to risk or was unable to exercise open predominance.
- It destroyed all illusions that might exist among Ethiopians that their revolution could continue as a gradual, benign, semi-constitutional process.
- It soon exposed a sharp inclination toward radical, communist-style authoritarianism (characterized as "socialism") in domestic policies and orientation toward Soviet positions on the international plane.
- It gave the Derg the superficial unity of being collectively responsible for causing blood to be shed and struck fear into all former regime officials who were spared, thus to some degree paralyzing potential opposition.

A great deal has been written about developments during the next few years when the revolution degenerated into near chaos. The Derg became more deeply entangled in fighting in Eritrea than Haile Selassie had ever been, and Somalia's still strongly Soviet-dependent leader, General Mohamed Siad Barre, found the temptation to attack Ethiopia irresistible. Whether he was actually encouraged to do so by the Kremlin remains one of the weightiest unanswered questions about Horn politics in the 1970s. I will not attempt here to repeat what I have

THE COURSE OF THE REVOLUTION

Until the revolution suddenly turned bloody on the night of November 23, 1974, when the provisional head of state who had replaced Haile Selassie, General Aman Andom, was killed in a shoot-out at his house and 59 imprisoned officials were summarily executed, everything had proceeded in a remarkably benign and good-natured fashion. During the spring and summer of 1974 there had been a great deal of public commotion, marching, protesting, debating, polemicizing, and political maneuvering. Gradually a military committee called the Derg (an ancient Ge'ez word adopted into Amharic only at this time) had consolidated its influence and maneuvered or intimidated civilian politicians into passivity or cooperation. There had been tense periods but Ethiopians had not had to be concerned about personal safety or random or deliberate violence. There was more open discussion of political and social issues than the country had ever experienced in its long history. Members of the aristocracy and former ministers and officials, many of them young and with reputations for enlightened views, voluntarily surrendered for internment on promise that charges of corruption or abuse of privilege would be systematically reviewed. A confused Haile Selassie, who had just passed his 82d birthday, was taken from his residential palace in a Volkswagen on Ethiopian New Year's Day, September 12, 1974, and interned on the grounds of his former working palace (the Menilek or Grand Palace) which the Derg has continued to use as the seat of government to this day. He was not physically abused, though stories began to be put out of the vast wealth he had allegedly accumulated and the unbounded luxury in which he supposedly lived.⁶

Eritrea was the cause, as far as we know, of the first serious policy differences that affected the Derg, for General Aman Andom (actually not a Derg member, though head of state), himself an Eritrean, immediately set about attempting to reach a political settlement of this protracted insurgency. There was good reason to believe that a major

⁶These were gathered together and further embroidered by a Polish journalist, Ryszard Kapuscinski, in *The Emperor*, Harcourt Brace, New York, 1983, a peculiar work of alleged investigative journalism that may actually represent an arcane commentary on communist Poland disguised as reportage on Ethiopia.

Students who had returned to studies after a two-year closure of the university showed no interest in political activism.

The Cubans and South Yemenis--who could hardly have been acting without the approval of someone in the Soviet hierarchy--could not let matters rest, however. In May 1978 a Marxist intellectual associated with Haile Fida, Negede Gobeze, was brought from Europe and smuggled into Ethiopia on a South Yemeni passport by the Cubans. Mengistu had visited Havana in May in order to thank Castro for the help he had provided in defeating the Somalis. There were rumors that Castro had proposed Negede's return to help organize a proletarian party. Mengistu was unenthusiastic and reacted strongly when he returned and found that Negede had been smuggled in. He expelled the Cuban ambassador and most of his staff in June and sent the South Yemeni charge d'affaires back to Aden. A few weeks later the Soviet ambassador also left.²⁴ Mengistu had had his way and things were patched up quickly. Castro came for Revolution Day and in November 1978 Mengistu went to Moscow to sign a formal Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation with the Kremlin.

If Mengistu had undertaken a commitment to the Russians to establish a "socialist" party, the Negede Gobeze affair gave him a good excuse to delay. Soviet interest in a party was expressed many times, but when the first step was taken, on December 18, 1979, it was not a party, but a Commission for Organizing the Party of the Workers of Ethiopia (COPWE) that was announced and given the former British colonial-style parliament building as its headquarters. The impressiveness of this building, with clock tower repainted deep red and with tall iron gates now ornamented with a hammer-and-sickle motif, was not a measure of COPWE's importance. It was given very little to do and no power of its own. Sobered by the political turbulence of the period that preceded the Somali war and wary of evidence of Soviet and Cuban dallying with potential rivals, Mengistu took no chances.

The Russians displayed as much outward and official enthusiasm for COPWE as they could muster, all the time pressing, directly and indirectly, for its transformation into a full-fledged party.²⁵ This

²⁴Information remains conflicting whether the Soviet ambassador's departure was a direct consequence of the Negede Gobeze affair.

²⁵See, for example, "KOPE i ee deyatel'nost'" in Anatoli Gromyko

process has taken almost five full years. The result, proclaimed as the Ethiopian Workers' Party on September 11, 1984, is a structure which represents little more than an organization of the military men and civil servants who already make up the governmental apparatus of the country. It is an arm of the government to an even greater degree than the All-Ethiopia Trade Union. Its main function is propaganda and mobilization of the "broad masses." The political currents all flow downward, not upward. There is no evidence that the Ethiopian Workers' Party will ever be permitted to develop any autonomy or to act as an independent source of advice or review of governmental activities except in very circumscribed and unimportant areas.

If the Soviets are so unwise as to attempt to exploit this party as a means of developing pressure upon Mengistu or trying to create alternative leadership, he is likely to react sharply. Does this mean that the party is of little significance as a factor in the future political evolution of revolutionary Ethiopia? How it will evolve remains to be seen. Though outwardly it has been constructed to resemble a party according to the Soviet and East European model and it may have some potential to evolve into such an organization, its future is far from certain. It could atrophy while the military dictatorship remains. Before speculating further on Ethiopia's future political evolution, let us turn to another fundamental issue where there has been no experimentation whatsoever with Soviet organizational patterns: nationalities.

NATIONALITIES: THE ILLUSION OF SELF-DETERMINATION

Like most African countries, Ethiopia is an agglomeration of many different ethnic entities. Though such groups are generally termed "tribes" in the rest of Africa, where the boundaries of states result from colonial partition and have almost no relationship to ethnic considerations, the term "nationalities," which has come to be used in Ethiopia consistently since the revolution, is more appropriate. Unlike the rest of Africa, Ethiopia is a nation which has evolved on the basis of its own internal political dynamism. The background to the

(ed.), *Sovremennye Problemy i Vneshnyaya Politika Efiopii*, Moscow ("Mezhdunarodnye Otnosheniya"), 1982.

nationalities issue is the subject of another essay in the series and still another will deal with the character of the various ethnic and regional dissident and separatist movements that have been active since the revolution. For purposes of the present discussion, only the Derg's halting and largely abortive efforts to come to terms with the country's multiethnic character will be reviewed. This discussion will be far briefer than that of the political party problem, for the story is much simpler.

During the period before the revolution, Marxist intellectuals and students had occasionally dabbled with ideas of restructuring the country along nationality lines, after the pattern of the USSR or China, and there was occasional speculation about breakup of the allegedly outdated empire with independence for separate peoples. None of this toying with the nationality issue was on a very high level of sophistication. It was not consistently encouraged by the Soviets or their surrogates. The Eritrean issue, where the Soviets played an active behind-the-scenes role in supporting insurgency through East European and radical Arab proxies and where the Cubans were openly engaged in propagandizing the Eritrean cause and training guerrillas, was not, strictly speaking, a nationalities issue. There is no Eritrean nationality or Eritrean language. Eritrea is a patchwork of at least eight major nationalities, several languages (including Italian and Arabic in addition to indigenous languages), and three religions with subgroupings of some. Language and religious divisions overlap. Eritrean insurgents were sharply divided, partly on ethnic and religious lines, and these cleavages remain important today. Vague idealism about "solution of the national question" permeated leftist debate after the revolution, but it did not become a major issue. Eritrea did. It appears to have been the primary cause for the Derg's first crisis in November 1974. Mengistu and those most closely associated with him were the most vigorous advocates of a hard line in Eritrea. A hard line meant a military solution. Enormous resources were allocated to "final" offensives that were to settle the problem in 1975 and 1976. They worsened it. The Eritrean insurgents appear to have continued to draw on support from Soviet-backed and approved sources through 1976.

Minor concessions to nationalities were made on language use. The imperial regime had stressed Amharic as the national language and enforced its use for administrative purposes and education throughout the country, with English as the primary foreign language. This policy produced serious resentment only in Eritrea, where the principal northern language, Tigrinya, had been used during the Italian period and continued in use after World War II. The Derg permitted and for a time encouraged use of major regional languages for publishing and broadcasting. When the national literacy campaign was launched people were permitted to qualify in several regional languages as well as Amharic. This practice continues. Amharic, which has been the national language of Ethiopia since the Middle Ages, was never discriminated against, however, nor was its official use in any way restricted. Nor was there any downgrading of English.

As the Derg strove to impose Soviet patterns on most aspects of Ethiopian life, the question of the possible reorganization of the country along ethnic lines became pertinent. Mengistu came closest to verbal adoption of Soviet nationalities policy in his April 20, 1976, speech which announced the "National Democratic Revolution." His proclamation declared

...under the prevailing conditions in Ethiopia, the problem of nationalities can only be solved when the nationalities are guaranteed regional autonomy. Accordingly, each nationality will have the right to decide on matters prevailing within its environs, be they administrative, political, economic, social or language, as well as elect its own leaders and administrators. The right of nationalities for local autonomy will be implemented in a democratic way.²⁶

A proclamation issued on May 16, 1976, dealing primarily with Eritrea expanded the general concept, declaring that a study program would be launched for each of the regions of the country to determine

²⁶The Ethiopian Herald, April 21, 1976.

the history and interaction of the nationalities inhabiting them, their geographic position, economic structure and suitability for development and administration.... The government will at an appropriate time present to the people the format of the regions that can exist in the future. The entire Ethiopian people will then democratically discuss the issue at various levels and decide upon it themselves.²⁷

Though formation of an Institute for the Study of Nationalities was announced, it did not start to function until March 1983. In practical political terms the nationalities issue has never advanced beyond the positions taken in 1976. The Nine-Point Policy on Eritrea which was enunciated then has long been moribund, though never reversed.

Restructuring the country on nationality lines would require a degree of control the Derg has never come close to establishing. It would involve a myriad of difficult practical problems--how to handle areas where several nationalities live intermingled? The Derg has had difficulty maintaining control over many of the 14 long-established provinces (now officially termed "administrative regions"). The trend in the early 1980s has again been toward progressive loss of control of the countryside in important northern regions such as Tigre and Gondar (ex-Begemder), along with a progressively worsening situation in Eritrea.

No ethnic issue Ethiopia faces better demonstrates the dangers of any attempt to apply the Soviet model than the Ogaden. If self-determination were to be applied, the Somalis of Ethiopia, who were originally less intermixed with other nationalities than almost any other Ethiopian people, would have a basis for association with Somalia and the government in Mogadiscio, we can be sure, whoever might be at its head, would lose no time taking advantage of such a situation. Any lip service to, or pro forma imitation of, Soviet-style nationalities arrangements in restricted areas where experimentation might be safe carries with it far-reaching implications for Eritrea and the Ogaden and carries the further danger of appearing to conciliate other separatist movements. Thus the most innocent-seeming experimentation with nationalities has explosive potential. No wonder there has been none.

²⁷*The Ethiopian Herald*, May 18, 1976.

This does not seem to have been particularly distressing to the Soviets. Soviet writing on the subject of nationalities in Ethiopia is remarkable for its sparseness and lack of content. The complexity of the problem is acknowledged in a study published in 1982, but the fact the problem exists at all is alleged to be the fault of the imperial regime and its supporters.

...it must be admitted that during recent decades in Ethiopia separatist attitudes have grown stronger, provoked primarily by the reactionary assimilationist policy of the previous feudal-monarchical regime. Ethiopia's entry in the course of the revolution onto the path of broad democratic transformation and its choice of socialist orientation provoked bitter resistance by internal and external reaction. Feudal counterrevolution merged with various separatist movements which are encouraged and supported by various imperialists and Maoists, the activities of which are clearly directed toward the dismemberment of revolutionary Ethiopia.²⁸

The best quotation Soviet writers have been able to find to demonstrate that Mengistu remains devoted to imitating the Soviet approach is so limp as to be meaningless:

Speaking in the Kremlin in October 1980, Mengistu Haile-Mariam stressed: "We Ethiopians can learn a great deal from the first socialist country. The Soviet Union is a big country with over 100 nationalities speaking in 130 languages who live in harmony on the basis of principles of equality and democracy."²⁹

There is no evidence that the Soviets have been urging Mengistu to try to imitate their territorial pattern. He is hard pressed to maintain a hold on the country's northern regions, historically the heartland of the Ethiopian state. Toying with new territorial arrangements could only worsen an already precarious situation. Though the military situation in the Ogaden is for the most part stabilized and the restraint its tenuous Western relationships impose upon Somalia make

²⁸"Natsional'noe stroitel'stvo i evo trudnosti" in Anatoly Gromyko, op. cit., p. 42.

²⁹Gromyko, op. cit., pp. 43-44, citing *Pravda*, October 28, 1980.

it unlikely that it can again go on the offensive against Ethiopia, and though the gradual return of a sizable portion of Ogaden refugees to Ethiopia seems to be continuing, no changes have taken place in the manner in which the Somali population of this region is administered by the government in Addis Ababa. Agricultural development schemes again envision resettling sizable numbers of peasants from central Ethiopia in the Ogaden. As far as nationality issues are concerned, the revolutionary government's approach to this problem does not differ in any of its essentials from that followed by its predecessor. The fact that resettlement plans are now strongly biased toward formation of state farms and collectives is the only way in which they are imitative of Soviet practice. This represents a commitment to Soviet-style agriculture, with priority on state control over productivity, but it has nothing to do with nationalities issues as such.

Facile Soviet claims to the contrary, the record to date would seem to indicate that the Derg's efforts to impose a Soviet-style political, economic, and social system on Ethiopia have resulted in exacerbation of nationalities strains and regional tensions. To make this observation is not meant to imply, however, that the overall concept of Ethiopian nationhood has been weakened by the revolutionary experience. Why this is so will be dealt with in another essay in this series. Let us turn here to a more direct attempt to answer the questions addressed at the beginning of this essay: How communist is Mengistu's Ethiopia? Is it irretrievably lost to the West? In other words is communism, to the extent that it has been imposed and/or taken root in the country, reversible?

THE APPEAL OF COMMUNISM

Regime claims and new party notwithstanding, it is difficult to find evidence that "Ethiopian socialism" has succeeded in taking root in the country or that any more than a small percentage of the population, given an opportunity to choose, would wish to retain it in its present form. Mengistu has not yet even managed to create a stable "New Class" that can operate his Soviet-style state, though the new party is expected to evolve into such a group. Under such circumstances, the appeal of communism--and the Soviet relationship as such--to the

dominant leadership group itself becomes even stronger than it was in 1974, when they originally turned the revolution in a pro-Moscow direction. Communism justifies the seizure and exercise of power in the name of the people without risking the results of any systematic effort to measure popular desire through elections or any other form of consultation with either "the broad masses" or even far more narrowly constituted elite groups. It defines open, structured competition for leadership as treason and classifies spontaneous debate about government policies as dangerous to state interests.

It is not difficult to see why a portion of the more energetic and ambitious military men who formed the Derg very rapidly came to feel uncomfortable about continuing a Western orientation in 1974. The West did not appear to be very dynamic in a period when its leader, the U.S., was retreating internationally and seemed to have fallen into internal disarray. To feel that it had a firm grip on power, the Derg not only had to dethrone Haile Selassie, a senior world statesman long admired in the West,³⁰ but a few weeks later summarily executed several dozen senior officials who had worked closely with Western governments for years. But no Western government broke relations or cut off military or economic aid to Ethiopia as a result, so the rapid turn toward the East had to be based on more deep-seated convictions and expectations that Western reactions to the revolution might be negative. The rapidity with which the Derg was formed and the fact that no concerted opposition to it developed in the summer of 1974 has been taken as proof that power simply fell into its lap. This may or may not be true--we still know too little about the undercurrents of that period to be sure. The manner in which the Derg moved systematically to undermine the faltering imperial regime and render the emperor and his closest associates impotent implies both a clear-cut goal and political skill in moving toward it.

³⁰It should be remembered, however, that the monarchy, as such, was not abolished with the deposition of the old emperor. Both for internal and external reasons Crown Prince Asfa Wossen, recuperating in London from a stroke he suffered in January 1973, was proclaimed King of Ethiopia--a lesser title; the monarchy was abolished in March 1975 because of the Crown Prince's failure to return to take up the position of King, it was claimed. How such a role could have been reconciled with "Ethiopian socialism" is difficult to envision.

Those whose ambition--or circumstances--impel them to seize power in a developing country are always reluctant to risk losing it--and jeopardizing their own lives--by permitting pluralistic political processes to function. I have already stressed the fact that once the Ethiopian revolution turned bloody, all Derg members--in whose collective name blood had been shed--found themselves linked in a community of interest (whatever their other differences might have been) in protecting Derg power and their own skins against challengers. No other explanation for the rapidity with which the Derg proclaimed "Ethiopian socialism" is needed--though in reality other factors may have entered in as well.

There was hardly any "proletariat" in Ethiopia. Almost all workers associated with the modern economy were in CELU. Its leadership had developed habits of independent thinking and was oriented toward the West. With the country barely 10 percent urban (and more than half of those born in the countryside), the only place a constituency for an authoritarian government could be found was among the peasantry.³¹ But it is ironic that the effort to create a body of loyal supporters for "Ethiopian socialism" among the rural population of necessity involved broadening a traditionally independent-minded peasantry. The peasants, particularly in the southern half of the country, at first paid little attention to the fact that they did not *own* the land, could not trade it and could not hire labor. It was sufficient that they had possession of it and the extended family patterns prevailing in these regions meant that few lacked labor to till what was allocated to them.

There was good evidence in the first years following the revolution that the Derg had won strong support from a sizable body of peasants. The ideological commitment to collectivization proved so difficult to translate into practice during the Somali invasion and ensuing political confusion that no large-scale collectivizing efforts--which would have rapidly turned most peasants into opponents of the government--occurred. Meanwhile, capitalizing on relatively good weather, peasants increased production. The erosion of peasant support for the regime which has

³¹The new seal adopted by the Derg featured a plow as its central symbol.

accelerated since 1980 has more complex economic causes. In the north, peasant support for the Derg has always been more problematic and has gradually been transformed into open hostility. We will examine the agricultural problem--the most crucial factor affecting the viability of the present Ethiopian regime--in a separate subsection below. Before doing so, let us look at other identifiable groups in Ethiopian society in terms of their orientation toward "Ethiopian socialism" and the regime's ability to exploit them.

Students count for little politically, even though there has been a steady growth of the student population. University students are among the quietest and best behaved elements in Ethiopia. Enthusiasm for the regime is as hard to detect among them as active opposition to it. The most popular publications in bookstores patronized by students are not the multitudinous translations of Marxism-Leninism and Russian literature, but books on electronics, computer science and modern business management. Less ambitious students content themselves with anticipation of a position in the burgeoning governmental bureaucracy. The more imaginative dream of completing their studies abroad and gaining employment in Europe, America, or elsewhere in Africa. The Derg tries to direct increasing numbers of students to the USSR and Eastern Europe. Most go with little enthusiasm and few are likely to return champions of the communist system. Nor are the Cuban, East German, and Bulgarian instructors at the university and professional schools in Ethiopia notably successful in creating strong supporters for their political system or even much respect for themselves. The memory of the large group of American and European instructors who used to predominate in the Ethiopian educational system is still far from dead.³² In sum, there is little prospect that Mengistu can exploit students even as a minor pillar of support for his system.

Workers have not been markedly favored by the Derg. There has been very little industrial or commercial development. Statistics which demonstrate expansion of workers in nationalized industries turn out, on examination, to reveal mostly an expansion of bureaucracy.

³²The principal foreign adviser in the Ministry of Education is still an Englishman who has served in Ethiopia nearly three decades.

Small businessmen and traders account for a much larger share of the population than in prerevolutionary times, though the return from their exertions for most of these people is meager and the opportunity to gain rewards for their enterprise--and expand the scale of their businesses--is both severely limited and subject to drastic reversal when sectors of economic activity are nationalized. These people are in business because there is no alternative for them. Thousands of Ethiopians make a precarious living operating small-scale hotels, restaurants, bars, and shops, for example, but most medium- and large-scale enterprises in these fields have been nationalized. Private grain trade is still permitted, but only because the government's procurement system cannot function on a scale sufficient to monopolize it. Efforts at expanding tourism as a source of rapid foreign-exchange earnings are concentrated entirely on state-owned hotels and tour operators. Thousands of small traders in art and handicrafts attempt to earn a marginal living off tourists and visitors. There is an oversupply of traditional handicraft products. The best that the Derg can expect of the whole class of small entrepreneurs and shopkeepers is that they remain passive opponents and continue to accept without violent opposition the increasing restrictions that are placed upon them. If private businessmen still had doubts about the Derg's ultimate intentions toward them, they would have been dispelled by the requirement during the 10th anniversary celebrations in September that all signs be taken off private shops in the capital--thus reducing colorful commercial areas to socialist drabness thought, no doubt, to be pleasing to Soviet and East European bigwigs who came to participate in the festivities.

Ethiopian socialism has already created a comparatively large and steadily expanding commercial shadow class of the kind the economic contradictions of Soviet-style socialism always generate: black marketeers, smugglers and various kinds of financial manipulators and illegal entrepreneurs. Many operate locally on a small scale; some operate extensive import-export networks with regular links abroad and need for protective arrangements with the authorities. The temptation for government officials and military officers to become partners in

such activities often proves irresistible. Managers of nationalized industries, trading companies and state farms succumb to opportunities for private gain. Ethiopia's principal export crop, coffee, is not all exported legally. There is a brisk trade in whiskey, electronic goods, watches, auto parts, and many kinds of durable and perishable consumer goods. Supplies come over the border from Djibouti and occasionally over other land borders. (The eastern part of the country, the Diredawa-Harar area, is in many respects a semi-free trade zone, with only limited central government authority being exercised.) There is diversion from legal import-export channels and from duty-free operations. People engaging in these activities tend to be apolitical, neither strong supporters nor opponents of the regime. All "socialist" regimes find themselves compelled to accept a certain level of underground economic activity not only because they are incapable of eliminating it but because it satisfies needs that the regimented economy cannot. Some of these people become, in effect, allies of the regime; others serve as underground entrepreneurs and also provide convenient scapegoats when needed.

The Military. Since the Ethiopian government is still in all essentials a military regime, the Ethiopian armed forces--at least the officers--are generally presumed to support it strongly. This may not be a valid assumption. The Derg provided during its first four years continual evidence of strong personal and ideological differences among officers. Much reduced in size today, the Derg may still harbor different factions. When the armed forces have performed poorly in Eritrea, Mengistu has administered harsh personal discipline, having officers whose units he considered delinquent shot. Such summary punishment must have left a bad taste among many in the armed forces. There is good evidence that military units in Eritrea and elsewhere in the north continue to perform much below the expected level of efficiency. The rate of desertion among rank and file in Eritrea has been high. The introduction of universal military service, which has recently been announced, is not likely to improve this situation. There is growing evidence of alienation in the armed forces between officers who endure hardships in Eritrea, elsewhere in the north and in the Ogaden, and those who enjoy privileged positions in Addis Ababa with

access to material goods and opportunities for personal enrichment. It is difficult to judge, however, the extent to which such resentments are politically relevant. More serious may be a growing cleavage between older professional officers with roots in the imperial period and those who owe their advancement to affecting enthusiasm for communism. The Russians are rumored to be pressing for a purge of older officers. The Derg has given a large number of military officers roles in the new party; many of these have already long held governmental positions. They constitute a special class whose status and prospects for advancement are linked directly to the continuation of the regime in its present form. Nevertheless, the degree to which these men feel a *personal loyalty* to Mengistu is hard to judge.

The Security Services do not conform fully to the standard Soviet-style pattern. The emperor's security services were not abolished when the revolution occurred. The heads of both of them were among those killed on November 23, 1974, but men immediately below them moved into the top positions and the services suffered no general purges. Both continued essentially unchanged until August 3, 1978, when they were merged into a Ministry of State Security under a police colonel, Tesfaye Wolde-Selassie, favored by the Derg because he belonged to no faction. The new ministry incorporated the personnel of the previously existing security services. While it has added new officers, it has not expanded to become a notably independent element in the power structure. It is widely regarded as being superior to and exercising authority over the separate Ministry of the Interior, which continues to be concerned with police and local government as it was in the prerevolutionary period. East Germans, Bulgarians and Hungarians are known to be advising the Ministry of State Security, but their activities are said to be carefully monitored and circumscribed by the Derg. Mengistu has never permitted the Soviets or Cubans to operate independently in the highly sensitive internal security field nor, unlike many other African leaders, has he entrusted his own personal security to any non-Ethiopian group. The Ministry of State Security certainly constitutes an important element of the bureaucratic structure, but it is not, as far as we know, a direct source of positive *political* support for Mengistu. It is more likely to be the locus of anti-Derg sentiment than a source of blind support for it.

The Bureaucracy. The pattern of retention of personnel from the prerevolutionary government that prevails in the security ministry is characteristic of the entire governmental structure. The Derg has never attempted to carry out a widespread purge of civil servants. Those willing to continue to serve it have been accepted. In spite of defections, which have continued and recently increased as COPWE has been transformed into a "full-fledged" party, the Derg has had less difficulty maintaining a reasonably efficient governmental bureaucracy than many other African countries. Brain drain to Arab countries has deprived Sudan of much of its managerial and administrative manpower. Ethiopia is much better off. Considerable numbers of imperial civil servants have been released from detention during the past three years and restored to active governmental positions. The central governmental establishment, provincial administrations, and the staffs of nationalized industries and state farms have grown enormously and continue to expand. New employees include recent university and high school graduates. Competition for jobs is keen. In prerevolutionary times most Ethiopian graduates preferred the security and status of government employment to more challenging opportunities in the private sector. This attitude has intensified since the revolution as the legal private sector has been steadily reduced.³³ Thus it is primarily in the vastly expanded state bureaucracy that the Derg has its most extensive group of supporters. Most of these cannot be regarded as enthusiasts of "Ethiopian socialism" but, by and large, they appear to be passively reliable. Among them there is a small body of more ambitious loyalists. The Derg has enlisted these as key members of its new party. Together with military officers, they constitute the party's core.

³³These observations should not obscure the fact that losses of qualified technical manpower since 1974 have been substantial, for between one-quarter and one-third of all Ethiopians trained as specialists in key economic fields, especially agricultural development, in the prerevolutionary period are no longer available--some having been killed during the period of violence 1975-1978, the larger proportion having gone abroad. See comments on this problem in John M. Cohen, "Agrarian Reform in Ethiopia, the Situation on the Eve of the Revolution's 10th Anniversary," Development Discussion Paper No. 164, Harvard Institute for International Development, Cambridge, Mass., April 1984, pp. 32ff.

COULD THE RUSSIAN TIE BE SEVERED?

The pro-communist orientation of the revolutionary leadership-- and in particular of Mengistu Haile-Mariam himself--appears to have been strong long before the Russian presence in Ethiopia increased substantially and before Moscow committed itself to a military relationship. It is hard to believe that the Soviets anticipated the need for such massive and rapid military aid at the time they apparently committed themselves to provide some in December 1976. In less than a year, they were airlifting unprecedented amounts of military equipment to arm Cubans who were being air- and sealifted to the country on a highest-priority basis, increasing their own advisory presence substantially and supplying vast quantities of arms, ammunition and major military gear--tanks and aircraft--for the use of the rapidly expanding Ethiopian forces. Whatever limitations the Russians originally placed on their military aid commitments, they abandoned them rapidly in face of the possibility of a collapse of Mengistu's regime in face of Somali attack. If they had doubts about Mengistu as their chosen instrument before the summer of 1977, they abandoned them quickly when faced with the choice of intervening massively or losing Ethiopia. When the Somalis were driven out, the Russians continued heavy deliveries of military materiel to bolster Ethiopian capabilities against insurgency in Eritrea. Best available estimates are that the USSR had delivered a total of at least \$2 billion worth of military assistance to Ethiopia through 1982. Has this military support given the Russians an invincible political hold on Ethiopia?

It is difficult to see how it has. It has brought continued expressions of gratitude from Mengistu and his colleagues, but the widespread popular satisfaction with the Russian rescue operation that existed in 1977-1978 has dissipated. In terms of actual power position within the country, provision of military support and increase of Soviet adviser and Cuban troop presence did not result in creation of political strong points within the structure of the revolutionary government. If the Soviet/Cuban intention had been to capitalize on military support by creating a strong, Soviet-loyal party, Mengistu frustrated it. Rancor of many kinds developed over Eritrea, where Cubans refrained from

insoluble in military terms. Five or six times as much military manpower is now tied up in Eritrea and the neighboring provinces of Tigre and Gondar. A military solution is even less conceivable than it was in 1974. This is the kind of stalemate that almost always produces restiveness among an officer corps and indiscipline in various forms among the rank and file.

The most serious problem the overmilitarization of Ethiopian society causes is the distortion of economic priorities. The fact that Ethiopia has not already faced a major crisis over this issue is attributable to (a) the low level of pay and amenities provided Ethiopian soldiers; (b) the residual strength of the Ethiopian economy, which after 1974 continued benefiting from the conservative management principles which evolved under Haile Selassie. The cushion this latter factor has provided is now almost threadbare. Prospects for indefinite absorption of high local military costs without serious political and economic consequences are poor. Military managers are likely to find themselves increasingly at odds with other claimants for available resources. It cannot be assumed that Mengistu and his most loyal Derg supporters will necessarily give absolute priority to military demands. Mengistu's appeals to the military for greater exertions against the Eritrean insurgents have been increasingly couched in deep historic nationalist terms.⁴³ The Ethiopian officer corps developed habits of nonconformist thinking in the prerevolutionary era--of which Mengistu and the Derg stand as outstanding examples. What is to prevent the present generation--in which the same tendencies toward thinking for themselves must be inherent--from feeling as much right to interpret Ethiopian history freely as Mengistu does?⁴⁴

⁴³His speeches delivered at the Congress of the "Eritrea Region Red Star Multi-Faceted Revolution Campaign" on January 25, 1982, and at Massawa on January 26, 1982, are remarkable examples of historic evocations that go back to Axumite times.

⁴⁴We know too little about the social and educational background and political inclinations of the Ethiopian officer corps. It is an urgent subject for research.

been close. None of the pragmatism in respect to agricultural policies, let alone the economy as a whole, that has characterized China for the better part of the past decade, has yet been evident in Ethiopia. Were an officially sanctioned interest in Chinese ways of doing things to become apparent, we would have strong evidence of a desire to turn away from the obsequious imitation of the Soviet Union which has been the predominant characteristic of Mengistu's exercise of power to date.

THE MILITARY CONUNDRUM

Efforts to reorganize the Ethiopian armed forces along Soviet lines do not seem to have advanced very far. Though enormously expanded, the armed forces still seem to operate according to traditional Ethiopian patterns. It is too early to tell what effect countrywide conscription will have. It can hardly be implemented for the time being, given the Derg's tenuous control over some of the most heavily populated parts of the country. Furthermore, given Ethiopia's large and steadily growing population, a system of putting all military-age young men through even a token period of military service appears to be beyond the logistic or financial capacity of the government. Military forces at their present level--about 300,000 men under arms at any given time--represent an economic burden that Ethiopia can ill afford on a continuing basis.⁴²

The stalemated situation in Eritrea, which has political and economic as well as military implications, will be reviewed at greater length in another essay in this series. The Eritrean rebellion was a minor contributory factor to the ferment that set in in early 1974 and led to the revolution later that year. It was a major factor in the turn toward blood and violence which the revolution took at the end of that same year. It contributed to several subsequent outbreaks of dissension within the Derg. On the surface, Eritrea seems to have generated little rancor within the Derg in recent years. It is hard to believe that this apparent calm can persist. The situation is potentially much more serious than it was in 1974 when 25,000 troops were bogged down in an Eritrean counterinsurgency struggle that was

⁴²A conscription system has the elementary financial advantage of savings on soldiers' salaries. This is not likely to be sufficient to offset the continued relatively high costs of food, clothing, accommodation, arms, and equipment.

Creation of a Ministry of State Security is more in keeping with Soviet practice than with the previous Ethiopian pattern. Haile Selassie had two established security services competing with each other as well as several informal informant networks. He applied this principle to many other aspects of governing. Successful Ethiopian rulers in the past have usually shown great skill in balancing disparate forces, setting rival groups against each other and drawing disparate constituencies into support of the political system. Mengistu has either failed to follow these practices or alienated groups which, with a modicum of political effort, could have been enlisted as supporters of even a republican revolutionary regime: traditional leaders in the countryside, for example. Mengistu's policy toward the Ethiopian Orthodox church has made it at best a wary, politically passive force which retains a considerable potential for becoming actively hostile to the regime. Mengistu has failed to cultivate an intellectual following. He has shown much less skill in co-opting young technocrats as regime supporters than Haile Selassie did. All of these options were open to the revolutionary leadership--because Ethiopians, especially the modernized and modernizing segment of society, were not strongly attached to the monarchy as an institution. The adoption of "Ethiopian socialism" and its relatively dogmatic implementation precluded application of such an approach.

It was often said at the time that the speed with which "Ethiopian socialism" was implemented, as well as the sweeping nature of some of the measures applied--land reform, for example, the students' campaign--seemed more Maoist in spirit than Soviet. The EPRP has occasionally--not in the least by Soviet commentators--been accused of being Maoist-inspired and/or supported. No evidence has ever come to light of significant Chinese communist input into the Ethiopian revolutionary process or of sustained Chinese effort to influence it. In October 1971, when Haile Selassie visited Peking and struck a bargain on recognition and Eritrea, Mao's China--already only beginning the turn toward pragmatism in international relations that characterizes the country under the leadership of Deng Xiao-Ping--opted to support the imperial system in Ethiopia. Its relationship with the revolutionary leadership has never

Mengistu still appears to see no inherent incompatibility between nationalism and communism. Much about the early phase of the Ethiopian revolution remains even more obscure than recent developments. Everything we know and can surmise, however, combines to present a picture of Mengistu developing high expectations of the Soviets as early as the fall of 1974. Mengistu is more closely identified with the proclamation of "Ethiopian socialism" in December 1974 than any other Derg figure. Though there was a great deal of wishful thinking involved in contemporary analyses that argued otherwise, it was a clear attempt to orient the revolution toward the Soviet Union. A good deal of mythology about the revolution--and Mengistu personally--turning toward the East because he felt rejected by the West--continues to be purveyed, often by well-meaning interpreters of Ethiopian revolutionary history as well as rationalizers of the eastward turn. It is sophistry. Mengistu, openly in charge since February 1977, has continued to praise the Soviet Union, consciously imitate Soviet policies, bask in Soviet praise, and constantly seek Soviet support on all issues of primary importance. On many lesser issues--mostly relating to foreign policy--where it would be possible to demonstrate independence of the Soviets (Afghanistan, Caribbean and Central America, Olympics, for example) Mengistu has done just the opposite, endorsing Soviet positions at the expense of being seen as a Soviet lackey and out of line with many other African and Third World countries with whom Ethiopia cultivates good relations.

Domestically, there have been substantial deviations from Soviet practice only in fields where the drastic consequences of applying a Soviet formula are readily apparent and would immediately jeopardize the incomplete hold Mengistu and the Derg have always had on power: the premature establishment of a Soviet-style party, application of Soviet nationalities policy, or--in a more modified way--advocacy of atheism and suppression of religion. Agricultural policy *goals* are fully imitative of Soviet practice. The revolutionary government's handling of the peasantry reveals a consistent ideological bias and an increasing proclivity to move toward Soviet patterns in face of mounting evidence of inapplicability to Ethiopian circumstances.

The memory of the commotion which engulfed the country from 1975 onward and of the hardships endured during the Somali war and Red Terror remains strong. Ethiopians do not want to undergo another period of terror and bloodshed. In most of the central and southern provinces, this desire to avoid repeating the recent past works in favor of the revolutionary government. In the north, where the government's authority is more tenuous, people have withdrawn into themselves and learned to live with insecurity. This is not a new situation for these regions. Until recently there had been widespread expectations among some segments of the population that economic conditions might improve. The bulk of the peasantry in the center and south still eats well (by local standards) and has an existence that still compares favorably with prerevolutionary times. Unless and until the government tries to force them *en masse* into collective farms, they will concentrate their energies on making the best of the possibilities open to them. The absence of a clear alternative to the present regime has worked in its favor.

Even though it has endured ten years and Mengistu Haile-Mariam has proved adept at maneuvering among rivals and avoiding assassins' ambushes, the regime appears brittle. Not only has it failed to inspire enthusiasm or strong positive loyalty, it has not created a self-propelled institutional structure. Mengistu has always feared institutional mechanisms which could make him vulnerable to Soviet-engineered replacement.

For all its sycophancy toward Moscow, the Ethiopian revolutionary regime is not simply a satellite government. The Soviets not only do not manage it but must be constantly wary of appearing to manipulate it for fear of generating Ethiopian resentments. No Soviet advisers have been observed at Mengistu's left elbow, though some may lurk behind him in the shadows. There is no evidence that he is dependent on the Russians (much less Cubans or East Germans) for his own personal security. Were such to become the case, we would have dramatic evidence of a weakening of his position. Is Mengistu then more of a nationalist than a communist?

HOW COMMUNIST IS ETHIOPIA?

No pro-Russian party or group exists in Ethiopia outside the narrow confines of the Derg and the organizations it has set up to implement "Ethiopian socialism": the Ethiopian Workers' Party, the National Revolutionary Development Campaign, the Supreme Planning Council and in the upper hierarchy of a variety of organizations set up to "mobilize" and control various elements in society: labor, peasants, women, youth, etc. Even among the senior personnel of these organizations, the common denominator is bureaucratic loyalty, not revolutionary zeal.

The revolution has intensified the desire for modernization in Ethiopia among elites and those obtaining a modern education; it has raised expectations among a good proportion of the population. But cultural habits and preferences of both the modernized segment of the society and those aspiring to join them remain pro-Western. No one studies Russian. Almost any Ethiopian would be insulted if he were told he dressed, looked or thought like a Russian. The outsize statue of Lenin in the park below the Addis Ababa Hilton has not inspired any serious study of Marxism-Leninism. Ethiopian ideological publications read like primers at a Soviet party school. The effort to adapt Marxism-Leninism to Ethiopian circumstances is all verbal and bureaucratic. There is no creativity in it. There is little evidence that the younger generation has been, or is being, converted, least of all those recruited for study and training in the USSR and Eastern Europe where they experience the shortcomings and contradictions of Soviet-style society firsthand. They also experience racist prejudice, to which Ethiopians, lighter than most Africans and with an ancient tradition of political independence, resent intensely.

What, then, has kept a Soviet-style regime in power in Ethiopia? Ruthlessness and Soviet arms; tight organization among a ruling junta all of whom now share responsibility for the system they have imposed on their country; an ability to manipulate some of the symbols of Ethiopian nationalism and to present themselves as defenders of the national interest against forces which have attacked and still threaten the country.

leadership always has to adopt; coercion is applied to control output; output declines and exhortation and pressure increase. In the richer and much more highly developed economies of Eastern Europe these approaches have had disastrous consequences--for example, a 25 percent decline in Poland's GDP in a three-year period. A 25 percent decline in Ethiopia's GDP, where famine is already chronic, would be a calamity of extraordinary proportions.

1984, a year of intensified revolutionary rhetoric and formation of a Soviet-style party, appeared to have locked Ethiopia into the communist pattern for a long period to come. Preoccupied with celebration of its 10th anniversary and proclamation of the party, the military leadership underestimated and tried to ignore the famine which had been spreading in the north for more than a year. When news of the famine broke soon after the noise of the anniversary celebrations had subsided, the regime was thrown into a crisis. It had no alternative but to accept massive Western emergency food aid. It also had to permit, as a price for the aid, a massive influx of relief officials, journalists, U.S. congressmen, and other American and European officials. Derg efforts to blame the famine exclusively on drought have failed and criticism of Western governments for alleged slowness in alleviating famine conditions the Derg refused to acknowledge have backfired. Russian inability to provide relief and continued Russian unwillingness to underwrite long-term development programs have convinced the Ethiopian population that the Soviet economic pattern the military leadership has been trying to force onto the country offers no hope. Resettlement programs are widely suspected as being motivated by a desire to remove as much of the agricultural population as possible from rebellious areas, thus undermining guerrilla movements. Western specialists are skeptical of resettlement as a cost-effective means of dealing with famine conditions. Thus as 1984 came to an end, Ethiopia was exposed to the world as being in a severe economic crisis which showed all the signs of turning into a major political crisis for the Soviet-oriented Derg leadership. Can the Derg maintain its pro-Russian policies? How high a price can Moscow pay? Can Mengistu shift orientation toward the West and survive?

than it was before the revolution. The situation in respect to Ethiopia's principal export crop--coffee--duplicates the Cuban experience with sugar. Official delivery and export quotas have never been met; falling world prices again deprive the country of a significant portion of the earnings even a continued modest level of coffee exports might produce.

Addiction to dogma and acceptance of Soviet and East European advice has deprived the Derg of the opportunity to develop and implement serious plans for exploiting the enormous potential Ethiopia's agricultural endowments represent. Taking advantage of green revolution technology and the large body of research that has been done in the past 25 years on agricultural development, a pragmatic and foresighted Ethiopian revolutionary government could not only improve peasant living conditions rapidly and gain peasant support, but capitalize on the wealth created to lay a basis for greatly accelerated modernization of the country in other respects. Ethiopia's range of altitudes, soils and climates is such that practically everything will grow. The prerequisites are all present for dairy, meat and poultry production that could not only provide for the needs of a growing population but produce large surpluses for export. So are the requirements for producing raw materials to supply high-quality textile, leather, woodworking, paint, plastics and many other kinds of industry where relatively low labor costs would put Ethiopia in a good competitive position in world markets. The accelerated modernization of the country on the basis of agriculture and agro-industry could set an example for the developing world comparable to the achievements of Korea, Malaysia and Brazil, for Ethiopians have shown themselves to be quick to absorb modern education and training. Their pride and highly developed sense of individualism have enabled them in exile to move rapidly into new fields. In the United States, they show many of the same characteristics of Southeast Asians.

"Ethiopian socialism" is a poor formula for exploiting the natural advantages of the country and strengths of its people. It stifles them. Agriculture, the basis of Ethiopian life for the past several thousand years, is the playground of bureaucrats and dogmatists. The Derg is being driven into the same dead-end policies that Soviet-style

and East European specialists. Programs for provision of better seeds, fertilizers, livestock improvement and expertise of other kinds all concentrate on the state farms and on measures that are aimed to entice or pressure peasants into collectives.

The Central Planning Supreme Council began drafting a 10-year plan in 1980. Not yet adopted but already serving as a basis for guidelines for policy, it provides a remarkable measure of the extent to which the Derg desires to apply Soviet dogma. This plan envisions \$13.4 billion in investment over 10 years, only 12.9 percent going to agriculture. The aim is to increase agricultural production 60 percent while increasing industrial production fourfold, providing new employment for 5 million people! An annual foreign aid input of \$800 million at 1979 prices is estimated as required to implement this plan.

Such planning is pathetically unrealistic in face of continued Soviet failure to provide significant economic aid and static or falling levels of development aid from present principal donors: the EEC, Germany, Italy, and the World Bank. A 1982 FAO mission which studied Ethiopian agricultural practices and plans discovered that only 8 percent of agricultural investment has been going to the small-farming sector.³⁹ Thus the capacity of Ethiopian small farmers to produce and sell, even if they were enthusiastic about delivering their produce to the market, is not being improved. Best evidence is that state farms, in spite of the favored position they enjoy in investment, offer a poor return and are far from the level of productivity they achieved as private commercial undertakings. They have "serious problems of overmechanization, uneconomic use of inputs, heavy manpower demands and lack of a disciplined labor force. Most are not yet financially viable."⁴⁰ Almost no progress has been made in improving Ethiopia's enormous livestock herds--27 million cattle; 41 million sheep and goats; 5 million horses and camels.⁴¹ The potential these livestock represent for export of meat and dairy products to nearby areas where demand is great--the Middle East and Southeast Asia--is farther from realization

³⁹Cohen, op. cit., p. 50.

⁴⁰Cohen, op. cit., p. 25.

⁴¹Cohen, op. cit., p. 36.

with the money they receive in return. In the center and south of the country, where production has remained relatively high (it increased during the first years after land reform) this problem is more acute. Peasants themselves are eating well but have little incentive to sell, especially to the state-controlled Agricultural Marketing Corporation (AMC). Regulations require collective farms to sell all their produce, and private traders, who still account for approximately 50 percent of the grain trade, to sell part of what they buy at fixed low prices to the AMC. A large-scale program of construction of state-controlled grain storage facilities is under way in the south. Such facilities will make it easier for the government to use coercion to secure grain deliveries.

Proclamations issued in 1978 and 1979 aimed to accelerate movement toward collective farming. Though Amharic terms are used for the three stages through which the collective process is supposed to progress-- *welba*, *malba* and *weland*--and attempts have been made to justify the system as arising out of Ethiopian traditions and tailored to fit Ethiopian circumstances,³⁷ it is basically a scheme for collectivization Soviet-style. It is not surprising that little progress has been made through persuasion. As of 1982, individual peasants were cultivating 94 percent of the land, state farms 4 percent and collective farms and new settlements 2 percent.³⁸

Agricultural development evaluation and research are the responsibility not only of the Ministry of Agriculture, but of several other organizations: a Ministry of State Farms, a Ministry of Tea and Coffee, a Settlement Development Authority which is part of the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (established to deal with famine relief), the National Revolutionary Development Campaign, the Institute of Development Research at Addis Ababa University, and the Central Planning Supreme Council. This last-named group has developed a large bureaucracy to deal with agriculture and implement the advice of Soviet

³⁷For example, Fassil G. Kiros, "Mobilizing the Peasantry for Rural Development: The Ethiopian Experiment in Progress," in *Proceedings of the VIIth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, Lund, Sweden, 1984, pp. 577-595.

³⁸Cohen, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

occurring and even in the Soviet Union itself some efforts at reform of the agricultural system are again under way. The Soviet agricultural model presents a more serious problem for the Ethiopian revolutionary regime than it has been for most others because

- Such a large proportion of the population is rural;
- There are no promising prospects for industrialization or diversion of people away from agriculture;
- High population growth is already placing intense strain on the country's food resources;
- Beset by chronic famine in some areas compounded by environmental degradation and spreading insurgency, the Derg cannot risk the consequences of the upheaval forced collectivization would cause.³⁶

In the northern provinces, rebellion, insurgency and various forms of passive resistance to regime efforts to exercise control of the countryside are severe restraints on agricultural development and prevent establishment of procurement and marketing systems. Overpopulation in relation to the present level of development of agriculture almost ensures that even with periods of good rains near-famine conditions will continue to prevail indefinitely. Famine relief programs, in which the U.S., Canada and several European countries are now participating, can keep deaths from reaching high levels--and, in effect, keep the population increasing--but they have no impact on the basic agricultural and social problems of these regions which continue to be exacerbated by efforts to apply socialist dogma.

Even in those northern regions where agricultural productivity exceeds local food needs, peasants are reluctant to sell grain--or increase production for sale--when there are few consumers to buy

³⁶Agriculture accounted for half of Ethiopia's GDP in 1983 and 90 percent of its exports. In 1981 per capita food production was only 84 percent of the 1970 level. The World Bank estimates that Ethiopia's population stood at 33 million in 1982 and will rise to 57 million by 2000. A census announced in December 1984 drastically increases the official population estimate to more than 42 million. Cohen, op. cit., pp. 34-35; World Bank, *World Development Report 1984*, p. 192; *Ethiopian Herald*, December 6, 1984.

religious belief and activity is observable not only in mass attendance at services and festivals, but in new church- and mosque-building and renovation.

The activities of foreign missionaries have been severely curtailed but not entirely forbidden; their role in education is too valuable to be dispensed with. The Derg's dealings with indigenous religious groups stemming from missionary activity, of which there are several, have varied. It has avoided clashing with the large Catholic minority in Eritrea. On the other hand, the Evangelical Lutheran Mekane Yesus Church, strong among the Oromo of Wollega, has experienced serious difficulties.

There has been a great deal of reporting abroad about oppression of the small indigenous Ethiopian Jewish sect, the Falashas, but it is difficult to find concrete evidence that they have been singled out as a special object of mistreatment. Poor, isolated and long neglected, they are experiencing the same hardships as the majority of the population in the northwest province of Gondar, where the revolutionary government has never been able to establish complete control.

While no religious group can be identified as constituting itself a source of active resistance to the revolutionary government, it is even harder to find any reason for regarding any religious denomination as actively or potentially supporting the Derg.³⁵ Since the great majority of Ethiopians participate in religious observances, overtly oppressive actions (in contrast to the present policy of unenthusiastic toleration) could generate opposition.

THE PEASANTRY--THE ULTIMATE TEST OF THE REVOLUTION

Nearly 70 years of history of communist regimes in power offers an unbroken record of failure in agricultural policy and communization of the peasantry. One of the most puzzling aspects of the Ethiopian revolution is why the Derg has persisted in trying to force Ethiopian agriculture into a Soviet-style mold when throughout the communist world, most notably in China, drastic departures from dogma are

³⁵The Kunama of western Eritrea, who are predominantly animists, are said to be the Eritrean group most favorable to the revolutionary government. The Anuak of the Sudan border region in Illubabor have also been reported to be strong Derg supporters.

The *Ethiopian Orthodox Church* was one of the pillars supporting the prerevolutionary system in Ethiopia. It was seldom an active political force; its influence was mostly residual, but it had been important in inspiring national resistance during the Italian occupation. The Derg was very careful in dealing with the church in 1974 and did not move against the throne until Archbishop Tewoflos, the Patriarch, endorsed the revolution at the end of August 1974. A forceful personality, he was tolerated for only a year and a half, until early 1976, when he was replaced by a minor church figure who had been head archbishop of the province of Sidamo, which has few Orthodox Christians. The church was deprived of its large land holdings by the rural and urban land reforms of 1975. It continues to be strongly supported by the population, however, and no one who has spent a few days in Ethiopia in recent years can fail to be impressed by the enormous numbers of people of all ages who attend church services both on Sunday and on the numerous feast days in the Ethiopian religious calendar. Pilgrimage sites draw pilgrims in vast numbers; the great annual pilgrimage to Kulubi (near Harar) has been attracting even more pilgrims during the St. Gabriel feast which occurs each year during the last week of December than it did in prerevolutionary times. The same is true of the great Muslim pilgrimage site in Bale, the tomb of Sheikh Hussein.

There was a marked tilt toward Islam during the early phase of the revolution. Islamic holidays were officially placed on a par with Christian ones. The Derg has never had any Muslim members of significance, however,³⁴ and the proportion of Muslims in prominent positions in revolutionary Ethiopia has remained almost exactly the same as it was before the revolution. The Derg is perceived as unenthusiastic toward religion by all major groups, including Muslims, but it is credited with wanting to avoid confrontation. Among both Christians and Muslims a definite postrevolutionary resurgence of

³⁴A recent lengthy study of Derg personalities states that there has been only one Muslim in the Derg: Lt. Ali Musa, a Holeta graduate "widely considered a hatchet man for Mengistu in 1977-78." He later became chief administrator for Bale but is reported to have been arrested in that position in 1983 and perhaps executed. "Pliny the Middle-Aged" (pseudonym), "The Lives and Times of the Dergue," *Journal of Northeast African Studies*, Vol. 5/3 (1983-84), pp. 1-41.

becoming directly involved and Soviet advisory activity was for the most part camouflaged. The result has been widespread Ethiopian suspicion that the Soviets may actually be playing a double game with both the EPLF and the TPLF. How prevalent this suspicion is in the Derg itself, and whether Mengistu shares it, we do not know. At the sub-Derg level of the Ethiopian government, it is well attested. Both Russians and Cubans have become progressively less popular among the Ethiopian public since 1978. Gradually both Soviet and Cuban presence has been reduced from a high of perhaps 1,600 and 18,000, respectively, in 1978 to about 1,200 and 5,000 in late 1984. Mengistu's regime does not rest on Cuban or Soviet bayonets. It is a regime which has so far proved capable of maintaining itself through its own authoritarian methods. Since 1980 it has felt strong enough to release many imprisoned opponents, though the total number of political prisoners in Ethiopia remains far higher than it was in prerevolutionary times.

The most difficult aspect of the Soviet-Ethiopian relationship to understand is the failure to provide economic aid. A few projects chosen for their high visibility could, for at least a few years, have created the impression that Moscow was rewarding Derg loyalty by making a major contribution to the welfare and economic development of the country. The Soviets have been so unforthcoming for so long that even a change in policy and delivery of substantial aid would no longer have the effect it might have had five years ago--for the impression of Soviet niggardliness is now so deeply embedded in the consciousness of the public and of government officials that it could be eradicated only by massive inputs maintained for several years. Such generosity appears to be beyond Soviet capabilities in the foreseeable future, as poor Soviet and bloc performance in response to the current famine demonstrates. Half a billion dollars in commodity and development aid would now seem to be the minimal commitment the USSR would have to make to reverse the economic crisis exposed by the current famine.

What, then, ties Ethiopia to the Soviets? Primarily the strong commitment of Mengistu to be a Soviet ally and imitate the Soviet system. Time and again Mengistu has expressed himself in the most unequivocal pro-Soviet terms:

...we are profoundly convinced that the working class of Ethiopia cannot be free unless imperialism and its accomplices are wiped out of the face of the globe and the rights and freedoms of the working class of the world are assured. Our struggle is, therefore, international in character.⁴⁵

It is difficult to understand how either Soviet or internal Ethiopian pressure upon him could cause Mengistu to make such statements if they ran contrary to his own convictions.

On the other hand, were Mengistu to decide to break with the Soviet Union, there is no identifiable source of institutional intractability in the government or counterpressure in Ethiopian society to block such a move. We know too little about relationships within the Derg as it is presently constituted to know whether ardent Soviet supporters there could be enlisted to keep Mengistu from reducing or altering the relationship if he chose to do so. None of the institutions that have been developed to support "Ethiopian socialism" seems to have the capacity in itself to serve as an obstacle, or even act as a brake, on a process of disengagement. With the public at large, Mengistu could expect to gain popularity by engineering a successful disengagement. Ethiopian leaders who have defied foreigners have usually been popular. Those who have tried to convert the country to foreign ways have seldom survived for long.⁴⁶

Dismantling a Soviet-type economic system and reorienting military forces dependent on Soviet arms can be a complicated process, as the experience of the Egyptians (and to a lesser degree, the Somalis) has demonstrated. But if the Soviet relationship does not contribute to the Derg's capacity to hold onto power, the incentive for maintaining it is certainly reduced. These conclusions already seem apparent not only to broad segments of the Ethiopian population but to many regime officials. There is still little evidence that they are recognized by Mengistu or his Derg supporters.

⁴⁵Speech at Asmara, January 25, 1982.

⁴⁶The most dramatic example is the Emperor Susenyos, who succumbed to Portuguese persuasion and intrigue and accepted conversion to Roman Catholicism in the early seventeenth century. Both the aristocracy and the common people joined to depose him.

The celebrations of the 10th anniversary of the revolution and formal establishment of the Party of Workers and Peasants of Ethiopia produced a wave of pessimism among Western-oriented Ethiopian officials and intellectuals who consistently hoped that confrontation with reality, especially in the economic field, the intractability of problems such as Eritrean insurgency, and the worsening of relations with key neighbors such as Sudan, might lead to a gradual moderation of Mengistu's pro-Soviet orientation.

Pessimism proved to have a shorter life than most Ethiopians anticipated, because the upwelling of concern about the famine and international relief operations that are now under way to alleviate its effects have produced a contrary effect. "This famine is a blessing in disguise," one hears over and over again from articulate Ethiopians, many of them serving as officials. "It forces Mengistu to open to the West; it demonstrates the pointlessness of trying to follow a Russian economic model; it underscores Moscow's unwillingness to do anything to help Ethiopia," says one pro-Western official. While Mengistu and his pro-Soviet team show increasing fear that their predicament may worsen, the population shows less fear of the Derg than it has displayed at any time in the past ten years. With several million people starving and international relief essential to alleviate the situation, the Derg is in no position to resort to oppression and terror to keep the population under control. Such actions would be reported immediately by the dozens of journalists and hundreds of relief workers who are moving about the country.

It can be argued that Mengistu is now so personally identified with defense of the Soviet relationship, and has surrounded himself with so many men at least as strongly pro-Soviet as himself, while at the same time the mood of the country has become so anti-Soviet, that he is losing the opportunity which until recently still existed to present himself as a true nationalist and defender of Ethiopia's fundamental interests. In other words, he is caught in a trap of his own making and cannot hope to extricate himself from it and retain power.

This may be happening. The likelihood that a point of no return would set in for Mengistu and the Derg seems greater the longer they attempt to adhere to an unequivocally pro-Soviet course.

In nondemocratic systems, changes in governments and leaders, and changes in government policies and fundamental direction are almost always a function of feasibility of alternatives. Theoretically, reorientation of the Ethiopian revolution toward the West, reintroduction of democratic forms and adoption of pragmatic, free-market economic policies has never disappeared as an alternative to the ultra pro-Soviet course the Derg chose. The situation created by the famine--and the relationship of the famine to insurgency throughout the northern part of the country--dramatizes the futility of the pro-Soviet course into which the Derg tried to lock the country with the creation of the Ethiopian Workers' Party. In light of such developments the triumphal arches and brightly painted obelisks and billboards that decorate the streets of the capital look like circus props. On close examination they prove to be built of plywood and tin. During the next rainy season the paint will peel. These stage props symbolize the hollowness of the revolutionary vision the Derg has tried to impose on the country. Alternative courses of revolutionary development are discussed with growing boldness. The locomotive of history is building up steam in Ethiopia. It remains to be seen whether it will overrun those who have been trying to steer it.

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