

This book is the most comprehensive account of the Ethiopian revolution currently available, dealing with almost the entire span of the revolutionary government's life. It is also the first sequential exposition of events, and thus of the history of the revolution. Particular emphasis is placed on effectively isolating and articulating the causes and outcomes of the revolution. The author traces the revolution's roots in the weaknesses of the autocratic regime of Haile Selassie, examines the formative years of the revolution in the mid-seventies, when the ideology of scientific socialism was espoused by the ruling military council and finally charts the consolidation of Mengistu Haile Mariam's power from 1977 to the adoption of a new constitution in 1987.

In examining these events, Dr Tiruneh makes extensive use of primary sources written in the national official language. He is also the first Ethiopian national to write a book on this subject. This book is thus a unique account of a fascinating period, capturing the mood of the revolution as never before, yet firmly grounded in scholarship.



# THE ETHIOPIAN REVOLUTION 1974-1987

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# THE ETHIOPIAN REVOLUTION

1974–1987

*A transformation from an aristocratic to a totalitarian  
autocracy*

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## *Abbreviations*

|         |  |
|---------|--|
| ALF     | the Afar Liberation Front  |
| AELU    | the All Ethiopian Labour Unions  |
| AESM    | the All Ethiopian Socialist Movement   |
| CC      | the Central Committee  |
| COPWE   | the Commission for the Organization of the Ethiopian Workers' Party              |
| CELU    | the Confederation of Ethiopian Labour Unions                                     |
| CCAFPTA | the Co-ordinating Committee of the Armed Forces, the Police and Territorial Army |
| ELF     | the Eritrean Liberation Front  |
| EPDRF   | the Ethiopian People's Democratic Revolutionary Front                            |
| EPLF    | the Eritrean People's Liberation Front   |
| EDU     | the Ethiopian Democratic Union   |
| EMLRO   | the Ethiopian Marxist-Leninist Revolutionary Organization                        |
| EOPRS   | the Ethiopian Oppressed People's Revolutionary Struggle                          |
| EPRP    | the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party                                       |
| ESM     | the Ethiopian Student Movement   |
| ESUE    | the Ethiopian Students' Union of Europe  |
| ESUNA   | the Ethiopian Students' Union of North America                                   |
| JFEMLO  | the Joint Front of Ethiopian Marxist-Leninist Organizations                      |
| NDR     | National Democratic Revolution   |
| NDRPE   | the National Democratic Revolutionary Programme of Ethiopia                      |
| NCO     | non-commissioned officer   |
| OLF     | the Oromo Liberation Front   |
| PA      | Peasants' Association  |

|       |  |
|-------|--|
| PAE   | the Peasants' Association of Ethiopia                  |
| PDRE  | the People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia           |
| PMAC  | the Provisional Military Administrative Council        |
| PMG   | the Provisional Military Government                    |
| POMOA | the Provisional Office for Mass Organizational Affairs |
| TLF   | the Tigrai Liberation Front                            |
| TPLF  | the Tigrai People's Liberation Front                   |
| REWA  | the Revolutionary Ethiopian Women Association          |
| REYA  | the Revolutionary Ethiopian Youth Association          |
| USUAA | the University Students' Union of Addis Ababa          |
| UDA   | Urban Dwellers' Association                            |
| WSLF  | the Western Somalia Liberation Front                   |
| WPE   | the Workers' Party of Ethiopia                         |





Map 2 Administrative divisions



## CHAPTER I

# *The background to the emergence of the structural crisis*

### THE EMERGENCE OF ETHIOPIA AS A SOVEREIGN STATE

The region now called Ethiopia has been the home of diverse linguistic groups since pre-historic times. These were the Semitic languages of the northern and central highlands, notably Amharic and Tigrinya, the Cushitic languages of the lowlands and of the south-western, central and south-eastern highlands, notably Oromo, Afar and Somali; the Sidama languages of the central and southern highlands; and the Nilotic languages of the periphery areas along the Sudanese frontier. It has been the orthodoxy among 'Ethiopianists' to assert that, whereas the other groups have lived in the region since time immemorial, the Semitic languages and people were a result of intermarriages and cultural exchanges between the Cushitic peoples of northern Ethiopia, and settlers from the Arabian Peninsula which took place only in the first millennium BC. However, the idea is not without challenge; Grover Hudson for one has argued that all the Afro-Asiatic languages have in fact originated from the Ethiopian region.<sup>1</sup> If correct, this would render Ethiopia the source of the Semitic, Cushitic and Sidama languages and their counterparts in the present neighbouring countries of Africa and the Middle East as well as many other languages in north, central and West Africa, like the Berber and Chadic languages. Clearly the origin of the Ethiopian linguistic groups is still a matter of conjecture.

The Ethiopian region was also an early home for the great monotheistic religions of the Middle East. Though Judaism was perhaps the first to be introduced into the region (probably before Christ), it was Christianity (fourth century) and Islam (seventh century) which were superimposed on the linguistically diverse, Judaic and animist populations of the region and

became the major contending ideologies from that time to the present.

In addition, the Ethiopian region has been the home of diverse political institutions for at least the last 2,000 years. During that period, the major protagonist has been the Christian kingdom which had to change its seat several times in the northern and central Highlands. The first of these was the classical Kingdom of Axum (first millennium) which had as its heart-land the present regions of the Tigrain and Eritrean plateau and the adjoining coastal area of the Red Sea. The kingdom was notable for its architecture, having a written culture and maintaining a flourishing trade not only with the interior but also the Middle East and Far East. At the height of its glory in the middle of the millennium, it was in control of a large area extending into the Arabian Peninsula across the Red Sea, the present-day Sudan, and it also dominated most of the trading posts on the southern coast of the Red Sea as far as present-day Somalia. Axum's rise to a land and sea power earned it the designation 'empire'. However, the rise and expansion of Islam in the seventh century, and the waves of migrations of the Bejas from the north, cut the empire's relations with the other centres of the classical civilizations and, by the end of the millennium, put an end to Axum altogether.<sup>2</sup>

In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the medieval kingdoms of Ethiopia emerged in the Agaw (Cushitic) and Amhara regions of the central highlands with the religious ideology and script of Axum.<sup>3</sup> In addition to making an impressive array of conquests in all directions including the present Eritrean region in the north, they built monasteries and produced literature, music and art. The political career of the more important of the kingdoms which was ruled by the so-called Solomonic dynasty and which had emerged among the Amhara in the thirteenth century, was marked by having to change its seat constantly in order to tame independently minded regional governors and to ward off increasingly important Islamic encroachments from the strings of emirates that had come to exist in the eastern highland and lowland areas during the twelfth century.<sup>4</sup>

The decline of this kingdom came in the sixteenth century as a result of invasions by one of these emirates (Harar) and by waves of Oromo migrations from the south. Harar, led by Gragn who was probably a Somali, overran the length and breadth of the central

and northern highlands from 1529 to 1543. If, in this enterprise, Harar was backed by the Ottoman Empire, which was by then beginning to make its influence in the region felt, the Christian kingdom was rescued from total annihilation by Portuguese musketeers made available courtesy of their government. Despite the failure of the conquest, it appears to have resulted in the further penetration of Islam among the highland populations. Harar's defeat was followed by fifty years of waves of migrations by the animist Oromo into the eastern, western, central and northern highlands. Subsequently, the Oromo settled in the territories which they conquered and adopted either Christianity or Islam depending on the religion of the people among whom they settled.<sup>5</sup>

The greatly weakened Christian kingdom established its capital in the north-western part of the highlands (Gondar) in the second half of the sixteenth century; nevertheless, quite apart from the fact that it had not recovered from the previous invasions, it was further debilitated by religious disputes provoked by the intervention of Jesuit missionaries, by the centrifugal tendencies among the regional nobles and by the restiveness of the royal garrisons. With the religious disputes out of the way, with an understanding struck between the nobility and the monarchy, and with the influence of the Ottoman Empire having declined in the region because of revolts against it in the Arabian Peninsula, the Christian kingdom was able to flourish once again at Gondar between the 1640s and the 1770s. From then to the 1850s, however, it disintegrated into feudal anarchy often referred to as 'the era of the princes'.<sup>6</sup>

These political actors can be described as an empire (Axum), a city-state (Harar), a kingdom (Janjero among the Sidamas), and as a clan (the Somalis). In other words, none of them were sovereign states with a claim to independence, equality and territorial integrity, nor were they committed to non-interference in each other's internal affairs and the settlement of disputes peacefully. Rather, they felt free to trample on and pillage each other's rights and properties, subdue one another and exact tribute. Similarly, the whole of the region that we now call 'Ethiopia', composed as it was of all these political actors, did not enjoy the attributes of a sovereign state in its dealings with powers like the Greek or Ottoman Empires. Its relations with such powers were governed

by the same rules that prevailed among the actors within the Ethiopian region.

The process of Ethiopia's emergence as a sovereign state can be said to have been initiated and completed by its well-known kings: Tewodros of Gondar (1855–1868), Yohannis of Tigray (1869–1889) and Menelik of the central province of Shoa (1889–1913). Calling himself king of 'Ethiopia' like his predecessors and imbued with Ethiopian nationalism, Tewodros conducted a series of campaigns and managed to bring most of the northern highlands under his control, thus putting an end to the era of princes. Yohannis not only consolidated Tewodros's fragile reunification of the north but also extended his rule to the Red Sea coast by bringing under his control the Naibs of the port towns of Massawa and Arkiko who, since the sixteenth century, had been switching their allegiances between the Ethiopian kings and the rulers of the Ottoman and Egyptian Empires.<sup>7</sup> Thus, Egypt, which in the nineteenth century had replaced the Ottoman Empire as the regional power, was expelled from the area as recognized by the tripartite agreement of 1884 concluded between Yohannis, Egypt and Britain. While acknowledging the suzerainty of Yohannis, Menelik was in the meantime expanding to the south-west, south and south-east and in so doing bringing under his control territories like the Ogaden which had never been under the jurisdiction of the kingdoms of the north. When Yohannis died fighting the Dervishes on the present Ethio-Sudanese frontier in 1889, Menelik inherited his throne and became the uncontested ruler of the whole of present-day Ethiopia.

As the internal consolidation was underway, the regional Islamic expansionists were replaced by the European imperial powers. In fact, Menelik's southward thrust was in part instigated by his competing in the carving up of the Horn of Africa with European powers; he is reputed to have stated that he was not going to be an independent spectator to the division of the region among the Europeans. However, it soon transpired that European designs were not limited to competing with him over territories which were outside his jurisdiction but extended to the annexation of the whole of Ethiopia as built by Tewodros, Yohannis and himself. Thus, Italy which had a coaling post at Asab and which had been fighting with the forces of Yohannis in order to expand into the interior, took advantage of the confusion that ensued

upon Yohannis's death and in 1890 carved out the whole of the coastal area and the tip of the northern highlands, christened it 'Eritrea', and brought it under its control. Then, in 1896, Italy declared an all-out war on Ethiopia but was heavily defeated at the hands of Menelik at Adwa (Tigray), not far from what became the Ethio-Eritrean boundary. Why Menelik did not then pursue the Italians, drive them out of Eritrea and claim what was his by right (by the fact that he was a successor of Yohannis) has since been a matter of intense speculation among Ethiopians.

Menelik's diplomatic genius (his ability to play one state against another) is often cited as a major reason for his strong stature in the eyes of the European powers. More important in this regard was, perhaps, his Adwa victory; that event seems to have enhanced the standing of Menelik and his country in the international arena, frustrated the ambition of the European powers to colonize Ethiopia, and forced them to conclude boundary treaties with him. Thus, Ethiopia and France concluded a treaty concerning the Ethio-Djibouti boundary in 1897; Ethiopia and Britain concerning the Ethio-Sudanese boundary in 1902, the Ethio-Kenyan boundary in 1907, and Ethio-British Somaliland in 1908; and Ethiopia and Italy concerning the Ethio-Eritrean boundary in 1908. Though a similar treaty was concluded between Ethiopia and Italy concerning the Ethio-Italian Somaliland boundary in 1908, the instruments by which it was executed (oral agreements and exchanges of correspondence) has since proved illusory.

The recognition of her boundaries by the European states coupled with the fact that she had a government and a people effectively made Ethiopia a sovereign state. This was further enhanced by the recognition of her sovereignty over all her territories except Eritrea by a tripartite treaty of 1906 concluded between Britain, France and Italy and by her membership of the League of Nations in 1922. The emergence of Ethiopia as a sovereign state at the turn of the century was remarkably early; at the time, only the Latin American states, Japan and China had joined the European state system; a few other countries like Saudi Arabia and Yemen which were allowed to keep their independence, were, not unlike Ethiopia, targets of colonial ambitions of European powers.

Like the present Third World countries and, perhaps, like non-nuclear states, the sovereignty of Ethiopia was true only in the

juridical sense of the term. In other words, Ethiopia lacked the resources with which it could assert such formal attributes of a state as equality, independence and territorial integrity against the European powers which continued to pose a threat against its until 1944. Thus, though there were earlier attempts at dividing her into British, French and Italian spheres of influence, the real threat to her independence came in 1936. Resentful of her humiliation at Adwa, fascist Italy launched its offensive against Ethiopia from its African possessions of Eritrea and Italian Somaliland; this time, Italy had the advantage of modern weapons like planes and poison gas with the help of which she tore into the Ethiopian forces and occupied the country. Land-locked and starved of European weapons by a French blockade of Djibouti, Ethiopia's patriots resorted to guerrilla resistance while Haile Selassie went to Europe in self-imposed exile and, from that vantage point, launched a diplomatic offensive against Italy.

With the outbreak of World War Two in the European theatre and with Mussolini's joining the Axis, Italy was confronted by the Allied Powers both at home and in her colonial possessions. In 1941 Britain, at the head of the Allied Forces, liberated Ethiopia and reinstated Haile Selassie. Britain followed this by imposing a number of restrictions on the Ethiopian government which amounted to reducing the country to the status of a British *de facto* protectorate. This gave rise to the fear in Addis Ababa that Britain intended to treat Ethiopia as an enemy-occupied territory, which would not have been altogether inconsistent with her recognition of Italy's occupation of Ethiopia by an Anglo-Italian treaty of 1938. As it happened, Britain did not pursue the restrictions she imposed on Ethiopia with much vigour; after some diplomatic wrangling and a degree of US pressure, the restrictions began to be relaxed as of 1942.<sup>8</sup>

On the other hand, Britain was insistent that the Somali-inhabited regions of the Ogaden and Haud which she had brought under her control should be treated as enemy-occupied territories, a fact Ethiopia was made to recognize by treaty in 1942. After a lot of protests on the part of Ethiopia, another Anglo-Ethiopian treaty was concluded in 1944. That treaty recognized Ethiopia's sovereignty over the Ogaden and Haud subject to their continued British administration, since Britain insisted that they were necessary for the prosecution of World War Two. Despite this

understanding, in 1945 Britain submitted the Ogaden and Haud for disposal by the Council of Foreign Ministers of the Great Powers. As the proposal was not greeted with favour, the British government went public and declared that the idea had been submitted to the council only because of its sympathy for the Somali people and that the proposal would be dropped as of then. However, the Ogaden was not returned to Ethiopia until 1948 and the Haud area until 1955, three years and ten years after the end of the war respectively.<sup>9</sup>

In 1941, Eritrea too came under British administration as enemy-occupied territory. Britain sought (or it was accused of having sought) to expand its adjoining colony of the Sudan by hanging on to Eritrea. For her part, Italy, which had made its peace with the Allied Powers in 1943, sought the return of its ex-colony of Eritrea. Ethiopia sought 'reunification' because of her need for access to the sea, her claim that the territory used to belong to her and because the peoples of Ethiopia shared the same historical, linguistic and religious heritage with the peoples of the territory. Some Eritreans supported the British, some the Italians and some the Ethiopian position, while others were in favour of outright independence. The question of the disposal of Eritrea was then entertained by the Council of Foreign Ministers of the Great Powers between 1945 and 1948. However, they could not agree on the question, not least because of the onset of the cold war which was beginning both to frustrate their attempts at a post-war settlement of European issues, and to spill over to extra-European questions like that of Eritrea. Finally, they agreed to submit the question to the General Assembly of the UN, which, after several years of deliberation, decided to federate Eritrea with Ethiopia as of 1952.<sup>10</sup>

#### THE MODERNIZING AUTOCRACY

Medieval Ethiopia was very much an agrarian society composed of a mass of cultivating peasants and a surplus-appropriating upper class. The northern socio-economic order was introduced into the southern highlands during Menelik's conquests of the region in the last quarter of the nineteenth century and superimposed on the pre-existing agrarian system about which very little is known. Though important as animal-rearing communities, the nomadic peoples who inhabited the vast expanses of the arid and semi-arid

lowlands along the Red Sea coast and Somali frontier have not been absorbed into the northern socio-economic order.

Though there were important pockets of tenancy in the north, the bulk of the peasants had a title to their holdings called *rist* which entitled the holders to use their lands and pass them on to their heirs. Contrary to popular misconception, there is growing evidence to show that the *rist*-holders also had the right to sell their land though in reality they rarely exercised that right because they depended on their holdings for their livelihood and because if they sold their plots, they would lose the right to claim a share of the family *rist* land. Since the land was owned by the cultivator, therefore, the major form of surplus appropriation in the north was tribute, known as *gult* (fief). By contrast, the major form of surplus appropriation in the south was rent collected by landlords from the peasants. This arose from the fact that the conquerors of the south and their descendants, who were probably given tribute rights initially, managed to register the land and claim it in the form of ownership and reduce the cultivators to tenancy in the course of the twentieth century. In addition to tribute and rent, the peasants of both northern and southern Ethiopia were subjected to *corvée* and to presenting gifts on special occasions.<sup>11</sup>

Further, the *rist*-holders paid a tenth of their produce by way of tax. In 1944 this was replaced by the payment of rates based on the size and quality of the land and in 1967 by a progressive income tax. Though the same obligations existed for the landlords of the south, there was apparently a wide practice of shifting their tax duties onto the tenants. Finally, the peasants of the north and south and, when possible, the nomads of the lowlands paid tax on livestock, salt and trade.

The upper class which lived off the surplus appropriations was composed of what could be called the gentry and the nobility. More often than not, the gentry were state functionaries who were responsible for local administration, justice and tax collection. In return for their services, the gentry were entitled to a share of the tax they collected and sometimes to a tribute; often, they would have their own land in which case they could also be beneficiaries of *corvée* and rent.<sup>12</sup>

Superimposed on the gentry were the nobility who were primarily a class of warriors. The monarch gave rights of tribute over certain lands to members of the nobility in exchange for a

commitment to make available, in time of war, their 'private' armies as well as soldiers spontaneously raised from among the gentry and peasants. In addition to the land tenure and tax systems, these 'feudal institutions' of the north were introduced to the south by Menelik's conquest of the region towards the end of the nineteenth century, giving rise to a new class of gentry and nobility often referred to as the *neftegna*.

A constant feature of the weakness of the medieval Ethiopian state was the fact that these regional nobles who were in charge of military and administrative functions tended to assert independence against the monarch. The monarch counterbalanced the influence of the nobility with whatever political skills and manoeuvrings he could master and with the many royal garrisons (*chewa*) which were commanded by his loyal *rases* and *asmaches*.<sup>13</sup> Except for the period between the 1770s and the 1850s when the centrifugal forces prevailed, central rule continued to be the order ever since. Despite this inherent weakness in the state, strong monarchs of medieval Ethiopia were able to use these institutions to conquer vast territories and it was the same institutions that the monarch, from Tewodros in the middle of the nineteenth century to Haile Selassie in the twentieth century, used to create present-day Ethiopia to defeat Italy at Adwa in 1896 and to fight and resist it during its occupation of the country from 1936 to 1941.

In the twentieth century, the nobility was to find its position undermined on account of the demands of modernization set in motion by European expansionism. The major reason for this was the state's creation of a modern civilian and military bureaucracy and the increasing dependence on it rather than the traditional elite. No doubt, modern education plays a pivotal role in the building up of such a bureaucracy. The first modern school was established by Menelik in Addis Ababa (Menelik II School), a school that Haile Selassie himself attended as a boy. Graduates of the Menelik and Mission schools, as well as individuals hand-picked by the government, were sent abroad for further education and returned in the early part of the century to constitute a class of radical advocates of reform in the social, economic and political fields.<sup>14</sup> Called 'Japanizers' or 'the young of Ethiopia', these precursors of the radical civilian elite of the 1960s and 1970s held government positions that required modern education and

backed Haile Selassie in his drive to adopt progressive policies which were opposed by the traditional nobility. It appears very few of the militants survived the Italian occupation of the country and those that did seem to have fallen out with the monarch on matters of policy as well as the question of his sojourn in Britain during the occupation. After the war, however, the monarch devoted a great deal of attention to the building of schools and institutions of higher education; for a time, he appointed himself minister of education, visited every school at least once a year, gave one of his palaces to the university etc. The kind of education pursued was very elitist; partly as a result of this and partly because of the belated introduction and slow growth of educational institutions, by no means all children of school age were provided with access to schools. In 1970, the number of enrolled secondary school students was 70,000 while the equivalent figure for university students in 1974 was 6,000 with a further 2,000 attending universities in other countries. The civil service, which was the most important employer of the school and university graduates, was gradually yielding to modernization under their influence. By 1974, therefore, 20,000 school and 6,000 university graduates were working in the civil service. The bulk of the remaining civil servants, totalling about 100,000 in 1974,<sup>15</sup> had primary school education and/or church education, the latter of which only enabled them to read and write the official language (Amharic).

More important to the decline of the state's dependence on the nobility was the creation of a modern army which had been begun in the 1920s when Haile Selassie was the most powerful man in the government as regent and heir to the throne (1916 to 1930) and pursued vigorously when he became king (1930 to 1974). The first to be established was the royal bodyguard in the 1920s, with the help of a Belgian military mission engaged for the purpose and with the training of officers in France. This was followed in 1934 by the establishment of the Genet Military Academy of Holeta. After the Italian occupation, the British helped in organizing and financing the army (1941 to 1951) followed by the Americans and others thereafter. The royal bodyguard was reconstituted with pre-occupation graduates of the Holeta Academy, the Police Abadina was established in the 1940s, the Harar Academy in 1957, and the air force and navy were greatly expanded thereafter. The assistance of different countries was employed in the running of

these establishments: Indians for the Harar Academy and the bodyguard, Swedes for the air force, Norwegians for the navy and the Israelis for the police commandos and for other security units.<sup>16</sup>

The Holeta Academy recruited its intake from among non-commissioned officers who could read and write the national official language (Amharic) and who could do their basic arithmetic; however, in its two years of training it offered no academic subjects whatsoever. Whereas the Police Abadina College was no different from the Holeta Academy in this regard, the others, including the Harar Academy, the air force and the navy, recruited some of the best school graduates of the country and provided them with an academic background equivalent to three years of university education in addition to the usual military training in strategy, law, and the like. By 1974, the army consisted of 45,000 men including four divisions of infantry, one tank battalion, one airborne infantry battalion, four armoured car squadrons, four artillery battalions, two engineer battalions, fifty medium tanks, twenty light tanks, forty armed personnel carriers, eighty-six armed cars, six helicopters, a 6,800 mobile emergency force, 1,200 frontier guards, a 3,200 commando force as well as 9,200 paramilitary territorials in active force.<sup>17</sup>

The civilian and military bureaucracy was extremely expensive to maintain in several respects. In the first place, quite apart from the costs involved in running modern institutions like colleges, academic institutions, hospitals and the like, the amount paid to members of the new elite by way of salary was much more than the income of the direct producers of wealth (the peasants and workers). For example, whereas the pay of a university graduate was a minimum of 500 dollars per month and that of a school graduate half of that, the per capita income of the country was a mere 150 dollars a year. Secondly, there was the expectation of the members of the modern elite not only to be paid above the level of inflation but also to receive an ever-increasing income in order to promote their prestige and standard of living. Thirdly, the need to import weapons created dependence of the state on other powers and on exportable goods; whatever could not be paid for by the export of coffee, hides, oil seeds and other less important commodities, had to be made good by the generosity of external powers. In addition, economic development became, in its own

right, the tenet and ideology of the new elite. In other words, the economy had to be made to generate more wealth to meet these demands and others which, politically, were arguably less important in the short run but in terms of the plight of the people in the long term were even more pressing.

The state was in a dilemma with regard to its agrarian strategy, if it can be said to have had one. There was very little it could do concerning the extensive lowlands which the nomads used for watering and grazing their herds, short of developing certain parts of it through the granting of concession agreements to foreign investors since they required capital-intensive projects beyond the means of the government. Foreign investors would probably not have been easily attracted for this purpose. The *rist* lands of the north, which were arguably equivalent to a system of freehold, were fairly divided up by the peasants but extremely subdivided and fragmented. The only possible land reform in these areas was either nationalization or collectivization; while the wisdom of such a policy is questionable, the *ancien régime* was in any case not predisposed to these policies. The state, therefore, was reduced to providing fertilizers and insecticides made available by courtesy of the UN organizations during the 1960s. By contrast, the state could have acted on the land which was being cultivated through tenancy agreements between the farmers and landlords but, instead, it prevaricated on the question.

There were at least three trends discernible in the late 1960s, which were not necessarily consistent. In the Ministry of Land Reform and Administration there was a proposal to place a ceiling on the amount of land an individual could own without paying excessive tax on it; this was obviously intended to result in a certain amount of redistribution of land in areas where there were concentrations of land holdings in individual hands. Conversely, in practice the opposite applied: the vigorous commercialization of agriculture pursued in several areas of the country in the late 1960s, made possible by international public capital, led to the eviction of thousands of tenants and poor farmers. However, there is no question that this policy actually led to unprecedented levels of productivity. Yet again, there was another draft legislation which was finally submitted to parliament intended to regulate tenant-landlord relations; if adopted, this might have put an end to eviction of tenants. However, it would also have acted against

the *laissez-faire* commercialization policy of the state. Coffee which mostly grew in the south-west and which constituted by far the most important foreign exchange earner did not show a marked rise in productivity in the 1960s and 1970s. It was not a good match to the Middle East's oil. In effect, agriculture was, on the whole, neither in a position to provide the raw materials required by industry nor generate sufficient taxable surplus to meet the increasing requirements of the modernizing state.<sup>18</sup>

Arguably, the achievements in the industrial sector over the same period were more impressive than the agricultural sector. Though the government launched three successive five-year plans starting in 1957, the policy pursued in relation to the growth of industry was also basically *laissez-faire* and the plans were mere indicators of targets that it was hoped would be met by the private as well as public sectors. In fact, most of the big industries which were actually developed by multinationals (for instance the St George Beer Brewery, the Ethiopian Airlines, the Wenji Sugar Factory and the Melloti Beer Brewery) predate the five-year plans. More important than these, at least in terms of creating employment, were the intermediate industries that were established mostly by resident Italians, Greeks and Armenians in the 1960s. The explanation for the sudden increase in the number of these industries which included garages, food-processing plants, restaurants, pulp industries, as well as import-export businesses was most probably the adoption in 1964 of a liberal investment guarantee proclamation with generous provisions on the expatriation of capital. By and large, nationals were limited to the retail business. In the 1960s, manufacturing production expanded at an average annual rate of 11.1 per cent with higher rates registered in the later part of the decade; the labour force grew from 28,340 in 1961 to 51,312 in 1971.<sup>19</sup> However, all this was an extremely modest step towards a capitalist transformation of the national economy; 51,312 manufacturers in a population of about 32 million is not only insignificant but had also come very late. The inadequacy of the rate of growth is perhaps best reflected by the fact that there was still a great deal of unemployment. By the end of the 1960s, school graduates were also beginning to be unemployed and the fear of unemployment for university graduates was on the horizon from the early 1960s.

Thus, the national economy did not live up to the expectations

of the modern elite. It did not improve its standard of living, or provide adequate employment for its new members. Nor was the state able to afford modern weapons comparable to Middle Eastern countries with which Ethiopia was in military competition. In fact, in the 1960s, it became unfashionable for this elite to complain about its immediate circumstances; instead, its rhetoric became preoccupied with the plight of the lower classes in addition to becoming engulfed by a great sense of economic nationalism. How was it that Ethiopia, which had the potential to feed the whole of Africa or the Middle East, and which had been independent for 3,000 years, was now, in the second half of the twentieth century, just as backward as other Third World countries if not more so? This rhetorical question was echoed in all speeches and debates of the elite. It can be argued that this was the situation in most less-developed countries. In the case of Ethiopia, however, it was easy for the new elite to find a scapegoat in the anachronistic aristocratic autocracy which was still intact but which was in the meantime being rendered obsolete by the forces of modernization which it had itself unleashed.

Though the nobility and gentry had lost their traditional military functions, they had survived the changes of modernization as an administrative and surplus-appropriating class. In 1908, Menelik introduced the first ministerial form of government. A by-product of this was the division of the country in the same year into thirty-four administrative regions based on ethnic distribution and geographical position. During the occupation, Italy revised this and divided the country, including Italian Somaliland, into only five regions on similar grounds as before. In 1942, Haile Selassie's government again restructured the administrative units into twelve provinces with three subordinate administrative layers.<sup>20</sup> With some changes, most notably the acquisition of the Eritrean province and the division of Hararge into two provinces, this last structure lasted until 1987. Almost all top administrative positions were retained by the nobility and gentry until 1974. Yet another preserve of the nobility continued to be the monarch's court and up to about 1960 the bulk of the ministerial positions.

The survival of the upper class up to the beginning of the last quarter of the twentieth century was in the context of a modernizing autocracy. Prior to the Italian occupation, the nobility had

still been very influential and, hence, even in a position to obstruct some of the progressive policies of Haile Selassie which he pursued as regent and king up to the time of Italian occupation. After the occupation, however, the traditional regional nobility were greatly weakened with the result that the nobility drawn from the central province of Shoa replaced the regional ones who had a local power base and legitimacy. Thus, like the south, the north came under the tutelage of the Shoan aristocracy. The latter were none other than Menelik's courtiers, his warrior lords of the south (the apex of the *neftegna*) and their descendants. More specifically, this meant that the provincial governorships were given to members of the royal family (including in-laws and distant relations) and hand-picked Shoans chosen for their loyalty to the crown.

A result of the Shoanization of the state was one of the reasons both for the further weakening of the nobility as well as the weakening of the bond between the government and the people. As Clapham pointed out, the concept 'Amhara' is not an ethnic but a linguistic and psychological one; the Shoan aristocracy including the monarch Haile Selassie were descendants of various ethnic groups like the Oromo and Amhara.<sup>21</sup> The Amharas of the north who do not accept Shoans as belonging to the same ethnic group as themselves, and who in fact believe that the Shoans usurped the throne which rightly belonged to them, found it insulting that the Shoan aristocracy were preferred to their own nobility to rule them as provincial governors. The Tigrains, who shared the same sentiments as the Amharas of the north, had the additional burden of having to speak Amharic in order to be able to go to school and to be employed by the state. To the southerners, the ruling class had always been not only a speaker of a different language but also a usurper of their land. Finally, while the Muslims of the lowlands did not suffer any deprivation of land on account of the ruling class, there were the questions of language and religion which acted as a barrier between them and the rulers. This is not to raise the controversial question of whether the peoples of Ethiopia are sufficiently integrated to live in one state or not – a question that anthropologists enjoy delving into – but merely to point out that such differences as the above between the rulers and the ruled were, as will be noted in the next section, important in creating friction between them.

The decline of the influence of the nobility was marked by a corresponding ascent of the monarch to the heights of power. Article 4 of the Revised Constitution issued at the height of Haile Selassie's power (1955) stated: 'By virtue of His Imperial Blood, as well as by the anointing which He has received, the person of the Emperor is sacred, His dignity is inviolable and His power indisputable. He is, consequently, entitled to all the honours due to him in accordance with tradition and the present Constitution.' Both tradition and the Constitution were generous in according the monarch indisputable power. As noted earlier, the regional nobles had been at times in a position to challenge his authority in the past; more often than not, however, he was the fountain of all power and justice; at any rate, with the decline of the nobility in the twentieth century, the monarch's powers became more 'indisputable' than ever before. Moreover, the Constitution of 1955 granted him not only the power of veto over laws made by parliament but also the personal authority to promulgate the kind of law that parliament was authorized to make.<sup>22</sup> In addition to his legislative prerogatives, the monarch enjoyed extensive powers in the judicial, executive and treaty-making areas. Thus, he could review court judgements, make any executive decisions and conclude treaties with foreign powers subject in a limited number of cases to ratification by parliament.<sup>23</sup>

The monarch had his court with the help of which he carried out these tasks. He had his royal seal with which he promulgated laws made by parliament as well as by himself. He had, in addition, a department called 'chilot' with the help of which he revised any judicial matters that were submitted to him, including, most notably, decisions made by the regular courts. Further, he had the Ministry of Pen with the help of which he made his decisions known to the subordinate government agencies including the council of ministers. Finally, there was the institution of the 'Akabi Sihah' over which the monarch presided and gave audience to the high dignitaries of state who offered their view on matters for which they had been granted an appointment or on any other matters where the monarch sought their opinions; they bestowed their respects through ritualistic prostrations as they approached the throne by way of showing their continued subservience to the monarch. These age-old institutions which were housed in the palace were filled predominantly by the aristocracy. The monarch

was the centre around whom state power revolved. He used his position to play one individual or faction against another. Though this was most operative among the King's courtiers, the provincial governors were also subject to it; this was enhanced by the fact that the provincial governors were encouraged to bring matters directly to the King rather than through the Ministry of the Interior to which they were subordinate. The upper echelons of the bureaucracy were not saved from this medieval machination either. Relevant in this regard was the emergence of a highly educated class of technocrats who began assuming the highest government positions, including the ministerial posts as of the early 1960s. The monarch also exploited the split or competition that existed within this group, a split between the descendants of the aristocracy who emerged victorious during the 1974 uprising and those of humbler origin led by Aklilou Habte-Wolde (prime minister between 1961 and 1974).

According to Clapham, this system of government could cope with small court factions but not with a wider set of political constituencies as were developing in Ethiopia at the time.<sup>24</sup> Further, it can be said that this excessive concentration of power in one man and the absolute accountability to him of the officials could but breed not only complete subservience of the officials to the monarch but also to the concomitant irrelevance of officials building a power base within the society they ruled: if power flows from the King alone, it can be derived only from him and not from the people. A further implication of this state of affairs was the tendency of such officials not to take responsible decisions but pass them to the King for his action. Moreover, all this can work well, or work after a fashion, when the monarch is young, strong and intelligent, attributes which Haile Selassie had amply demonstrated in his long years of effective control of the state. An outstanding example of this was his incisive cross-examination of his generals and civilian officials which he conducted through radio interviews from Asmara on his way back to reinstate his rule after three days of unrest in the country as a result of an abortive coup against him in December 1960. By 1974, however, he was too old to make a single coherent sentence. Further, another inherent weakness of the Ethiopian monarchy was the fact that despite its centuries of history it had not evolved effective rules of succession to the throne with the result that a number of contenders

emerged at these junctures giving rise to leadership crises. Speculation about who was going to succeed Haile Selassie was actually raging for a number of years prior to 1974.

Thus, by 1960, the process of modernization had far advanced and tilted the balance in favour of the new elite as against the old; for all intents and purposes, the age-old aristocracy which had, for centuries, been the backbone of the monarchy had lost its military and administrative functions to the new elite. Though the monarchy survived with all its anachronisms and inherent weaknesses and continued to preside over these social forces, it was, as of 1960, finding it increasingly difficult to make itself relevant to the new elite. Moreover, the changing international environment greatly contributed to the decline of the *ancien régime*. The next section will deal with these internal and external factors that led to the collapse of Haile Selassie's regime in 1974.

#### THE EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL FACTORS IN THE DECLINE OF THE STATE

A state derives its strengths and weaknesses from internal and external sources. In this regard, two post-World War Two developments on the international scene (the emergence of the bi-polar security system and the emergence of the Middle East into independent sovereign states) appear relevant sources of strength and weakness for the Ethiopian state. Internally, three centres of opposition to the *ancien régime* look worthy of note: the rebellion in the Ogaden and Bale, the rebellion in Eritrea and the emergence of opposition at the centre. Arguably, all three had their genesis in the events of 1960.

Starting from the early 1940s Ethiopia had been cultivating friendly relations with the US, not least because it sought to oust British influence in the area; however, it was not until 1950 that concrete bargains were struck between the two countries. As early as 1948, Pentagon officials had expressed interest in maintaining the old Italian communications installation near Asmara (Eritrea). Secondly, US officials were about the same time developing the strategy of organizing the countries at the southern flank of the Soviet Union, like Turkey, and Iran, into a military alliance under NATO to form a line of defence (the northern tier) against possible USSR southward expansion. Also entertained by the

Pentagon was an extension of this strategy, namely, the southern tier (a secondary line of defence to be composed of amenable Middle Eastern countries). Thirdly, the US had taken advantage of the temporary absence of the USSR from the UN and successfully moved the General Assembly of that organization to pass the Uniting for Peace Resolution which authorized member states to contribute military units for deployment in Korea against the 'threat' of North Korean 'expansion' to the south. The US was, therefore, eager for member states of the UN to commit certain of their military units to that end. In 1950, Ethiopian diplomats at the UN expressed Ethiopia's willingness to allow the US to keep the communications facilities should Eritrea be returned to Ethiopia, persuasively advocated the establishment of and Ethiopia's participation in the southern tier alliance, and promised to commit a unit of her bodyguard to the war in Korea. Having come to an understanding on all points, the US and Ethiopia concluded two agreements: the first, in 1951, entitling Ethiopia to the Point Four economic aid programme, and the second, in 1952, entitling her to military aid under the Mutual Defence Assistance Act of 1949.

The United States preoccupation in all this was its fear of possible Soviet expansion. As the Marshall Plan of 1947 had marked the onset of the cold war between the East and West, the Point Four Programme and the Mutual Defence Assistance Act of 1949 marked its extension to the Third World. Dubbed Kagnev after the name of the Ethiopian bodyguard battalion sent to Korea, the communications installation was used by the US for tracking space satellites, monitoring radio broadcasts from Eastern Europe and the Middle East, relaying military and diplomatic communications, and for linking American telecommunications in Europe and the Far East.<sup>25</sup> By contrast, Ethiopia's primary interests were territorial consolidation, access to the sea, economic development, and countering the threat that was building up against her in the Middle East. As it happened, she benefited a great deal in these respects: Eritrea was federated to Ethiopia in 1952 by a decision of the UN General Assembly and, between 1952 and 1974, she received 270 million dollars worth of military aid and 350 million dollars worth of economic aid.<sup>26</sup> The amount of military aid provided is more than half the total of US military assistance given to all the African countries over the same

period; based on such comparisons, observers of Ethiopian politics often express surprise at the extent of US support for Ethiopia. However, this overlooks one important fact: Ethiopia during that period was not so much in military competition with the African countries as with those of the Middle East.

In the wake of its emergence into independence, the Middle East was plunged into an ideological crisis perhaps unprecedented in its history. It was torn between the forces of pan-Islamism and those of pan-Arabism, between these forces and those of local nationalism, between the forces of progress and those of reaction, and between the forces of capitalism and those of socialism. In their manifestations, all these trends in the Middle East had negative implications for Ethiopia.

In its most fundamentalist form, pan-Islamism recognized only two kinds of territories: that which is inhabited by the community of believers (*dar'al Islam*) and that which is inhabited by the community of infidels (*dar'al harb*). According to the principle of *jihad*, since *dar'al Islam* recognized no boundaries imposed by *dar'al harb*, the normal condition between the two communities is one of war, at least until such time as the whole world is transformed into an Islamic state.<sup>27</sup> In this sense, pan-Islamism makes it a duty upon *dar'al Islam* (the community of the Islamic world) not only to liberate Ethiopian Muslims from rule by the infidel but also to absorb the Ethiopian Christians into the Islamic world. In its more tamed post-war version, pan-Islamism makes it incumbent upon Muslims to collaborate with their co-religionists. The most consistent adherents of pan-Islamism have been Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states.

As far as its implications for Ethiopia are concerned, pan-Arabism is a variation of the same theme. Article 7 of the 1947 Ba'th Party Programme provided: 'The Arab fatherland is that part of the globe inhabited by the Arab nation which stretches from the Taurus Mountains, Poucht-I-Kouh Mountains, the Gulf of Basra, the Arab Ocean, the Ethiopian mountains, the Sahara, the Atlantic Ocean and the Mediterranean.' Thus, the Ba'thist governments of Syria and Iraq would be proponents of carving out the Ethiopian lowlands and annexing them into the greater Arabian fatherland.

Yet again, the Middle East was divided along East-West lines. The starting point of this was the defeat of the Arabs in the

Palestinian war of 1948 which in its wake gave rise to an anti-West and an anti-government fervour resulting in coups, revolutions and assassinations during the early 1950s. Obviously, this tended to suck the extra-regional powers into the politics of the Middle East. In 1957, for instance, The Eisenhower Doctrine declared the exposure of the Middle East to communist expansion and offered economic and military assistance to friendly states in the region (a term which apparently included Ethiopia) and direct military intervention should the friendly countries come under attack from communist forces of the region or of the Soviet Union.<sup>28</sup> This led to the subsequent radicalization of Egypt, Algeria, Libya, South Yemen and the Palestinian movement, all of which became hostile to Ethiopia because of her close associations with the US. In fact, Radio Cairo had, since the early 1950s, been running an anti-Ethiopian campaign in the languages of the Horn of Africa and Egypt's radicalization only reinforced an already existing trend. The Eisenhower Doctrine in fact suggested the formation of an alliance between a group of Middle Eastern countries including Ethiopia in order to counter the influence of the radical states; however, Ethiopia could not even be a party to any association of conservative Arab states for reasons explained earlier. Her only choice was to throw in her lot with Israel, a move which aggravated the Arab states even further.

Implicit in all this is the fact that the Middle East emerged in the post-war years not as one but as many independent sovereign states. This is best reflected in the Charter of the League of Arab States (1945) which, in its preamble and Article 5 in particular, recognized as valid all the attributes of European states. Again, as states, some of the Arab and Afro-Arab countries have interests that go against those of Ethiopia. In this regard, mention could be made of the Yemen's interest in the control of the Red Sea and Ethiopia's islands there, Egypt's and Sudan's interests in the Nile, and the latter's interest in controlling common frontier regions and guerrilla movements and activities. Since the most important conflict of interest with Ethiopia has been that of Somalia, further discussion of this particular country is warranted.

In 1960, a republic of Somalia emerged as an independent sovereign state composed of the ex-British and ex-Italian Somalilands. The designation 'Afro-Arab' appears appropriate to the new republic since on the one hand, it is situated on the

continent of Africa and it became a member of the OAU, and on the other hand it became a member of the League of Arab States in 1973, the Charter of which in Article 1 requires its members to be independent Arab states. Ethnically and linguistically, the Somalis are not Arabs; the attraction of League membership appears to have been such provisions as Article 6 of its Charter which declared that if one of the members were a victim of aggression, the League would ' . . . determine the measures necessary to repulse the aggression', a provision approaching something like a mutual defence pact.

The source of conflict between the Republic of Somalia and its neighbouring countries (Ethiopia, Kenya and Djibouti) is her stated policy of bringing all the Somali peoples in those countries under her rule (pan-Somalism). Stated from a different perspective, the particular issue between Somalia and Ethiopia could be said to have emanated from the annexation of the Ogaden by the Ethiopian monarch (Menelik) in the late nineteenth century, though, despite her official pronouncements to the contrary, the republic's claims extend to vast territories beyond the Somali-inhabited region of the Ogaden. Be that as it may, pan-Somalism led the republic to condemn the existing boundaries between herself and neighbouring countries as impositions of imperial powers and launched a diplomatic and military offensive to have them revised. The acceptance by African countries of the sanctity of colonial boundaries, as reflected in Articles 2 and 3 (3) of the OAU Charter of 1963, afforded Ethiopia a substantial amount of diplomatic support in her drive to stave off Somalia's claims. Though the provision of the Charter of the League of Arab States on the question of territorial integrity of independent states is the same as that of the OAU Charter, the members of the League and other Muslim states provided Somalia with diplomatic and material support in her drive to bring about the unity of the Somali peoples.

At the founding congress of the OAU in 1963, President Osman of Somalia condemned Ethiopia as expansionist, claimed that the Somali question was unique and demanded self-determination for all Somali people. The Ethiopian prime minister, Aklilou Habte-Wolde, retorted in kind: it was Somalia which was obsessed with territorial aggrandizement; all African states must respect existing territorial boundaries whatever their merit. Somalia failed to

make headway on the diplomatic front; on the contrary, at the Cairo meeting of the OAU in 1964, the organization reaffirmed its commitment to the principle of territorial integrity only in clearer and stronger terms.

From February to March 1964, open warfare broke out between Ethiopia and Somalia along their common frontier. After many OAU committee meetings and good offices, the parties were able to reach an agreement on a cease-fire, a demilitarized zone six to ten miles deep on each side of the border and a cessation of hostile propaganda by press and radio. After a short lull, hostilities broke out again in 1965. Somalia raised the question of the Ogaden once more and Ethiopia reacted by cutting diplomatic relations and by closing the border because of alleged arms smuggling into Ethiopia across the frontier. In the following year, the focus of conflict between the two states became Djibouti, a conflict provoked by De Gaulle's visit to the territory in August of that year and by the resulting expectation that the territory was about to become independent. As it happened, De Gaulle submitted the question to a referendum and the people of Djibouti decided to stay under French administration. Djibouti being an important port and inhabited by Afars and Somalis, two ethnic groups who also live in Ethiopia and Somalia, was yet another bone of contention between the two states.<sup>29</sup>

*Détente* between them came in the wake of Somali elections of July 1967 when Shermarke became president and Igal prime minister. In September, a Somali delegation led by Igal met with Ethiopia's cabinet and agreed to end the state of emergency along the Ethio-Somali frontier which had been in force since 1964, to conclude further agreements regarding cultural and commercial exchanges, and to establish a permanent advisory commission on a ministerial level to consider mutual problems. These agreements were concluded and in the following year endorsed by the Somali parliament. The pan-Africanist and architect of rapprochement, Igal, abandoned Somalia's territorial claims on Ethiopia but at the same time insisted on the granting of the right of self-determination to the Ethiopian Somalis.<sup>30</sup> President Bare, who took power through a coup of October 1969, declared that Somalia would honour its legitimate international treaties and obligations; thus, Igal's rapprochement seemed to hold but only until 1972 when Somali hostilities resumed with a vengeance. By

then Bare's adoption of socialism had made his country the beneficiary of substantial military aid from the Soviet Union.

It is submitted that it was in these global and regional contexts that the oppositions against the *ancien régime* of the 1960s (the alienation and resistance in the south-east, in the north and in the centre) can best be understood. In fact, it is difficult to disentangle the resistance in the south-east (among the Somalis of the Ogaden and the Oromos of Bale) from the military activities and sabotage of the adjoining Republic of Somalia. The Western Somali Liberation Front (WSLF), which had the aim of liberating the Muslim Somalis of the Ogaden, was formed in Mogadishu (the capital city of the Republic of Somalia) in 1960, the year when the Republic became independent. A movement, which had the aim of liberating the Muslim Oromos of Bale, was established at about the same time. From 1966 to 1970, the two liberation movements operated in close collaboration with each other also drawing much of their assistance from the Republic of Somalia. The alliance between the two movements came to an end in 1970 because Bare, on account of his continued rapprochement with Ethiopia, put the WSLF leadership behind bars, and because the leader of the Bale Movement gave himself up to the Ethiopian authorities. WSLF was reactivated in the early 1970s, as was a splinter group of the Bale Movement (the Ethiopian National Liberation Front); this time the latter had as its focus the liberation of the 'oppressed' peoples of Ethiopia, especially the Oromo.<sup>31</sup>

The Republic of Somalia's support for WSLF can be explained by its commitment to pan-Somali and pan-Islamic ideologies but its support for the Bale Movement can be explained only by the latter of the two ideologies since the Oromos of Bale though Muslim are ethnically different from the Somalis. In fact, the Oromos are the biggest linguistic group in Ethiopia and the Oromos of Bale are a small part of that ethnic group. This argument is further supported by the jurisdictional claim of the Somali Youth League of 1959 and later of the Republic of Somalia itself over the bulk of the Muslims in the region including the Afars of Ethiopia.<sup>32</sup> No less important are also the economic and strategic advantages involved in expanding to include the Ogaden and Bale.

The second centre of opposition to the *ancien régime* was Eritrea

in the north and north-east of the country occupying all of Ethiopia's coast from the Sudan to Djibouti. Egypt and Pakistan, which had an associate status at the Council of Foreign Ministers, were the most adamant supporters of Eritrean independence when the question was being considered by that body from 1945 to 1948. When in 1948 the question came before the General Assembly of the UN, these countries spearheaded the Islamic hostility to the proposal of Eritrean unity with Ethiopia. During the 1940s Eritrean Muslims mostly supported the independence solution and the highland Christians the unionist solution. Taking the whole population of Eritrea, the unionist solution was the proposal which had the most substantial following.<sup>33</sup>

The idea of an independent Eritrea was kept alive by Cairo's radio broadcasts starting from at least the middle of the 1950s. These called for the secession of the region from Ethiopia – the price Egypt sought to exact from Ethiopia for the latter's association with the US.<sup>34</sup> Egypt followed this in 1958 by training the first Eritrean fighters in a camp near Alexandria as part of its campaign against 'reactionary' governments of the region and by sending the best officers among them to the Soviet Union for further training.<sup>35</sup> By the end of the 1960s many disaffected Eritreans, especially Muslims, had left the region and gone to Egypt either because they did not approve of the federal solution of the General Assembly of 1952, or because Haile Selassie's government was unduly intrusive in matters that came under local jurisdiction, or because the Muslims and Christians in the Eritrean Assembly could not see eye-to-eye on a number of issues which in turn led to the alienation of the former. In 1960, those who were trained abroad formed the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) and launched their armed struggle in the following year.

In 1962, the Eritrean Assembly decided to dissolve the federal structure and unite Eritrea with Ethiopia, a move which Haile Selassie's government is widely believed to have instigated. The fact that the king did not veto the Assembly's decision suggests at least his approval of the action if not his direct involvement in it. The dissolution of the federation is often taken as the cause of secession; however, given the trends prior to 1962 and given the developments in other regions since then, it is doubtful if Eritrea would have taken a different course than it did anyhow.

The ELF was primarily based on the Muslim half of the Eritrean

population; the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF), which was to take the secessionists' struggle to the Christian highlanders and finally develop into the dominant group, emerged as one of the factions that broke away from the ELF towards the end of the 1960s. The ELF was conservative whereas the EPLF became radically left of centre. The radicalization of the latter was part of the general trend among the Ethiopian students, in the Middle East (particularly the Palestinians) as well as in the West. There is circumstantial evidence to suggest that as the ELF was supported by the conservative forces in the Middle East so was the EPLF by the radical forces of the region such as leftist sections of the PLO, Syria and South Yemen. The Egyptian military training programme of 1958 was continued until 1967 followed by Algeria, the PLO, Libya, Syria and South Yemen; other strong supporters included Somalia, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. In addition to providing arms, funds and wide press coverage, the Arab countries served as intermediaries between the socialist countries and the Eritrean insurgents. For example, in December 1964, large shipments of Soviet light weapons were transmitted to Eritrea through Syria and the Sudan. Further, Soviet, Czech and Chinese automatic weapons including Soviet AD 47s, rockets, mortars and Sam 7 heat-seeking missiles and Chinese plastic mines were ferried across the Red Sea from South Yemen to Eritrea.

Arab organizations have had the Eritrean question on their agenda and have at times even allowed the secessionist organization to attend their proceedings. For example, the League of Arab States has entertained the question since at least 1962 and, in 1969, the leader of the ELF was allowed to attend its meeting as an observer. The periodic Islamic conferences (the Council of Arab Parliamentary Union and the Federation of Arab Lawyers) have expressed their support for Eritrean independence time and again.<sup>36</sup>

Sudan's position on the Eritrean question is uniquely important. Under pressure from the Arab world and domestic fundamentalist and leftist movements, it has kept its frontiers open for Eritrean insurgents except for two relatively short interludes. In the early 1960s, President Aboud of Sudan agreed to close the frontier to Eritrean secessionists in exchange for Ethiopia doing the same to southern Sudanese insurgents. However, the agreement came to an end with the overthrow of Aboud in 1964.

A similar agreement was again concluded between President Numeri and Haile Selassie which was effective only for two years (1972 to 1974).<sup>37</sup>

Despite the preponderance of Christians in Eritrea in terms of numbers as well as political organization, some Arab states regarded Eritrea as a Muslim community and their support for its independence as a form of jihad against the Christian regime of Haile Selassie. For example, King Faisal of Saudi Arabia is reported to have said that his government's policy was to create an Islamic state of Eritrea. Others have seen Eritrea as part of the Arab fatherland; in 1969, for instance, Arab supporters are reported to have described Eritrean secession as: ' . . . a streak of red Arab revolution into the black continent'. In 1975, the Kuwaiti Minister of Cabinet Affairs 'regretted the bloodshed, destruction and catastrophe which had taken place in that dear part of the Arab nation'.<sup>38</sup>

The third focus of dissension was the centre; the opposition there also had its genesis in 1960. In December of that year, the commander of the royal bodyguard, General Mengistu Neway, and his American-educated and radical brother, Germame Neway, used the bodyguard to launch a coup against Haile Selassie and proclaimed his replacement as king by his son, the crown prince Merid Azmach Asfaw Wosen. However, the loyalist generals used the other sections of the army to put the rebellion down within three days; apparently, the US Military Advisory Mission also helped in providing aerial photography to the loyalists. When it transpired that they were losing the battle, the brothers had the high government officials, whom they had under detention, massacred. Several days later, Germame shot his brother and himself; however, Mengistu survived, only to be tried and hanged afterwards.

It is not clear whether the coup was another instance of the many intrigues and plots that preceded it or whether its leaders had revolutionary economic and political programmes.<sup>39</sup> Interestingly enough, neither the leaders of the coup nor those who took part in the rallies and demonstrations so much as mentioned the king let alone criticized him; Haile Selassie was still 'elect of God' and beyond reproach. However, everyone knew that the coup was all about him; they also knew that all the speeches about the backwardness of the country were directed against him. In effect, the

political discourse (initially conducted in private) that the coup unleashed had the immediate effect of stripping the monarch of his divine status and of subjecting his ministers to a greater degree of criticism and charges of corruption than ever before.

Yet another impact of the abortive coup appears to have been the government's speeding up of the processes of modernization. The number of civil servants increased from 35,000 in 1960 to 100,000 by 1974. The army was 45,000 strong in 1974.<sup>40</sup> The teachers' and students' population showed a similar growth in the same period: the number of enrolled secondary school students in 1970 was 70,000 and the number of enrolled university students in 1974 was 6,000 with a further 2,000 studying abroad.<sup>41</sup> The number of private enterprises also increased substantially with the result that the labour force grew from 28,000 in 1961 to over 51,000 in 1971.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, these social sectors were allowed to organize themselves into unions and associations. For example, though the Revised Constitution of 1955 had allowed the formation of trade unions, the enabling legislation was not issued until 1962 when the Confederation of Ethiopian Labour Unions was launched for the first time. By 1974, the size of the Confederation had grown to about 80,000. Subsequently, the teachers, students and other professional associations emerged with government sanctions.

It was these social elements and corporate groups (institutions adapted from European models) which were most influenced by the enlightenment that ensued from the abortive coup of 1960. Initially, their grievances had been corporatist; as the decade wore on, however, they became more and more political; no doubt, some groups became more politically conscious than others. Thus, in the course of the decade, the rank and file of the loyalist army went directly to the palace several times and successfully petitioned the king for pay increases. By 1974, there were also apparently mess committees within the various units issuing lists of grievances.<sup>43</sup> The demands of the other groups were not met with such success; by and large, their petitions were kept at the level of the relevant ministries and their demands for pay increases, the right to form associations and for improved conditions of work remained unsatisfied. No doubt, the preferential treatment of the army further alienated both the trade unions which came under the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, and the civil servants who came under various other ministries.

The politicization of the grievances was spearheaded by the university and school students. During the coup, the former did demonstrate against the government but only under pressure from General Mengistu himself. By the middle of the 1960s, however, their associations had constituted what came to be known as the Ethiopian Student Movement (ESM) – with branch associations in Addis Ababa, Western Europe and North America – advocating radical reforms concerning land redistribution and democratic rights; by the end of the decade, all the branch associations had adopted Marxism–Leninism as the appropriate ideology to pursue and had committed themselves to the overthrow of the existing ‘feudo-capitalist’ order; and, by 1974, the associations had become the basis for the organization of Leninist–Maoist parties.<sup>44</sup>

The abortive coup of 1960 was important in discrediting the *ancien régime* in the eyes of, amongst others, the students. Once the ESM came into existence, however, it was swept off the ground not by trends in the Middle East as in the case of regional rebellions, but rather by European ideologies and organizational models; it was a by-product of neocolonialism in the sense that ESM was a part of the Western anti-authoritarian anti-imperialist movement of the 1960s, and a particularly militant variant of it at that. While the government’s heroes were Mao, Ho Chi Minh, Castro and Che Guevara about whom songs and poems were written by its partisans and while the literature most widely read was the works of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin, Mao as well as the *Peking Review* and an assortment of pamphlets written in the name of the Chinese communes, the bulk of these books and articles came, interestingly enough, not from the East but from the West. The channels of ideological transmissions were the classrooms, conversations with the Western instructors who fancied themselves radical, the libraries and the journeys by Ethiopians mostly to the West. For example, out of the 4,500 university graduates by 1974, about 1,000 were educated abroad; further, the branch associations of the ESM in Western Europe worked closely with groups radically to the left of centre. Even the army was not spared exposure to the West; in addition to fighting in Korea and the Congo (1950 and 1961 respectively), a lot of commissioned and non-commissioned officers were sent to the US for short-term training.

On the whole, it appears that the students’ appraisal of the

internal Ethiopian situation left something to be desired. Certainly, student papers made an attempt at analysing such questions as feudalism and national self-determination; more often than not, however, they were mechanical applications of Marxist concepts in the Ethiopian context. The earlier generation of young Ethiopian intellectuals (Japanizers) produced a more objective and original literature of their period than did the leftist radicals of the 1960s of theirs. It appears that the ESM was gripped more by an external ideology than by the immediate circumstances which it was hard put to try and recast in the Marxian mould.

Centrally important was the fact that the opposition forces (the rebellions in the peripheries and the dissensions at the centre) had the impact of radicalizing and reinforcing each other's outlooks, grievances and alienations from the regime. For example, by the end of the 1960s, the bulk of the army was pinned down by the rebels in the peripheries and, hence, forced to live in the arid and semi-arid regions of the lowlands often exposed to thirst, hunger and squalid conditions of life as well as to imminent danger of death in a war the end of which it could not see. More important was the vanguardship of the students' movement in radicalizing the civil servants and workers. The graduates of the academically advanced military establishments (the Harar Academy, the air force, the navy and the Police Abadina) were often allowed to go to the university in Ethiopia or abroad for degree courses; there, they would obviously engage in a mutual exchange of outlook with members of ESM. Moreover, the 4,500 university and 20,000 school graduates who had joined the public and private sectors can only be assumed to have gone to those places with their ideas; the fact that some of the leaders of the teachers' associations and of the Confederation of Ethiopian Labour Unions were identifying themselves with the students' movement in 1974 can be attributed to this trend. Yet another important development towards the end of the 1960s was the popularization, by the Addis Ababa University students, of the thorny question of the right of national self-determination as an appropriate solution in the Ethiopian context. This gave secession a cloak of respectability that had not been there previously. One of the spin-offs of this was the departure of the Eritrean students and graduates from Addis Ababa and Asmara *en masse* to the ELF

culminating finally in the emergence of the EPLF led by leftist elites.

Moreover, the internal forces of opposition had an impact not only on each other but also transnationally, disorientating the *ancien régime* more than ever before. In 1972 and 1973, the only comfort for the regime came from the diplomatic support of the African countries on the Eritrean and Ogaden questions and from the rapprochement with the Sudanese government which restricted the movement of Eritrean rebels across the frontiers of the two countries. By contrast, Ethiopia's relations with the Arabs, Israel and the US reached truly crisis proportions.

In 1972, North Yemen and South Yemen, supported by Arab campaigns, laid claim to Ethiopia's group of islands in the Red Sea, because, they maintained, Ethiopia had allowed Israel to build a military base there. No amount of denial by Ethiopia of the existence of such a base would temper the Arab demand for the islands. Towards the end of the same year, Somalia, which by then had become a strong military power on account of Soviet aid, sent a probing force into the Ogaden near to where oil and natural gas deposits were found. Ethiopia drove the invading force out by simply cutting its only supply of water and deploying a substantial military force in the area. Between March and April 1973, there was yet another military confrontation between the two countries near the town of Dolo (close to the Kenyan border) again near an area where natural gas deposits had been struck during the previous December. Since 1972, therefore, the two countries had engaged in a war of words, with Somalia claiming that it was in imminent danger of aggression by Ethiopian forces and the latter that it had been invaded by Somali infiltrators.<sup>45</sup>

More important for Haile Selassie's beleaguered government was the pressure that the Arab countries brought to bear on Ethiopia during and around the time of the tenth anniversary of the OAU in May 1973. Before the summit, Syria and Libya condemned Ethiopia for standing in the way of the aspirations of the Eritrean and Somali peoples and further insisted that the headquarters of the OAU should be transferred to Cairo or the summit should be boycotted unless Ethiopia cut diplomatic relations with Israel. The summit was saved and held in Addis Ababa because Haile Selassie managed to persuade Sadat, Bare and the others to attend; however, the Arab diplomatic offensive continued during

its proceedings: they insisted that Ethiopia cut her relations with Israel. For her part, Somalia urged the heads of state to have the courage to resolve the 'territorial' dispute over the Ogaden and demanded that Ethiopia be stopped from amassing her forces in the region.

During the summit, President Boumeidian of Algeria apparently promised the Ethiopian authorities that if Ethiopia severed her diplomatic relations with Israel, he would use his influence to discourage Arab support for the ELF. This was welcomed by the Ethiopian prime minister, Aklilou Habte-Wolde, who canvassed cabinet support for the proposal in June and July; finally, after a great deal of soul-searching, the cabinet decided to end diplomatic relations with Israel. However, the king vetoed the decision. Then came the Arab-Israeli war of October 1973 followed immediately by the African states cutting diplomatic relations with Israel one after the other. Haile Selassie was then persuaded to follow suit; on 23 October Ethio-Israeli diplomatic relations were also severed.<sup>46</sup>

In October 1973, the *ancien régime* lost not only its good friend and ally (Israel) without securing any hard commitment of Arab neutrality on the Ogaden and Eritrean questions but was also relegated to the outer perimeters of US security policy priorities. In 1972 the US pursued a hands-off policy in the Arab claim of the Ethiopian Red Sea islands; by contrast, Israel offered military assistance at the time though Ethiopia declined the offer for fear of invoking an Arab backlash. Also, at the time of the Arab diplomatic offensive in May 1973, Haile Selassie went to the US and asked President Nixon to provide him with modern fighter planes, M60 tanks and air-to-ground missiles in order to offset Somali modern weapons provided by the Soviet Union. He returned disappointed, having received a promise of defensive weapons only. Finally, during the month when Ethiopia cut her relations with Israel (October 1973) the US told the regime of its intention to close the Kagnew communications facilities which was one of the major factors that had brought the two governments together in the first place.

All this was in stark contrast to previous US policies towards Ethiopia, to, for instance, the Eisenhower Doctrine which proposed a direct US intervention should its allies in the Middle East, including Ethiopia, be threatened by regional or Soviet

communist expansionism. The reasons for the decline of US interest in Ethiopia in the early 1970s are of interest. According to an American who for a long time was adviser to the Ethiopian Foreign Office (John H. Spencer), the explanations for the US hands-off policy in the 1972 Ethio-Arab confrontation over the Red Sea islands, and for President Nixon's refusal to provide weapons to Ethiopia were *détente* between the superpowers, a perceived need to accommodate the Arabs, and the US's wish not to be identified with the monarch against whom the Ethiopian middle class was becoming increasingly hostile. The Americans also realized that, because of his age, the Emperor was finding it difficult to reach decisions with the result that government activities were coming to a halt.<sup>47</sup> Most observers agree that the reason for US loss of interest in the communications facilities was the advance in technology which rendered them obsolete and the US acquisition of new facilities in Diego Garcia which could be used instead of Kagnew.

The suggestion made in relation to *détente* does not make much sense, as it had not led to a superpower disengagement in the Middle East as reflected by the US continued support for Israel and the conservative Arab states; and by Soviet support for the radical Arab states. A relevant example of this might have been the Soviet challenge to the US in the Horn of Africa: the former was building up the Somali military forces and in 1973 was, according to Western reports, in the process of completing the construction of a military base in Berbera (Somalia). On the other hand, the explanation of the United States policy of Arab accommodation makes a lot of sense. By 1971, the formation of OPEC had reached an advanced state thus enabling the Arabs to control oil prices in the subsequent years and in 1973 to use the ensuing power as a diplomatic weapon. This Arab ascendancy of power and prestige was celebrated by Africa as a victory against Western domination. The West (including most notably the US which had great fear of being victimized because of its alliance with Israel) was forced to acknowledge the fact and adapt itself to the changed circumstances. No doubt, conceding to the wishes of the Arabs in this sense implied at least neutrality over Arab policies towards countries that mattered less to the US (like Ethiopia). The policy of accommodation also seems to have meant supporting, or rather not opposing vigorously, Arab policies towards the Red Sea

islands, Eritrea and the Ogaden. Similarly, Ethiopia's severance of diplomatic relations with Israel and its willingness to demote relations with the US was influenced by its fear of Middle Eastern ascendancy. Also, the reference made to domestic 'middle class' opposition against the *ancien régime* can only make sense in the context of the opposition that was building up among the students, civil servants and workers as explained above, since this was the only form of opposition that was in existence at the time. What is more, the opposition had been taking an increasingly leftist stance, condemning, above all, 'US imperialism' and Haile Selassie as its puppet. It is probable that the US may well have been further alienated by the anti-imperialist rhetoric of the opposition in Ethiopia.

To sum up, the aristocracy which had lost its military and administrative functions to the new elite was no longer the pillar of the monarchy; rather, the latter had become dependent on the new military and civilian elite. However, in the course of the 1960s and 1970s, the new elite, armed with Western ideology, became the main antithesis of the *ancien régime*. Moreover, alienated from the centre and backed by Ethiopia's traditional opponents (the countries of the Middle East), certain of the peoples on the peripheries (the Somalis, the Oromo of Bale and the Eritreans) had raised arms against the *ancien régime* and had, by 1974, managed to pin down the national army in those regions. Finally, in the early 1970s, the *ancien régime* lost its Western allies (the US and Israel) at a time when the Middle East was in the ascendant because of the power and prestige it derived from its ability to control oil prices. These developments, coupled with the anachronisms and inherent weaknesses of Haile Selassie's autocracy, had so weakened the state that it had almost ceased to function when the urban uprising broke out in 1974.

PART I

*The collapse of the old-state  
(January–November 1974)*



## CHAPTER 2

### *The urban uprising of January to June 1974*

The main actors of the popular uprising that erupted from January to June 1974, against Haile Selassie's government, were the armed forces, the teachers, the students, the trade unions and the civil servants. The armed forces, without whose collaboration the other groups would have found it difficult to put up resistance against the government, were composed of five divisions consisting of tens of brigades and battalions dotted all over the country. Bodyguard was situated in the capital, Addis Ababa, as was the Fourth Division, which had brigades and battalions in the provinces. The Second Division, also known as the Northern Forces, and the Third Division were based in Eritrea and Hararghe provinces respectively. The Fifth Division was an amalgam of various specialized units mainly located in and around Addis Ababa.

On 12 January 1974, the privates and NCOs of the 24th brigade (Fourth Division) situated in the town of Negele (Sidamo province) mutinied and placed their officers under arrest. They then demanded to see senior government officials who would meet their demands, which included pay and pension increases, better food allowances, injury benefits, improved living quarters, removal of disciplinary injustices, price control and access to water wells.<sup>1</sup> When General Derese Dubale, commander of the ground forces, was sent to Negele, the mutineers placed him under arrest, apparently because they wanted to see a higher official than him. They released him after a week only because they were flattered to receive a letter from the King sent through General Assefa Abera, Commander of the air force, promising them that their demands would be met. On his release, General Dersese Dubale was sent to Dolo (a town on the Ethio-Kenyan border) where a battalion of the 24th brigade was in mutiny. There he was made to sit under

the scorching sun for half a day and, when thirsty and hungry, was treated to dirty water and bread full of grit. The general was told that that was what the soldiers normally ate and drank.<sup>2</sup>

The Negele–Dolo incidents passed unreported and, as a result, the civilian population was quite unaware of them. However, they sent waves of unrest within the army, where the control over the use of communication facilities seems to have suddenly become rather lax. For example, a similar thing to the Negele–Dolo mutiny took place in the Debre-Zeit air force base (some 50 kilometres outside the capital) 10–13 February. Also, the radical elements in the air force and in the First, Second and Fourth Divisions established co-ordinating committees in the course of the same month and started mobilizing the army to come up with more and more extreme demands.<sup>3</sup>

In the third week of February 1974, certain sections of the civilian population started their uprising, it seems, quite independently from that of the army. On 18 February (the official day for the beginning of the uprising) the taxi drivers, the teachers and students went on strikes and demonstrations.

In the wake of the Arab–Israeli war and the dramatic petrol price increases, Ethiopia had to buy the commodity on the international market in 1974 for three times the previous year's price. As a result, in January 1974, Ethiopia increased the price of petrol to the consumer by 50 per cent.<sup>4</sup> The Addis Ababa taxi drivers, numbering over a thousand, who felt that a part of their income had been unduly whittled down, withdrew their services and went on demonstration starting from 18 February, demanding the reduction of petrol prices.

By 1974, the 18,000-strong Ethiopian Teachers' Association had been engaged, without any success, in a protracted negotiation with the Ministry of Education concerning pay increases and salary scales, for at least six years.<sup>5</sup> In January and February 1974, the teachers were further aggravated by an educational reform programme (the Sector Review) adopted by the government in December 1973,<sup>6</sup> to which they took exception particularly because it advocated universal education up to fourth grade followed by vocational training thereafter. The teachers felt that this was tantamount to condemning the children of the poor to perpetual subservience to those of the rich who could always afford private education beyond the fourth grade leading them to

more successful careers. Upon learning that the taxi drivers were going to go on strike as of 18 February, the Teachers' Association decided to join them and bring the country's educational system to a standstill on the same day. Having been highly politicized since the late 1960s, the Association's petition on 18 February did not limit itself to matters concerned with teachers (salary scales and the Sector Review) but extended to demands like the following: the liberalization of the laws concerning the right to demonstrate, minimum wages for all wage earners, pay increases for factory workers, price control, pensions for industrial workers, improvement of the laws concerning dismissal of workers, regular employment for temporary workers, the cessation of judges and other high officials from becoming members of company board of governors, granting of employment priorities to Ethiopians as opposed to aliens, expansion of employment opportunities and the right to organize trade unions for employees of certain organizations.<sup>7</sup>

The students, who, since the late 1960s, had deliberately abandoned pursuing corporatist interests in favour of advocating a fundamental political change through class boycotts, demonstrations and the distribution of anti-government leaflets, found in the taxi drivers and teachers long sought-after allies and, on 18 February, poured out onto the streets of Addis Ababa chanting revolutionary slogans and agitating resistance against the government. The events of that day also aroused the rebellious mood of the capital's lumpenproletariat into action.<sup>8</sup>

Addis Ababa and the neighbouring towns, to which the resistance spread very quickly, became engulfed in disturbances for about a week starting from 18 February. There were riotous demonstrations,<sup>9</sup> the stoning of buses and luxury cars<sup>10</sup> in an attempt to bring public transport to a halt and the robbing and destroying of property.<sup>11</sup> On 24 February, it was reported that the taxi drivers, students and the lumpenproletariat had caused the deaths of three and the wounding of twenty-two individuals in and around Addis Ababa and had damaged seventy-five buses, sixty-nine cars, two trains, a motor-bike and thirty-eight houses.<sup>12</sup>

The government's response to these challenges was one of sticks and carrots. On 22 February, the Ministry of the Interior indicated that the police had been authorized to take stern measures in order to uphold law and order, warned parents to

stop their children engaging in disturbances and urged teachers and taxi drivers to go back to work.<sup>13</sup> Two days later, it was reported that a total of 558 taxi drivers and other individuals had been placed under arrest for distributing anti-government leaflets, breaking cars, causing physical damage to persons and for robbery.<sup>14</sup> In a radio and television address of 21 February, on the other hand, the King announced that the Sector Review had been suspended, reassured the teachers that their other demands would be met within a month and urged them to resume teaching. In the same address, he explained that, despite the implications to the National Economic Plan, he had ordered the reduction of petrol prices.<sup>15</sup> As it happened, the price was reduced by 10 cents, and not by 25 cents, which is the amount by which it had increased several weeks earlier.<sup>16</sup> Further, on 23 February, it was reported that the Ministries of Defence and the Interior, in accordance with the King's orders, had increased the salary of soldiers and policemen by 18 birr (about 9 US dollars) each and announced that the salary scale for officers and payment for special skills would be studied and implemented in the future.<sup>17</sup>

In spite of these responses, the government's troubles took a dramatic turn for the worse. By the end of February 1974, what is usually referred to as 'the first round of military and police uprising' was in full swing. In addition to the co-ordinating committees at the unit level, there was now a co-ordinating committee of thirty men from the armed forces established in the headquarters of the Fourth Division (Addis Ababa), claiming to represent all the military units except the navy.<sup>18</sup> On 26 February, the Second Division seized the radio station in Asmara (Eritrea) and broadcast its objection to the pay increases of several days earlier as being inadequate, and its many other demands, not all of which were limited to matters concerning the armed forces. On the next day, representatives of the various military units in and around Addis Ababa went to the King<sup>19</sup> and submitted their demands including, it appears, freedom of political parties, the democratic election of administrators, land reform, the improvement of employee-employer regulations, freeing of all political prisoners, free education for everyone, enforcement of necessary price controls, the appearance in court of the government officials who directly and indirectly embezzled public funds and belongings, salary rises for members of the army and other

workers in accordance with prevailing market prices and the formation of a committee including members of the army and the civilian public to follow up the enforcement of the above points.<sup>20</sup>

Faced with such formidable mutiny, the King had no choice but to give in to the demands of the armed forces. In his 27 February address to the representatives of the armed forces, the King appealed to their nationalism and pleaded with them not to ask for more than the country could afford, and to protect the country.<sup>21</sup> On the next day, he also gave an audience to representatives of the Second Division and promised to meet their demands.<sup>22</sup> On 1 March, it was announced that the privates had been given a pay rise of 30 birr (about 15 US dollars) instead of the 18 birr previously promised, a pension rise of 20 birr (about 10 US dollars) and privates and officers alike were promised 20 birr for special skills.<sup>23</sup> It seems they were also promised the establishment of a committee to look into their other grievances.

A more interesting effect of 'the first round of military and police uprising' was the sudden resignation of the prime minister, Tshafi Tizaz Aklilou Habte-Wolde, and his cabinet on 27 February.<sup>24</sup> On 24 February, as a result of the demand of the co-ordinating committee of the armed forces. On the following day it was reported that the King had accepted Aklilou's resignation<sup>25</sup> and, apparently, appointed Lt Gen Abiye Abebe as prime minister; however, upon being told that the army preferred Lij Endalkachew Mekonnen as prime minister, he changed his mind and appointed the general as Minister of Defence and Endalkachew as prime minister.<sup>26</sup> It is clear that there were personal rivalries between members of the old cabinet and also group rivalries between the class of an aristocratic elite, to which dignitaries like Lij Endalkachew and General Abiye belonged, on the one hand, and the government technocrats of a humbler origin to which officials like Tshafi Tizaz Aklilou and most of his cabinet members belonged, on the other. What is not clear is whether such considerations motivated Endalkachew to have the King informed that the armed forces did not want the old cabinet and whether the King, as a result, pressurized Aklilou and his cabinet to resign.

An even more intriguing query is whether there was some kind of collusion between the activities of Endalkachew and his

group, on the one hand, and those of the army, on the other. On 28 February, the armed forces acted to arrest most members of Aklilou's cabinet<sup>27</sup> though not Endalkachew, who was also a member of that cabinet as Minister of Posts and Communications. According to one source, at least, it was not the co-ordinating committee of thirty men from the NCOs that effected the arrests but another group of intermediate officers who brought the first committee under its influence towards the end of February, and which was led by Colonel Alem Zewd Tessema, Commander of the Airborne Brigade, Colonel Yigezu Yemane, Commander of the Army Aviation, Major Atnafu Abate of the Fourth Division, Junior Aircraftman Girma Fissiha, Lieutenant Colonel Yilma Teshome of the Fourth Division, Lieutenant Colonel Afework of the Air Force, Colonel Fikru of the Fourth Division and Captain Demissie of the Addis Ababa police force.<sup>28</sup> Judging by the role that Colonel Alem Zewd's Committee played in trying to quell the civilian uprising against the government in the subsequent months, it is pretty likely that Endalkachew had a hand in the formation and activities of the officers' group.

In his first Prime Ministerial address to the nation through the mass media on 28 February 1974, Endalkachew outlined two matters as requiring his urgent attention: the safeguarding of the nation's peace and security and the continuation of governmental functions. Under the first strategy, he placed Addis Ababa under a 9.00 pm to 6.00 am curfew, brought the armed forces and the police under a single command within the Ministry of Defence and instructed them to apportion the city into zones and uphold law and order in their areas of jurisdiction.<sup>29</sup> On a later occasion, Endalkachew explained that the need to involve the army in the maintenance of law and order arose from the conviction that a situation beyond the control of the police had arisen.<sup>30</sup> It appears that the command established under the Ministry of Defence was none other than the intermediate officers' group of late February, led by Alem Zewd Tesema.

Under the second strategy (continuation of governmental functions) Endalkachew took the interim measure of appointing himself as the Minister of the Interior, in addition to his premiership, and of authorizing the highest officials in each Ministry to act as Ministers until such time as the members of the new cabinet were appointed.<sup>31</sup> The names of the new cabinet members were

not announced until 22 March,<sup>32</sup> because they were resident abroad at the time of their appointment.<sup>33</sup>

The March 1974 resistance to Endalkachew's government was no less extreme than the resistance of the previous months. Satisfied, it seemed, with what they had achieved, the NCO-led mutineers went to the King, thanked him for the pay increases, expressed their loyalty to the Crown, handed over the members of the old cabinet whom they had detained and retired to their barracks.<sup>34</sup> This marked the end of the so-called 'first round of military uprising'; but the civilian resistance continued from where the soldiers had left off.

The radical elements within the civilian population accused the army of being interested only in pay increases for its members and of having betrayed the 'people's movement' by going back to their barracks. They also argued that what was needed was not a reshuffle of the cabinet, but a more fundamental change. They distributed clandestine leaflets vilifying members of the new cabinet especially Endalkachew, by way of showing that the new cabinet was, if anything, worse than the old. Also, even if the strike of the Addis Ababa taxi drivers did not survive Aklilou's government, that of the teachers continued until 20 March, when they decided to resume teaching: even then, they added more demands to the ones issued by them a month earlier and made reservations to the decisions of the premier on 14 March, regarding their previous petition.<sup>35</sup> The decision to resume teaching remained a theoretical one because the university and school students refused to attend classes, or did so intermittently, till the end of the academic year (June 1974) because they felt their own demands were not met.<sup>36</sup> While the educational system was thus in abeyance, several other groups went on strike and demonstration in March 1974. In the hope of taking advantage of the chaotic conditions of the time, the inmates of the Addis Ababa prison (Kershele) went on the rampage for four days starting from 2 March, resulting in shoot-outs and deaths among the prisoners and guards. The disturbance came to an end only because the government established a committee which would go into the grievances of the inmates.<sup>37</sup> The Confederation of Ethiopian Labour Unions (CELU) brought the country to its knees by calling for a general strike of its 85,000 members to come into effect as of 8 March. A deepening of the crisis was averted within

four days with CELU concluding a seventeen-point agreement with the central government in which the rights demanded were granted.<sup>38</sup> On 11 March, the 800 employees of the Civil Aviation Agency petitioned the government to grant them the right to form a trade union, free medical services, the right to have their insurance paid for by the government, free education which would enable them to improve their professional skills, etc., and went on strike the same day.<sup>39</sup> As a result, flights were disrupted completely for three days and partially thereafter.<sup>40</sup> On 13 March, the 350 employees of the Ethiopian Tobacco Monopoly submitted an eleven-point demand to the government and went on strike for a day and a half in spite of having agreed to suspend the strike by a month within which period their demands were to be met. Apart from demands for the right to form a trade union, pay increases, overtime pay, bonuses, better health care and the like, they also requested the removal of the Chairman of the Monopoly's Board of Governors (Ato Tadesse Yacob).<sup>41</sup> From then on, the request to have government officials dismissed became very common among strikers and demonstrators.

In addition to these strikes, there were a number of other organizations which submitted petitions to the government in March and threatened to go on strike if their demands were not met within a prescribed period of time. These included the teachers of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church Schools,<sup>42</sup> other employees of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church<sup>43</sup> and the employees of the Addis Ababa Municipality.<sup>44</sup>

Obviously, the question of whether the army was going to move to the side of the government and uphold law and order, or whether it was going to support the resistance to the government had, by now, become crucial for the outcome of the events of the time. But the army did not speak with one voice; as suggested earlier, it was divided between the officer-dominated group which was essentially pro-status-quo and which felt that the changes of late February 1974 were adequate, and the NCO-dominated group, which albeit inarticulate, was after a more radical change.

On 14 March, for example, it was reported that representatives of the Fourth Division and the police of Eritrea went to the King and told him that he had done right in increasing the pay of members of the armed forces and of the police because, the representative argued, that section of the population was the least

paid and added that the civilians, particularly the teachers, had no 'right' to take advantage of the situation and ask for more pay because they had been educated at the expense of the country. Reportedly, the representatives also assured the King that they would crush those on strike should the King wish it.<sup>45</sup> Further, on 16 March, it was reported that a communiqué had been issued by the Ministry of the Interior warning Addis Ababans against distributing defamatory leaflets, because the security forces had been authorized to take stern measures against those who engaged in such activities.<sup>46</sup> Thus, the government, with the assistance of the conservative elements within the security forces, did not take strong measures against the civilian opposition, perhaps because that resistance took the less disruptive form of strikes rather than unruly demonstrations.

A more convincing argument for the lack of strong action on the part of the government appears to be fear of a backlash from the radical NCOs and privates. Towards the beginning of March, leaflets were being distributed in the name of the army arguing that they had gone back to their barracks only because a government committee was established to go into their demands and that their demands to the King concerned the rights of the army as well as those of the civilian population.<sup>47</sup> In the subsequent weeks, a plot to overthrow the government including the King was being hatched by, it appears, the most radical elements among the NCOs and privates claiming to represent the First Division, the Fourth Division, the air force and the Paratroop Brigade. On the eve of the execution of the plot (24 March), the representatives met and agreed that the beginning of the *coup d'état* on the next morning would be marked by fighter planes flying over the capital while those on the ground would start taking over the national radio station and all other strategic places in the city. However, the representatives of the Paratroop Brigade could not agree to the plan to kill Col Alem Zewd, who was commander of the same brigade, Chairman of the Military and Police Joint Command recently established under the Ministry of Defence and confidant of Endalkachew. When the others refused to accept the open protest of the Paratroop Brigade representative, he walked out on them and exposed the whole plot to the Ministry of Defence directly.<sup>48</sup>

By the next morning, the Ministry of Defence had moved to

have the rebels rounded up and the runway of the air force base in Debre-Zeit blocked with the help of the paratroopers. On 27 March, it was reported that the radio station and the airport in Asmara (Eritrea) were being guarded by pro-government members of the security forces because, it was explained, some units within the army and the police of the province were in rebellion and that the people were being advised, through the radio, to go about their business normally because the situation was under control.<sup>49</sup> However, it was not until 2 April that the government officially admitted that there had ever been an attempted *coup d'état*, and even then under pressure from the armed forces.<sup>50</sup>

The rebels had gone against the cardinal military doctrine of 'absolute loyalty to the Crown'; it was, therefore, easy for the government and the conservative group of the armed forces to expose them in the eyes of the army. The various units of the security forces condemned the rebels and expressed their loyalty to the King and the new cabinet. These included: the Fourth Division and the police of Eritrea on 26 March,<sup>51</sup> unspecified brigades on 27 March,<sup>52</sup> the Third Division and the police of Hararghe Province on 30 March<sup>53</sup> and the police of Kefa and Bale Provinces on 2 April.<sup>54</sup>

In spite of the crackdown on the rebels, April 1974 witnessed the most violent and disruptive disturbances, strikes and demonstrations of the whole uprising of that year. Each of the communities and organizations that came out in protest submitted petitions containing a lot of points – in some cases as many as thirty – but most of them were adamant on two of the demands (the dismissal of a number of their officials and the right to form trade unions). It appears that they were quite willing to give up their other demands if the two were met.

The demand for the dismissal of government officials was spearheaded by residents of provincial and sub-provincial capitals. Between 29 March and 6 April, it was reported that there had been strikes and demonstrations in all of the provincial capitals with police actions against the demonstrators being at their severest in four of them: Jimma (Kefa),<sup>55</sup> Metu (Illubabor), Asela (Arusi) and Arba Minch (Gemu Goffa).<sup>56</sup> In these four provincial capitals almost all of the adult male population – 300,000 people in Metu alone – seem to have come out onto the streets demanding the

dismissal of their governor generals (heads of the provincial administration) and other officials allegedly because they were administratively incompetent, had evicted tenants and given the land away to friends in Addis Ababa and had misappropriated millions of dollars raised from the public for particular projects.<sup>57</sup> As a result of police brutalities against the demonstrators, two people were killed and eight wounded in Jimma, and a lot of people were beaten up in Metu and Arbaminch, and in Assela<sup>58</sup> 1,514 people were arrested.

The Chamber of Deputies (the lower house of parliament) was incensed by the police actions in these and other provinces. For four days it held an extremely heated debate on the subject, and, on 4 April, it decided that the government should investigate the police brutalities and punish those responsible and have the Auditor General audit the allegations concerning the misappropriation of funds by the officials.<sup>59</sup> The central government was in a dilemma; it could neither meet the demands overnight, as seems to have been the expectation of the people, nor use the police to quell the disturbances without provoking further opposition. Under pressure from the parliament and the growing momentum of the opposition, the government retreated; on 8 April, it dismissed the governor generals of Sidamo and Arusi,<sup>60</sup> and on 16 April, those of Shoa and Kefa.<sup>61</sup> On those two days no less than fourteen high officials were appointed with many more to come soon after,<sup>62</sup> suggesting that the dismissals were much more extensive than was actually reported.

The disturbances, strikes and demonstrations of April 1974, were not limited to the provincial people, but extended to residents of Addis Ababa, particularly those working for governmental and semi-governmental organizations. Almost all of them gave prominence to the demands for the dismissal of certain of their officials and for the right to form trade unions. For example, some 600 employees of the Ministry of Finance submitted twenty-two demands and, after several days of strike, went back to work on 17 April, only because three of the Ministry's officials were dismissed in accordance with their request and because they were promised that their other demands would be met in due course.<sup>63</sup> Their demand for the right to form a trade union was denied them on the grounds that they were civil servants and as such could not properly establish a union under the law.<sup>64</sup> Similarly, the

employees of the Ministries of Justice,<sup>65</sup> Agriculture<sup>66</sup> and Health<sup>67</sup> all made the dismissal of certain of their officials a prerequisite for resuming work.

More protracted and disruptive were the strikes and demonstrations of the service-rendering governmental and semi-governmental agencies of Addis Ababa. Strikes by the employees of the Civil Aviation Agency, which started on 11 March,<sup>68</sup> did not come to an end until 1 April.<sup>69</sup> As a result, flights were held up until at least five of the agency's officials were dismissed.<sup>70</sup> The employees of the Addis Ababa Municipality went on strike for sixteen days until 12 April, and managed to have the Mayor dismissed by the central government.<sup>71</sup> The danger to the city was such that on account of the accumulating tons of garbage, there was fear of cholera breaking out any time.<sup>72</sup> The capital city's only rail link with the outside world was cut off from 6 April to 9 May, by the strike of the employees of the Franco-Ethiopian Railway Company.<sup>73</sup> Reportedly, the implications of the delivery of food aid from the port of Djibouti to the interior and of armaments to the army in the eastern region of Hararghe were very serious; nonetheless, the employees would not budge until at least thirteen of the company's officials were removed.<sup>74</sup> The public transport system of Addis Ababa was also disrupted intermittently between 13 March<sup>75</sup> and the beginning of May,<sup>76</sup> by the strike of the employees of the Lion Bus Company. On 24 April, the city's taxis were stoned and the windows of many smashed. The bus drivers who sought to bring the entire transport system to a halt, and who actually managed to do so for a few days, were suspected of stoning the taxis. The employees of the company also demanded the dismissal of ten officials before they would consider going back to work at all.<sup>77</sup>

Further, the employees of the Telecommunications Board, who had petitioned the government on 11 March,<sup>78</sup> went on strike on 30 April,<sup>79</sup> and resumed work only on 5 June.<sup>80</sup> In spite of the fact that they had submitted a twenty-five-point petition, they expressed their willingness to resume work if two of their demands were met – namely the dismissal of some of their officials and the right to form a trade union. On the question of the right to form a trade union, the employees of the Telecommunications Board were joined, on 30 April, by the employees of seven other agencies. These included the employees of the Ethiopian Light and Power

Authority, the Ethiopian Coffee Board, the Ethiopian Commercial Bank, the Highway Authority, the Addis Ababa Municipality, the Civil Aviation Agency and the Water and Sewerage Authority of Addis Ababa. The first four of these went on strike on the same day.<sup>81</sup> All of these agencies had been arguing for years that, as industrial or profit-making government agencies, the relevant law<sup>82</sup> could and should be interpreted to allow them to form trade unions. The trade union registering government department (the then Ministry of Community Development) rejected the application of the employees of the Telecommunications Board which had argued along these lines.<sup>83</sup>

It was by no means only employees of governmental, semi-governmental and private organizations that took part in the protest movement in April, but also religious and various other communities that poured out onto the streets of Addis Ababa and submitted petitions to the government. An outstanding example of this was the demonstration of the Muslim community and their Christian supporters on 20 April, which brought out onto the streets over 100,000 people. In the biggest demonstrations of the protest movement, they demanded, through placards and chants, equal status for their religion.<sup>84</sup> Generally, the protest movement in April was so ubiquitous that in moments of flippancy the story was told that such peripheral communities, as the beggars and prostitutes, also demanded the doubling of alms to be received and payment for services rendered, and went on strike until such time as their demands were met.<sup>85</sup>

Part of the reason why Addis Ababans went on strikes and demonstrations quite unchallenged was because the army and the police were themselves involved in the protest movement of April. By the beginning of that month, they were starting to feel that the King's promise a month earlier to have the corrupt officials of Aklilou's cabinet tried by a court of law was going to remain unfulfilled. Further, when, on 18 April, Endalkachew addressed some 200 representatives of the armed forces in the Fourth Division, to ask them for their collaboration in the implementation of his cabinet's programmes, the one question that was asked again and again was why the members of Aklilou's government had not been placed under arrest and why they had not been punished?<sup>86</sup> Incidentally, the lower house of parliament also added its voice, on 22 April, to the chorus of demands that

members of the old cabinet be placed under arrest for their own safety, the country's security and for facilitating the work of the new cabinet.<sup>87</sup>

The security forces did not limit themselves to complaints; rather they took the law into their hands and started arresting the officials. On 7 April, the armed forces and the police of Hararghe placed the local radio station and certain other government offices under their control and demanded the dismissal of Lt Gen Haile Baykedagn, Second Commander of the ground forces, and Lt Gen Yilama Shibeshi, Commander of the Police Force. Lt Gen Haile Baykedagn resigned the next day.<sup>88</sup>

These were isolated incidents, but the co-ordinating committee which surfaced by the last week of April in the Fourth Division, claiming to represent the ground forces, the bodyguard, the air force, the navy, the police and various other units of the armed forces, started taking concentrated action against the officials. In what is usually referred to as 'the second round of military uprising', the group placed under arrest Aklilou, members of his cabinet and their collaborators, in the last week of April.<sup>89</sup> What were referred to as 'collaborators' were none other than the provincial governor generals, senior military and police officers and other high government officials of whom about 200 were detained at the time.<sup>90</sup> On 27 April, representatives of the group went to the King and expressed their allegiance to the Crown and to the new cabinet.<sup>91</sup> On the 29th, they declared that they had accomplished the task for which they had been established and retired to their barracks.<sup>92</sup>

Also, there may have been another committee calling itself the Co-ordinating Committee of the Armed Forces and the Police, led by Col Alem Zewd Tessema; this too seems to have emerged in the last week of April.<sup>93</sup> Even if the circumstances suggest that this was a separate committee from the previous one, it could, on the other hand, simply have been the conservative wing of the same committee. As Hagai Erlich suggests, it appears that Endalkachew, with the help of Alem Zewd's committee, used the upsurge of the military movement against the old officials who may have been conspiring against his cabinet while at the same time appeasing the protestors by collaborating in the arrest of the allegedly corrupt officials.<sup>94</sup>

In May and June, the protest movement started losing its

momentum, mainly on account of the strong measures that the government was able to take with the assistance of the conservative officers. From the time of his appointment as prime minister, Endalkachew, in his public addresses, had been pleading for time to deal with the innumerable petitions, and time for the implementation of his cabinet's programmes. In April, his strategy was to evade the petitions which were submitted to his office by referring them to the relevant organizations where the disputes could be settled between the employees and the management, while, in the meantime, buying time for himself to deal with the more pressing demands of the army.

In the last week of April, the government started threatening to enforce rigorously the law on strikes and demonstrations and to use the security forces against those who went on strikes and demonstrations without adhering to the procedures of the law. On 23 April, for instance, the government resolved to take appropriate measures against industrial workers who went on strike outside the prescriptions of the law, civil servants who went on strike at all, and against those who went on demonstration except in accordance with the law and announced that the security forces had been authorized to enforce these decisions.<sup>95</sup> On 30 April, the government issued a communiqué citing its decisions of 23 April, and in pursuance of it, warned civil servants who were on strike that they would be replaced by new employees if they did not resume work immediately, and directed managers to keep a strict record of working hours.<sup>96</sup> On 30 April the Ministry of Justice published, in the official newspaper, all the relevant Penal Code provisions against strikes and warned that they would be rigorously enforced as of then.<sup>97</sup> On 3 May, the Ministry of the Interior did the same with the laws on demonstrations and added new restrictions on them.<sup>98</sup>

From early on there was a half-hearted attempt to use the labour court in the then Ministry of Community Development to enforce these laws. It will be remembered that CELU, which represented a lot of the workers in the private sector, had called for a general strike by its members and that it was called off after four days of an effective strike (7–11 March) because CELU had reached a seventeen-point agreement with the central government. On 18 March, the Employers' Federation of Ethiopia applied to the Employer–Employee Board asking it to declare the general strike

illegal and to find that the agreement reached between CELU and the central government did not heed the Employers' Federation. On 20 April the court decided in favour of the Employers' Federation on both counts and, in spite of the fact that the agreement between CELU and the government had provided that no reprisals would be taken against the workers who took part in the general strikes, it ruled that the workers would not be paid for the days they were on strike. CELU then declared the decision illegal and convened a meeting to consider what measures to take against it.<sup>99</sup>

The court's decisions did nothing to quell the rebellious mood of CELU. It continued to challenge the authority of the government so much that on 30 April the Ministry of Defence accused CELU of promoting lawlessness and strikes especially by civil servants and warned it to stop these illegal activities or face closure.<sup>100</sup> In its letter to the prime minister, CELU expressed its deep shock at the communiqué of the Ministry of Defence, denied that it was promoting lawlessness, declared the warning illegal and asserted that threatening workers into submission would only damage the economy. Further, it claimed that, since the armed forces shared the demands of the workers concerning living conditions and since they had time and again sympathetically assisted the workers in promoting the same demands, they knew that CELU stood for the poor and that it was concerned about the country's progress.<sup>101</sup> The prime minister's office took exception to the fact that CELU's letter was dispatched to the local and international press before it was received by itself and pronounced that everyone including CELU was under the law.<sup>102</sup> Also, the labour court had occasion to entertain petitions from individual unions and employers,<sup>103</sup> but its decisions were not effective since the parties continued to challenge them.

More effective than the law courts in quelling the strikes was what was called the High National Security Commission, which was probably created by the Minister of Defence (Lt Gen Abiye) behind the back of Endalkachew. According to Endalkachew, the Commission was a revival of the Military and Police Joint Command which was established by him two months earlier in order to uphold law and order and which was dissolved later as the security situation improved. Further, he explained that the differences between the two were that the jurisdiction of the Joint Command

was limited to the capital city whereas that of the Commission extended to the rest of the country as well and that the composition of the Joint Command was limited to the members of the army and the police whereas that of the Commission included civilians as well. Despite this acknowledgement of the Commission by Endalkachew, Gilkes points out that the latter took it as a ploy of Abiye to overthrow him.<sup>104</sup>

Of the cases dealt with by the Commission, that of the Telecommunications Board was most striking. On 16 May the employees of that agency submitted a twenty-five-point petition to the Commission and asked it to deal with some of the points and leave the rest to be dealt with by the management of the Board. The Commission then held a number of meetings with the representatives of the employees in which the one question of the dismissal of certain of the agency's officials became extremely controversial. The Commission took the position that individual rights could not be removed without due process of law; the representatives of employees on the other hand argued that since the demand was that of the majority, the Commission should enforce it without asking for evidence to prove the guilt of officials concerned. On 25 May, the representatives of the employees held a meeting of all the workers of the Board and communicated the decisions of the Commission to it. Representatives of the Commission who also attended the meeting felt that the decisions were misrepresented and tried unsuccessfully to stop the meeting. At the end of the meeting, the Commission had twenty-four of the employees arrested and the rest dispersed by force.<sup>105</sup> After the government brought further pressure to bear on the employees,<sup>106</sup> they all resumed work on 6 June with the sole demand now that their colleagues under arrest be released.

A further example of the Commission's activities is its intervention in the dispute between the employees and officials of the General Post Office. On 2 May, the employees of that agency locked out seven of their officials. Since the employees had done this once before and since on that occasion soldiers sent by the Commission opened the offices of the officials and let them in, the employees responsible for this second lock-out were placed under arrest, but released on the next day because the arrest led to a general strike of protest by all the employees of the General Post Office.<sup>107</sup> Further, the Commission conducted a series of

consultations with the Ministry of Education, teachers, students and parents and on 11 May it published in the official newspaper the decisions it arrived at. It hoped that the decisions would lead to the re-opening of the schools which were shut as a result of student class boycotts,<sup>108</sup> but all in vain.

If the role of the Commission in these cases looked ineffective, its authority was nevertheless being recognized by other agencies. On 17 June, the Diabaco Cotton Spinning Factory was closed and both employees and employers petitioned the Commission accusing each other of being responsible for the closure.<sup>109</sup> On 23 June the employers were able to dismiss 114 workers and to keep forty full-time employees of the factory out of work until their cases were resolved,<sup>110</sup> measures that would have been undreamt of but two months earlier. By June, the urban uprising had begun to thaw.

#### CONCLUSION

What is clear from the preceding pages is that the rural populations of Ethiopia were not involved in the uprising which prevailed over the first six months of 1974. Despite that, leftist observers of the event have maintained that the peasants had always been involved in insurrectionary protests against the exploiting class and continued to be so during the uprising under consideration. In support of their claim, they often cite the armed struggle of the Oromos in Bale from 1960 to 1970, the 1967 resistance of the farmers of the north-western province of Gojam against tax reforms and the thousands of farmers (mostly tenants) who were dislodged from their holdings as a result of the development of commercial farms in several areas as of the late 1960s.

However, the Bale resistance involved all classes of the area and was based more on ethnic and religious considerations than anything else; further, it was led by an organized elite helped and abetted by the Republic of Somalia. Also, in the Gojam resistance, all the upper and lower classes took a common position against the government attempts to measure their holdings for the purpose of tax evaluations because, they feared, the measurement was a government ploy to introduce land reform in the region. Further, the peasants displaced from the commercial farms left their holdings sheepishly and the bulk of them became wage

labourers in the neighbouring farms and towns, or joined the pool of the unemployed there. The fact remains that there is no evidence to show that the peasants of the north or those of the south ever acted either independently or, except for those in Bale, as part of an organized political movement. Moreover, there is no evidence to show that they behaved any differently in the uprising of 1974. Their mobilization and absorption into the political life of the country did not take place until later.

In fact, the revolutionary credentials of the Ethiopian peasantry compared poorly to those of the nomads whom the literature on Ethiopia has on the whole ignored. As argued earlier, the nomads of the Sahel plains in Eritrea and those of the Ogaden had, since about 1960, been involved in armed resistance against the *ancien régime*. Like the Oromos of Bale, the resistance of these nomads was primarily based on religious and ethnic considerations and was led by an organized elite with substantial international support. Though the general literature on the revolutionary potential of nomads leaves a lot to be desired, the Ethiopian experience seems to suggest that the nomads can be as revolutionary as the peasants if not more. Be that as it may, despite the fact that the nomads had struggled for a long time and may well have contributed to the decline of the *ancien régime*, they did not play any role in the uprising of 1974 which was quite outside their reach.

As the topic of this chapter suggests, the uprising of 1974 was based on the 'urban' residents who numbered about 3 million out of a total population of almost 32 million. Of these, it was only the civil servants, industrial workers, the army and the students who took an active part in the protest movement. The total number of civil servants was 100,000, about a third of whom were employed in the state-owned or dominated enterprises; the employees of some of the state-owned or dominated enterprises like the Ethiopian Air Lines were allowed to form trade unions but most were not. The Confederation of Ethiopian Trade Unions, which included the employees of the state-owned enterprises which could form unions, had a total membership of about 80,000. The Ethiopian Teachers' Association, whose members were civil servants, was 18,000 strong. In addition to the civil servants, there was the army of 55,000 including the 10,000 territorial army in active force and a police force of about 30,000. The number of enrolled school

students was about 70,000 and that of the university 6,000. Thus, out of the total urban population of 3 million, the politically active group made up of civil servants, workers, the soldiers and students was less than 300,000; the rest of the urban residents were either self-employed, part of the informal economy, or unemployed and hence dependent on those who earned their living from the formal and informal sectors.

In early March, the Confederation of Ethiopian Trade Unions called for a general strike by its members; the government gave in to all the demands of the Confederation and the strike was called off within a few days. Following that, the headquarters of the Confederation became the focal point at which a lot of the demonstrations by all interest groups (including those that were not members of the Confederation) started and/or ended. This was mainly due to the activists within the interest groups who, because of their ideological leanings, sought to give the workers a leading role in the uprising and encouraged the demonstrators to go to the headquarters of the Confederation. The headquarters had become the focus of the demonstrations so much that in April the government was forced to accuse the Confederation of instigating all the demonstrations and strikes and warned it to stop such activities or face closure.

Despite this, there are considerations that make the active participation of the working class in the popular uprising of 1974 questionable. First, the members of the Confederation of Ethiopian Trade Unions were university or school graduates and, hence, part of the *petit bourgeois* intellectual substratum; in other words, they were not a product of the industrial work force who got to their position by dirtying their hands with labour or the production belt. Secondly, the industrial workers of the individual enterprises, as opposed to their national Confederation which held only one general strike in the six months of social upheaval, were involved in strikes and lock-outs of employers only in a handful of cases and even then for only a few days in each case. By contrast, the strikes and demonstrations of quite a number of the government agencies like the Civil Aviation Agency, the Telecommunications, and the Municipality of Addis Ababa were much more protracted, lasting for months on end.

It is believed that the civilian left and the army competed for the vanguardship of the urban uprising of 1974 much more than the

industrial workers. The civilian left had at its disposal the University Students' Union of Addis Ababa with the help of which it organized the university and school students to boycott classes, hold rallies and go out on demonstrations for the duration of the uprising. The influence of the civilian left was not limited to the students but also extended to the employees of the government and semi-government agencies which were embroiled in the uprising. The school and university graduates who were working for these government and semi-government agencies managed to dominate the steering committees that sprang up in those agencies in the course of the uprising. The functions of the steering committees were presiding over the general meetings of the employees of their respective agencies, writing petitions to the government, preparing papers and placards for the public, and organizing strikes and demonstrations. The civilian left played an active role in all this not as affiliates of any political organization but as individuals. At the time there was an underground organization called Abiyot (revolution) which was based among the civilian left; however, as opposed to its counterparts abroad, it was completely inept and played a minimal role in the uprising, if at all.

Equally important, if not more so, was the role played by the security forces in the uprising of 1974. Their units also had steering committees which led the discussions concerning the mood of the protest movement among the civilian population, wrote petitions to the government, prepared papers for distribution to the public, and generally considered what measures to take. As it happened, the measures they took in exacting concessions from the government and in arresting the officials of the *ancien régime* were much more effective for the 'success' of the uprising than any of the measures taken by the civilian population. In a sense, the uprising could be seen as a competition between the state and the civilian population to win over the security forces to one side or the other; as it happened, the security forces erred on the side of supporting the protest movement. It is doubtful if the uprising would have persisted had it not been for this fact.

Despite their numerical insignificance compared to the rest of the population, the politically active elite managed to hold the *ancien régime* to ransom. The explanation for this must be sought in the crisis of the *ancien régime* itself, in Haile Selassie's

government and in the cabinets of Aklilou and Endalkachew. As argued in the previous chapter, Haile Selassie's autocracy had not only been buffeted and discredited by internal and external opposition but also its head, the monarch, had become too old and senile to employ even his old skills effectively. Since the early twentieth century, Haile Selassie had been riding waves of mutinies and public protests by blaming his officials for things that had gone wrong in the government and by compromising the positions of his officials by way of concessions to the protestors. In 1974, he followed a similar strategy: not only did he sacrifice Aklilou's cabinet in the hope of appeasing the security forces but also told his officials not to resist arrests by the army and to trust him to be able to ride the wave of the protest movement once again. However, the mutinies and protests of 1974 had an unprecedentedly wide social base; they were too deep rooted to be managed by anyone let alone the monarch whose senility had given rise to a power vacuum in that year.

That Haile Selassie had left a power vacuum was obvious more to his officials than to anyone else. The monarch's monopoly of power had left them without any power base in the society including the army and had, further, rendered them too weak and divided to replace him. Those of the ministers who attempted to fill the vacuum only managed to trip over each other and fall together. The February 'resignation' of Aklilou's cabinet was no doubt a result of the demand of an NCO committee of the time; however, there is evidence to show that Endalkachew, who had an eye to the prime ministerial position, had a hand in instigating the demand, in influencing the monarch's appointment of a prime minister in his favour and in bringing about the arrest in April of hundreds of the officials including members of Aklilou's cabinet. Members of Endalkachew's cabinet were from a more aristocratic stock than their predecessors; as some of the pamphlets of the time indicated, this was incongruent with the populist spirit of the uprising. Be that as it may, Endalkachew's cabinet could not hold together. Endalkachew's bid to become prime minister was contested by Lt Gen Abiye Abebe who was merely appointed Minister of Defence. However, the competition between the two continued, leading in March to the establishment of Alem Zewd's committee by Endalkachew for the purpose of co-ordinating the security forces, and in April to the establishment of the National

Security Commission by Abiye for the same purpose. Though these were admirable attempts at building a power base within the army, they were at the same time directed against one aristocratic group by another with spill-overs to the security forces which almost resulted in an armed confrontation among them. The uprising of January to June 1974 was limited to the urban areas. However, this was sufficient to completely disorientate the *ancien régime* which, because of its already weakened position in the society, was unable to deal with it.

In effect, what the events of January to June 1974 show is the total collapse of the *ancien régime* and the absence of any obvious successor to it.

### CHAPTER 3

## *The turning of an urban movement into a junta dictatorship*

#### THE EMERGENCE OF THE DERG

In the organizations in which the members had unions or associations, the task of co-ordinating the demands, strikes and demonstrations of February–June 1974 fell on the democratically elected leaders and committees. Examples of these were the Confederation of Ethiopian Labour Unions (CELU), the Ethiopian Teachers' Association and the University Students' Union of Addis Ababa. In the other organizations, spontaneous committees sprang up in the course of the movement and took on the task of co-ordinating the protest activities in their respective organizations. Also, in some of the provincial capitals, notably in Jimma (Kefa), committees made up of similar corporate groups went as far as temporarily occupying the local administrations and setting themselves up as popular governments, albeit for a short time. Needless to say, the most active in all these committees were the radical left.

According to Lefort, the emergence of Co-ordinating Committees within the army goes as far back as late 1973, when what he calls 'Army Mess Committees' started compiling lists of strictly corporatist grievances, at the instigation of senior officers who sought to create discontentment among the army against the prime minister (Aklilou Habte-Wolde).<sup>1</sup> By the end of February 1974, highly politicized unit co-ordinating committees were established at least in the air force and in the First, Second and Fourth Divisions<sup>2</sup> and spread to the remaining units thereafter. The Military–Police Co-ordinating Committees (like the ones that emerged in February and April) were different from what we have called 'the unit co-ordinating committees' in that they purported to represent all or most of the units instead of individual ones.

Finally, the Military and Police Joint Command of late February (created by Endalkachew) and the High National Security Commission of late April (created by Abiye) were different from the others in that they were not established by the armed forces and the police but by the government in order to arrest the tide of the movement.

The Military and Police Joint Command and the High National Security Commission were essentially pro-status quo; with the help of the moderates in the other committees, they tried to stabilize Endalkachew's cabinet. On the other hand, the radicals in the unit co-ordinating committees and the Military-Police Co-ordinating Committees sought to destabilize the government, as they managed to do during the first and second military uprisings of late February and April when the civilian protest movement seemed to have the upper hand. Even if it was clear that power had fallen into the hands of the armed forces in the course of the movement, they were unable to take any decisive measures because of the continuously changing balance of power between the moderates and the radicals among these groups.

In May and June 1974, the High National Security Commission, chaired by the Minister of Defence (Lt Gen Abiye Abebe), weakened the movement by interceding in disputes between the employees and management and, when necessary, by the use and threat of force. Needless to say, its decisions were enforced by the lower-ranking officers, NCOs and privates. In this, the radical members of the Military-Police Co-ordinating Committees found they were acting against the very civilian and military activists with whom they had identified themselves time and again. More important, perhaps, was the fact that in the aftermath of the 1960 abortive *coup d'état*, the rebels in the First Division (the body-guard) were executed, imprisoned or dismissed from the army for treason and related offences. The radicals of the 1974 movement feared that a similar fate might befall them for having been involved in mutinies and incarceration of the government officials, should the High National Security Commission succeed in reinstating the *ancien régime*. Spurred by considerations like this, the activists, at least in Addis Ababa, continued to hold informal meetings wherever they could: private houses, the wooded outskirts of the capital, churchyards and the like. The purpose of these meetings was to try and promote discontent among

members of the armed forces by pointing out to them that the detainees, instead of being treated like criminals, had their families visit them freely and provide them with sumptuous meals and glorious birthday parties while millions were starving as a result of the drought. In this way, the military radicals and the civilian militants who were able to take part in these activities managed to keep the spirit of the movement alive within the armed forces.<sup>3</sup>

Apparently, the government, with the assistance of the moderates in the army, had arrested or sent to remote areas some of the radical members of the Military-Police Co-ordinating Committee, after the first and second rounds of the military uprisings. Some of the others, particularly those who came from Addis Ababa, and Debre-Zeit, survived the arrest and banishments<sup>4</sup> and continued to struggle. Endalkachew unwittingly helped the armed forces organize themselves; seeing his downfall in the success of the National Security Commission's quelling of the uprising, he went to the various units and told them to put their house in order. According to Hagai Erlich, some twelve to sixteen of these radicals decided to form their own Co-ordinating Committee in early June 1974.<sup>5</sup> The committee was led by a Major Atnafu Abate from the Fourth Division and by Major Tefera Tekle-ab of army engineers; other members of the committee included Aircraftman Girma Fissiha, Major Tibebu, Major Genetu, Major Sisay Habte, and Major Fissiha Desta.<sup>6</sup> This marks the beginning of the third round of the military uprising which proved more decisive than the first two.

The third round of the uprising drew its strength not from another upsurge of civilian unrest but from an ability to co-ordinate the armed forces in and around Addis Ababa through the exploitation of the grievances of the veterans of UN military operations in Korea and the Congo, in 1951 and 1960 respectively. These veterans were led to believe that the government had paid them only part of what the UN had assigned for them and misappropriated the rest. Earlier on they had petitioned the government for a remedy in vain. In June 1974, at the instigation of Endalkachew, they appealed to the King against the Ministry of Defence (Abiye) only to be told to go and see Endalkachew. In their frustration and apparently with the encouragement of Endalkachew the leaders of the veterans

turned to the radicals and, with Major Atnafu's Co-ordinating Committee, started promoting discontent among the armed forces of Addis Ababa and the surrounding areas.<sup>7</sup> Once again, the balance had tipped in favour of the radicals.

The only task that remained to be accomplished by Major Atnafu's Co-ordinating Committee was the bringing of the provincial military units within the orbit of the movement. Accordingly, the committee promoted among them the idea that the purpose of the then movement was to arrest and bring to justice the officials of the *ancien régime* who were still at large. By then, the popular presumption within the army was that the officials were guilty of corruption and were responsible for the backwardness of the country and that the Investigation Commission was too inept to accomplish its task. By mid June 1974 the bulk of the provincial units were apparently aware of the existence of the Co-ordinating Committee.<sup>8</sup>

By all accounts, the last straw seems to have been when, on 26 June, two groups of MPs (one led by an Ato Kagnew Kitachew and the other by a Major Admasse Zelleke) went to the Fourth Division and addressed the soldiers there about the detained officials. The first group advocated the continued retention of the officials while the second pleaded for their release on bail.<sup>9</sup> The emotive appeal of Ato Kagnew greatly aroused members of the Co-ordinating Committee which took advantage of the occasion and called upon the soldiers there to take up arms and be on the ready to come out of their barracks and arrest the old officials.<sup>10</sup> Major Admasse's group was roundly condemned as having been instigated by the officials of the *ancien régime*.<sup>11</sup> Lt Gen Abiye, who was still believed to be in control of the armed forces and was planning to make a move against the Co-ordinating Committee, is thought to have been behind Major Admasse's intercession.<sup>12</sup>

According to some sources it was at this juncture (26 June 1974) that Major Atnafu's Co-ordinating Committee sent telegrams to the provincial military and police units asking them to delegate three representatives each in order to participate in the leadership of the movement or that Major Tefera captured the radio station on behalf of the Co-ordinating Committee and broadcast the same message to the provincial units.<sup>13</sup> However, considering the speed at which the committee was able to hold a general meeting and to start acting, it is more logical to assume that the

involvement of the provincial unit was invoked earlier on; according to Hagai Erlich for instance, some thirty-five to forty of the military units were invited to send such representatives by the middle of June.<sup>14</sup> On 28 June the bulk of the delegates were assembled in the headquarters of the Fourth Division (Addis Ababa). Some, like the ground forces, the air force, the navy and the police of the Second Division (Eritrea) did not send their delegates until 5 July<sup>15</sup> and still others until later. The publicized number of the final membership of the Co-ordinating Committee was 120 – a figure which apparently included the clerical staff of the Committee – but the actual number of representatives was 106.

The decision to ask the units to send three delegates each was in order to have an equal representation of the junior officers up to and including majors, NCOs and privates, which suggests that the body so created was composed roughly in that proportion. The senior officers were excluded because they were identified with the *ancien régime*. Thus, on 28 June 1974, was created what was then called the Co-ordinating Committee of the Armed Forces, the Police and the Territorial Army<sup>16</sup> and later variously the Armed Forces Committee, the Provisional Military Administrative Council, the Provisional Military Government, or simply the Derg (the committee).

#### 'THE CREEPING COUP' (28 JUNE–12 SEPTEMBER 1974)

Major Atnafu was, elected Chairman of the Co-ordinating Committee soon after the provincial military units expressed, in the middle of June, their willingness to collaborate with the third round of military uprisings.<sup>17</sup> On the very first day of the Derg's plenum (28 June) which was chaired by Major Atnafu Abate of the Fourth Division, the leadership question was raised again. A group within the Derg called upon the assembly not to waste its time by discussing the fate of the officials under arrest and those still at large, but to focus on the questions of adopting 'wise' leadership and of rising to the challenge of the time and living up to the expectations of the movement. On the next day, the leadership question came to the forefront and, after some tense discussions, Major Mengistu Haile-Mariam of the Third Division was elected chairman, Major Atnafu Abate vice-chairman and Major Gebreyes Wolde-Hana Secretary General of the Derg.<sup>18</sup>

It appears that the stirring-up of the leadership question among these delegates, most of whom did not know one another, and also the outcome of the elections, was a result of personal ambitions and diplomacy in the corridors of the Fourth Division.

The appointment of the non-Derg member, Lt Gen Aman Andom, as the chairman of the Derg was announced officially on 13 September 1974 as though it was made on the previous day,<sup>19</sup> whereas in actual fact it seems to have been made on 30 June 1974.<sup>20</sup> His credentials could only have strongly recommended him to the Derg: he was involved in the activities of the radical wing of the Military-Police Co-ordinating Committee starting from its inception;<sup>21</sup> he was popular with the army in general; he had, behind him, long years of experience in governmental affairs: as an Eritrean he could be expected to diffuse the Eritrean secessionist demand; and, he was an acknowledged hero in the fight against the Republic of Somalia, which had territorial ambitions over Ethiopia. From early July on, Lt Gen Aman started acting as Head of State, receiving ambassadors and other foreign dignitaries on behalf of the state.<sup>22</sup> Be that as it may, the effect of Lt Gen Aman's appointment on the ordering of the leadership was to make Major Mengistu first vice-chairman and Major Atnafu Abate second vice-chairman of the Derg.

At the same time as it was considering the question of leadership, the Derg was trying to define the purpose for which it was established. As noted earlier the purpose for its establishment was to detain the officials of the *ancien régime*, allegedly because they were obstructing the work of the new cabinet of Endalkachew, and bring them to justice alongside their colleagues already in prison. The need to co-ordinate the armed forces and avoid bloodshed among them appears to have been the other purpose of its formation. At any rate, once the Derg was assembled, the more radical elements within it considered these considerations too mundane a target for such a representative body to dwell on, and started whipping up the emotion of its members with a view to rallying support for a more radical stance. Reminiscing about the first three days of the Derg's general meetings some thirteen years later, Major Mengistu Haile-Mariam<sup>23</sup> said that it seemed as though 'fire' was coming out of the mouths of the speakers when they were making speeches about the backwardness of Ethiopia,

its history, the suffering of its people and the progress made in other countries. The small, round room in the Fourth Division where they met, he said, was gradually becoming charged with emotion until finally it reached a climax and exploded with scenes of war songs and declarations of readiness to die 'not the death of a dog but that of a lion' in the course of liberating the Ethiopian people from oppression. On the third day (30 June) they took an oath never to see the suffering and humiliation of the Ethiopian people again and to remain united to the point of death.<sup>24</sup> According to a Derg report, of September 1975, they actually swore an oath 'In the name of the living God' not to betray the secrets of the Derg.<sup>25</sup>

One of the spin-offs of all this was the adoption of a policy statement called 'Ethiopia First', which was announced on 4 July, the contents of which were published on 10 July.<sup>26</sup> Various referred to by the Derg as its motto, slogan, philosophy, principle, ideology etc., 'Ethiopia First' had thirteen sections, most of which related to the issues of the time. Examples of this are: allegiance to the King and Crown, cabinet reform, the trial of the corrupt and inept officials, speedy implementation of the draft constitution, close collaboration with the cabinet, the continuation of humanitarian aid to the drought-affected people, foreign aid from friendly countries in general and expansion of tourism. The other points reflect the Derg's long-term strategy: protection of rights for the entire people, quick development of the people, modern legislation on employer-employee relations, modernization of the traditional beliefs that obstruct the development and unity of the country, increased participation by the people in the development process, betterment and modern civilization on the basis of nationalism and equality rather than on the basis of the age-old discrimination along national and religious lines, and the conviction that the movement of the armed forces and police would result in change without bloodshed which would be possible because of the uniqueness of the country's history and culture.<sup>27</sup>

Actually, the Derg did consider overthrowing Haile Selassie's government some time in early July but rejected it because its members could not see eye-to-eye on the subject.<sup>28</sup> However, this did not stand in the way of its actions, which it started taking at the same time as it was expressing its allegiance to the Crown and to Endalkachew's cabinet.<sup>29</sup> On 28 June, the Derg had placed the

mass media under its control. In July and August, it used radio, television, newspapers, letters to government departments, the backing of the army and the police, and the guidance of 'Ethiopia First' to exercise increasingly significant executive and legislative functions to the detriment of the powers of the cabinet, the King and parliament – a move which has aptly been described as the 'creeping coup'.

The Derg did not abandon the primary purpose for which it was established (the arrest of the officials of the *ancien régime* who were still at large). In a series of publications in the main newspaper of the government (*Addis Zemen*), it issued long lists of names of these officials and called upon them to give themselves up or to face confiscation of their assets. In July and August, it was reported that about one hundred such officials had been detained. Most of them gave themselves up voluntarily; but those who did not were arrested by force and also had their assets confiscated, through Derg letters to such agencies as the banks, the municipality and the Ministry of Land Reform.<sup>30</sup>

At the same time as it was placing the officials under arrest, the Derg set about undermining Endalkachew's cabinet and gradually reducing it to a status of subservience. On 29 June, some Derg representatives went to the cabinet and proposed the establishment of a joint committee between the Derg and the cabinet, ostensibly to study '... the situation in the country...'.<sup>31</sup> Within about a week of this, no less than ten meetings of the joint committee, made up of four cabinet ministers and some Derg representatives, were held mainly to try and thrash out the relations between the two bodies.<sup>32</sup>

One of the early questions raised by the cabinet was whether it was appropriate for it to deal with a body whose legal status was undefined, to say the least. This prompted the Derg to send a delegation on 3 July to the King to ask his permission, among other things, to work closely with the cabinet in the interest of the country's security, unity, development and the improvement of the army and the police. The King, who had the power to take any measures<sup>33</sup> he deemed<sup>34</sup> to be in the interest of the country,<sup>34</sup> granted the request.

With the legal hurdle out of the way, the Derg representatives explained to the joint committee that the aims of the Derg were 'Ethiopia First', the arrest of corrupt officials and the removal of

obstacles<sup>35</sup> from both within and outside the cabinet which might stand in the way of its smooth operations. For their part, the cabinet representatives explained that the cabinet had adopted its programme of action on 9 April 1974, but was unable to 'solve' the problems of the country because of the demonstrations, the absence of security, and because responsibility was entrusted to the cabinet while power was vested elsewhere. The problems of the country were indicated to be the drought, the decline of the tourist trade, lack of confidence by foreign investors in the country and decline of agricultural output due to aggravating relations between the tenants and landlords.

The most important and protracted issue discussed in the joint committee proved to be the question of who should tackle these problems next. The cabinet representative suggested that another cabinet-Derg joint committee should be established combining both responsibility and power and that the Derg, or some of its members, be dispatched to the provinces to create branch offices which would come under the committee. After consultations with the Derg, its representatives rejected the cabinet's proposals and, instead, told the cabinet to continue working under the constitution and to tackle the problems itself. They said that the Derg preferred to continue working outside the cabinet. The cabinet could do nothing beyond expressing doubt about the wisdom of the Derg's response.<sup>36</sup>

Clearly, this was a show-down between the two contending parties (the Derg and the cabinet). As already noted, however, the Derg had the armed forces, the police and the mass media behind it. Further, it had, by now, the blessing of the King and had, as a result, acquired some semblance of legality. Under the circumstances, the Derg was in a position to assert its will against the helpless cabinet<sup>37</sup> whose members were, by now, probably divided between those who were willing to work under the Derg and those who were not. The Derg acted to isolate those members who were not amenable to its whims; on 16 July, it arrested Lt Gen Abiye Abebe (Minister of Defence)<sup>38</sup> and on 22 July it replaced Lij Endakachew Mekonnen by Lij Michael Imiru as prime minister.<sup>39</sup> In addition to his other responsibilities, Lt Gen Aman Andom was appointed Minister of Defence in a subsequent cabinet reshuffle.<sup>40</sup> The Derg's control of the cabinet was now complete.

The next to fall prey to the Derg's designs was the King, who by

then was helpless and isolated, most of his close protégés having been arrested, and the rest having betrayed him. As of 17 July, the tone of the mass media turned harsher than before. Almost every other day, it started issuing lengthy and populist articles vilifying Haile Selassie's government as having been highly corrupt and exploitative.<sup>41</sup> By the second half of August it appears that the Derg felt the King had been sufficiently discredited in the eyes of the public for it to start dissolving the institutions around the Crown (with the help of which the monarch had exercised his prerogative powers) as well as confiscating the enterprises in which the King and the other members of the royal family had a vested interest. Hence, on 15 August, it was reported that the Ministry of Pen (the King's Secretariat) had been brought under the Derg until such time as it was transferred to the cabinet.<sup>42</sup> Two days later, it was announced that the Crown council, the special brigade and the chilot (a court of final instance, presided over by the King) had all been dissolved.<sup>43</sup> Also, the Lion Bus Company (28 August),<sup>44</sup> the St George Brewery and the Haile Selassie Prize Trust (6 September)<sup>45</sup> were brought under the administration of the Ministry of Finance because, it was explained, most of their assets and shares belonged to the King and the other members of the royal family.<sup>46</sup>

Thus, in July and August 1974, the Derg incarcerated the bulk of the top officials of the *ancien régime*, reduced the cabinet to a status of subservience and isolated the King from the exercise of power without any opposition from the public. If there was any feedback it was from the militant left which condemned the measures as being haphazard and off the socialist path and demanded more and more radical actions to be taken by the Derg, or preferably, by a 'People's Government' to be made up of the representatives of the social groups, including the army, which had been active in the popular uprising.<sup>47</sup> Under these circumstances, Derg radicals were able to rally support within the Derg for carrying out a *coup d'état*.<sup>48</sup>

As noted earlier, the questions of overthrowing Haile Selassie's government and the nature of the government that should replace it were considered by the Derg, in early July, but postponed until such time as a compromise on the issues raised could be reached. Again, the same questions came to the forefront in early September and were debated between the sixth and the

tenth of that month.<sup>49</sup> Apparently, seven alternative proposals were discussed in those meetings: to maintain the Crown and remove the obstacles from within and outside the cabinet, to maintain the Crown and replace the cabinet with a new one, to maintain the Crown and establish a civilian–military joint cabinet, to replace the Crown with a provisional military head of state and improve the cabinet, to replace the Crown and the cabinet with a military government, or to replace the Crown and the cabinet with a people’s government.<sup>50</sup> The final verdict was not proclaimed until 12 September 1974, which has since been annually celebrated as Revolution Day.

Since, in the summer of 1974, the Derg was already in a position to declare curfews, effect arrests, confiscate assets and appoint ministers including the premier, it can arguably be maintained that it had become the government as of 28 June 1974, when it was established. However, the formalization of that fact did not take place until 12 September 1974, when it issued proclamations 1 and 2 which suspended the existing constitution, deposed King Haile Selassie I, and dissolved the parliament. The proclamations replaced these institutions with the Derg which was declared to have assumed ‘ . . . full governmental powers . . . ’ until such time as a people’s assembly was established.<sup>51</sup>

In part, the assumption of ‘ . . . full governmental powers . . . ’ meant that the Derg appointed itself as a collective head of state.<sup>52</sup> The Derg was to express this status through its chairman who was authorized to grant audience to foreign guests and ambassadors and to execute international agreements on behalf of, and in accordance with, the decisions of the Derg.<sup>53</sup> Also, it was envisaged that the functions of the head of state would be transferred to the Crown Prince, Merid Azmach Asfaw-Wosen, who was to be crowned as a constitutional monarch upon his return to the country<sup>54</sup> from Switzerland where he was staying for medical treatment.<sup>55</sup>

More important was the fact that the Derg was entrusted with sweeping law-making powers. Thus, it was authorized to enact ‘all types of laws’,<sup>56</sup> declare war and take all necessary measures to safeguard the integrity and defence of the country,<sup>57</sup> and determine which treaties and international agreements would be subject to ratification before becoming binding on the state, and ratify the same.<sup>58</sup> An example of the Derg’s law-making power noted earlier

is the issuance by it of proclamations which, under the suspended constitution, could only have been promulgated by parliament and the King.

Even if articulated less clearly than its law-making power, the executive powers of the Derg were no less extensive than the former. Obviously, such authorizations of the Derg as the power to take any action necessary to safeguard the defence and integrity of the state<sup>59</sup> had implications for both legislative and executive powers. More specific was the mandate of the Derg not only to make laws, but also to provide for their implementation.<sup>60</sup> If these provisions sound vague or very narrow in their scope, the Derg's broad mandate, to assume 'full governmental powers',<sup>61</sup> could always be invoked to justify the exercise of any executive powers.

#### THE DERG'S ASSERTION OF POWER OVER THE VANGUARDS OF THE POPULAR UPRISING

The Derg was 'a provisional *military* government' and as such could leave little or no room for popular participation in the supreme decision-making processes. Ostensibly, the only concession it made towards public participation in supreme governmental affairs was the establishment by it of a Provisional National Advisory Commission to advise it on how a non-provisional government should be established and, more specifically, to draft a new constitution for the country.<sup>62</sup> The membership of the commission was limited to a maximum of sixty being made up of two representatives from two Co-operatives, three from the Confederation of Ethiopian Labour Unions, six from three Teachers' Associations, four from the Christian and Muslim communities, two from the business community, fourteen from the provinces and twenty-one from government agencies.<sup>63</sup> The commission would have given the civilian population a say in the future of the country, but its importance was watered down by the fact that it was reduced to the status of an advisory body whose recommendations could be vetoed by the Derg at will.<sup>64</sup>

Further, quite unlike the early part of 1974, the public was now denied the right to manifest its demands through strikes and demonstrations. Immediately after its establishment, the Derg condemned all forms of strikes and demonstrations as being contrary to its aim of change without bloodshed and as being

inimical to the economy of the country, and threatened to take stern measures against those who participated in them.<sup>65</sup> Also, the law which announced the Derg's formal seizure of power on 12 September 1974 prohibited engaging in any strikes, holding unauthorized demonstrations and assemblies and contravening the Derg's principle of 'Ethiopia First'.<sup>66</sup> People who went against these provisions were to be tried before a military court without any right of appeal.<sup>67</sup>

The fact that the Derg was a military government which excluded civilian participation in the supreme decision-making processes of the government and the fact that it had restrictive policies concerning democratic rights brought it into conflict with what may be called the vanguards of the popular uprising of early 1974. As noted earlier, the then uprising was kept aflame by the formally elected leaders of the corporate groups like the CELU, the Teachers' Association and the Student Unions. Also active behind the scenes were the Co-ordinating Committees that mushroomed at the time among the civil servants, military units and the police all of which, by law, had been prevented from creating associations of any sort. These committees co-ordinated strikes, demonstrations and the issuance of petitions to the government and anti-government leaflets to be distributed to the public. Further, in some provincial capitals there emerged, at the time of the popular uprising, what looked like spontaneous popular governments made up of teachers, students, workers and delegates to municipal councils which attempted to run the local administration, albeit temporarily.<sup>68</sup>

Some of these groups continued to be politically active even after the Derg's emergence and seizure of power in June and September 1974. One major exception to this were the civil servants, who stopped having strikes and demonstrations as of early June 1974, thus lending their name to the rhetoric of the Derg, which continued to issue in the official newspaper (*Addis Zemen*) long lists of government agencies which were supposed to have written messages supporting the establishment of the Derg and its policies.<sup>69</sup>

Other sections of the population were however, restive. On 26 October 1974, for instance, the unemployed of Addis Ababa met in front of CELU's head office to demand employment from the government. They were dispersed by the police with gunfire which

resulted in two dead and one wounded.<sup>70</sup> Also, the agricultural tenants, who as far as the evidence goes did not take part in the early 1974 uprising, were, around the time of the deposition of the King, beginning to refuse to pay rent and also to assert a claim to the land they worked, partly because they misunderstood a statement of the Derg that no additional rent was to be charged, to mean that tenancy was abolished<sup>71</sup> and partly because some civilian activists were encouraging them to believe the government had introduced land reform. This took place in several *Awrajas* (sub-provinces) of Hararghe, Arsi, and Sidamo provinces where the assertive tenants were harassed and subdued by the military units within the areas concerned.<sup>72</sup> Obviously the uprising of the unemployed and the tenants had very little to do with opposing the establishment of a military government or its policies.

More to the point was the opposition of CELU. In its annual congress of 15–17 September 1974, it passed a resolution demanding the dismantling of the Derg and the establishment in its place of a provisional people's government and the reinstatement of fundamental civil rights which had been suspended by the Derg.<sup>73</sup> The Derg ordered CELU to withdraw its resolution, and, when that was not forthcoming, it moved to arrest its president, vice-president and secretary.<sup>74</sup> CELU reacted by calling for a general strike of its members to take effect as of 25 September, but it failed to materialize because of the Derg's stern warning and threats against so doing and because of the intervention of the unit co-ordinating<sup>75</sup> at the factory level.<sup>76</sup>

Another of the vanguards of the early 1974 popular uprising which put up resistance to Derg rule was the student movement. On 17 and 18 September 1974 students of the Arat Kilo and Sidist Kilo Colleges of the Addis Ababa University held meetings in which they adopted the resolution of CELU, demanded the replacement of the Derg by a 'people's government' and rejected the Derg's decision to send them on a campaign in order to educate the people about basic health care and developmental problems, and afterwards went on a demonstration in support of their claims.<sup>77</sup> On 11 October, students of Addis Ababa and of the Alemaya Agricultural College (Hararghe Province) also went on a demonstration demanding the reinstatement of democratic rights prior to the implementation of the campaign programme. The

Derg's security forces dispersed these demonstrations with gunfire and arrests.<sup>78</sup>

Much more pressing was the resistance to Derg rule by the various military units, including the Engineers Unit, the Army Aviation, the Medical Corps, the Military Band, the Veterans of the Congo Campaign, the Borena-Negele Fourth Brigade, the Seventeenth Battalion, the air force, the First Division (bodyguard),<sup>79</sup> the Third Division and the Second Division.<sup>80</sup> In other words certain of the units in all of the five military divisions, particularly those located in the capital, were part of the resistance.

The most ardent military opposition to the Derg's seizure of power seems to have come from the Engineers, the Army Aviation and the bodyguard, all of which were located in Addis Ababa. In early August 1974 it was reported that a rift was emerging between the Derg and the Army Aviation because the latter had demanded the reinstatement of democratic rights (including freedom of speech, writing, demonstration, assembly and organizing political groups), the distribution of land to the 'tiller', the launching of a planned economy and the establishment of a democratic people's government.<sup>81</sup> Within weeks of the Derg's formal seizure of power on 12 September, the opposition to Derg rule had spread to the other military units in and around Addis Ababa, leading to the arrest of many officers and other ranks, including Colonel Yigezu of the Army Aviation, Major Tefera Tekle-Ab of the Engineers Unit, a Tekeste of the air force and Major Damtew Teferra of the Military Police.<sup>82</sup> The final show-down came on 7 October 1974 when the Derg, with the help of the more amenable military units, especially from the Third Division, crushed the resistance of the Engineers with force after having killed five, wounding an unknown number and imprisoning some 300 of their members. At the same time, it surrounded the Army Aviation and managed to subdue them without much resistance. The First Division (the bodyguard) saved itself from the wrath of the Derg by handing over the activists among its ranks, including Captain Demise Teferra, chairman of the Bodyguard's Co-ordinating Committee.<sup>83</sup> On 21 November 1974, *Democracia* reported that the Third Division had imprisoned its commander and recalled its representatives to the Derg, including Major Mengistu Haile-Mariam, and that the unit committees of the Second Division were claiming equal status with the Derg because their

members were also elected by the army units that they represented.<sup>84</sup>

The most important opposition, especially in the long run, came from two budding underground political organizations, established several years before 1974 among veterans of the student movement abroad. The first of these was what is usually referred to as the Democracia group and what emerged as the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP) and the second was what is usually referred to as the Voice of the Masses group and what emerged in April 1976 as the All Ethiopian Socialist Movement (AESM). The leadership of EPRP returned to Ethiopia in July 1974 and launched its weekly paper (*Democracia*) in the same month. Though the leadership of AESM did not return to Ethiopia until the beginning of 1975, it appears it had enough followers in the country to launch its weekly paper (*Voice of the Masses*) in August 1974.<sup>85</sup> From then on, the EPRP and AESM were beginning to see themselves as championing the cause of the vanguards of the early 1974 popular uprising; however, being anti-Derg themselves, they may have overstated the case of the opposition. The circumstances of the time dictate the conclusion, nonetheless, that the bulk of the groups claimed by the two organs to have been actively opposed to Derg rule were indeed engaged in anti-Derg demonstrations and boycotts of classes.

For their part, 'Democracia' and 'Voice of the Masses' advocated and influenced Derg's imprisonment of members of the aristocracy, nationalization of their assets, suspension of the existing constitution and the deposition of the King while at the same time condemning the same actions as superficial. They argued again and again that what was required to effect a fundamental change was the dismantling of the censorship machinery and the spying network of the *ancien régime*, the nationalization of industrial and financial institutions and the granting of land to the 'tiller', thereby abolishing capitalist and imperialist exploitation in one fell swoop.<sup>86</sup> The two most important demands of 'Democracia' and 'Voice of the Masses', which they were to advocate for a long time to come, were: the reinstatement of democratic rights<sup>87</sup> to the broad masses, especially the right to form associations, and the immediate handing over of power by the Derg to 'a provisional people's government'<sup>88</sup> made up of the representatives of the workers, farmers, students, teachers, small

businessmen, low-ranking civil servants, artisans and handicraftsmen, progressive intellectuals, the unemployed and the army.<sup>89</sup> Essentially, the Derg was being criticized for lack of class consciousness, for not vigorously pursuing a Marxist–Leninist line and for manifesting ‘Fascist’<sup>90</sup> tendencies in its handling of the opposition.

The Derg’s response to the challenges of the civilian and military activists was not limited to the use of firearms and tear gas against, and the imprisonment of, those who went on strikes and demonstrations, but also extended to resorting to counter-propaganda, summary executions of those already in prison and the disbanding of rebellious military units. On the propaganda level, the Derg reiterated, time and again, that it was itself a *provisional* military government which intended to act as a vehicle for the transfer of power from the *ancien régime* to a people’s government<sup>91</sup> after a new constitution had been adopted.<sup>92</sup> At the time, the general public may have believed this; the political activists among them, on the other hand, refused to take the Derg’s commitment at face value. This was so, partly because of the Derg’s reluctance to commit itself to any timetable in which it would transfer power to the people and partly because some of its programmes had a long-term perspective. On 2 and 26 September, the Derg’s Chairman Lt Gen Aman Andom explained that a civilian government would be established after the people had been made, through education, conscious enough to administer themselves.<sup>93</sup> Also, like some sections of ‘Ethiopia First’ which have been noted earlier, sections of the thirteen-point programme issued by the Derg on 13 September 1974 could only be accomplished over a long period of time. These included the commitment of the Derg to ensure the rights, equality and development of the people; to abolish discrimination on the basis of nationality, religion and income; to remove superstitions inimical to the modernization of the country; to provide free education to all Ethiopians; and to expand industrial production.<sup>94</sup>

Moreover, the Derg had the official daily newspaper (*Addis Zemen*) publish frequent messages of support from a wide spectrum of the population by way of showing the existence of popular support for the military government and its policies. Further, it condemned all those that opposed it as puppets or

remnants of the *ancien régime* and asked members of the public to hand over those who were misleading the people about the Derg's true intentions.<sup>95</sup>

As of the middle of November, the Derg started taking more and more desperate actions on account of the problems with the opposition which were beginning to reverberate within the Derg. On 16 November, therefore, it issued no less than four draconian legislations; the first establishing a military court with a mandate to try any offences; the second describing new offences in addition to those provided for in the existing Penal Code of Ethiopia; the third providing for special procedures for the military court; and the fourth declaring an emergency law authorizing the Minister of the Interior to conduct search and seizure without warrant.<sup>96</sup> One could have presumed that these laws were targeted towards the officials of the *ancien régime* who were under arrest and who were being screened by the investigation commission established for the purpose about eight months earlier. It is justifiable to presume this because the Derg was reiterating the same at the time. However, the contents of those legislations reflect that they were actually directed towards arresting the hostile activities of those opposed to Derg rule.

On 23 November the Derg showed how bloody it could be by a summary execution of well over sixty detainees, not because they had been tried by any court of law, but because the Derg, according to itself, had made 'a political decision'.<sup>97</sup> Included among those executed were two Derg members, five non-Derg member junior officers and other ranking members of the armed forces and others whose number and identity it was promised would be revealed later. According to the Derg, these had attempted to overthrow the government by instigating feud and bloodshed among the various units of the armed forces<sup>98</sup> and, according to 'Democracia', they were the activists within the First Division, the Engineers Unit, the Army Aviation and the air force who had been placed under arrest in September and October for their role in opposing the military government.<sup>99</sup>

Lt Gen Aman Andom, Chairman of the Derg, was one of the sixty killed on the same day. The whys and wherefores of his killing have been a matter of much verbal and written conjecture and there is, perhaps, no need to add to it here. One thing is clear; for some time before 23 November he could not see eye-to-eye with

most Derg members on a number of issues including, most probably, the handling of the Eritrean question and the unruly proceedings of Derg meetings. As a result, he had resigned his post of chairman around 15 November,<sup>100</sup> which could only have thrown the Derg into confusion and more desperation. It appears that some Derg members who sought to victimize him then started accusing him of dictatorial tendencies, of having had dealings with foreigners and the army behind the back of the Derg, and of reluctance to delegate some of his powers to others as the Derg had wished.<sup>101</sup> The fundamental point of friction seems to have been that in appointing the General as its chairman, some of the Derg members had intended to make of him a figurehead whose reputation it could use to advantage. However, the General was the wrong choice for this purpose; he was a strong character, well able to stand up to the King, let alone the Derg, which was composed of members of the armed forces and the police very much his juniors.<sup>102</sup> Be that as it may, on 23 November General Aman Andom died in an exchange of fire with agents of the Derg's security men who had come to his residence to arrest him according to some, on orders of the Derg, and, according to others, on orders of the Derg's first vice-chairman (Mengistu Haile-Mariam).<sup>103</sup>

The remaining fifty-two victims of the Derg's political decision were twenty-nine of some of the highest civilian dignitaries and twenty-three senior military and police officers of the *ancien régime* whom the Co-ordinating Committee of the Military and the Police and later the Derg had been incarcerating, starting from early 1974. Included in this group were the two previous prime ministers (Tshafi Tizaz Aklilou Habte-Wolde and Lij Endalkachew Mekonnen). Again, the reason for the summary execution of all these officials is mysterious, especially in view of the fact that an investigation commission had been established to investigate their cases and in view of the fact that the Derg had time and again bound itself to commit them to trial.<sup>104</sup> One explanation appears to be that the officials were sacrificed on the altar of the Derg's desire to win to its side the civilian left, which was the only vocal group in the country. In the preceding months, there were underground leaflets which urged 'political actions' against the officials of the *ancien régime* without actually explaining what they meant by the term. Also Democracia and Voice of the Masses had,

since almost their inception, been asserting again and again that the Derg was reactionary because it was taking measures against the 'progressives' (the civilian and military activists who were opposed to Derg rule) while it was pampering the officials of the *ancien régime* in prison.<sup>105</sup> That the Derg wanted to identify itself with the militant left is obvious from its statements about it.<sup>106</sup> Yet another explanation has been that the first vice-chairman moved the Derg to take the action in order to submerge Aman's death into the obscurity of the elimination of the 'corrupt' officials.<sup>107</sup>

It is one of the ironies of the time – or the double faced disposition of the Derg – that a week before the executions the first vice-chairman of the Derg, Major Mengistu Haile Mariam, had expounded that during the Glorious Revolution in England, hundreds and thousands of people had been killed and many houses had been burnt to the ground; that during the French revolution, many aristocrats had been decapitated; and that during the Russian revolution, members of the opposition had been wiped out like locusts. He contrasted these with the then on-going revolution of Ethiopia which, he said, ousted the 3,000-year-old aristocracy without a drop of blood, disproving the theory of the world intellectuals that a revolution is not possible without bloodshed.<sup>108</sup> In spite of this and in spite of the Derg's earlier commitments to bring about the change without bloodshed as in 'Ethiopia First', various proclamations and releases to the press, the 'revolution' was officially stained with blood as of at least 23 November 1974, and rule of law had given way to expediency.

By and large, the Derg was tolerant of the civilian militant but not of the military activist. In order to quell military resistance to its rule it disbanded the rebellious units either by imprisoning their members, as in the case of the Engineers Unit, or by assigning them to remote parts of the country, as in the case of the First Division. Similarly, towards the end of November, the Derg called to Addis Ababa some 276 members of the armed forces and the police, gave them a short seminar on its policies and, starting from 4 December, assigned them to various government departments to act as its watch-dogs. These the Derg called 'apostles of change'.<sup>109</sup> The bulk of the 276 seminar participants were drawn from among the unit co-ordination committees which had later been recognized and maintained by the Derg to act as bridges

between it and the various military units and the police. However, since a lot of them seem to have been active in the anti-Derg opposition and since, in some cases, the unit co-ordination committees refused to be elected by military units and the police,<sup>110</sup> the Derg removed them from the midst of the army and the police, under the guise of assigning their members to relatively high government positions.

The elected representatives of the armed forces and the police came together and formed the Derg on 28 June 1974. The emergence of the Derg marked the beginning of the end of the *ancien régime* as the Derg started whittling down its powers. Also, the emergence of the Derg marked the beginning of the end of the people's exercise of democratic rights since it prohibited strikes, demonstrations and boycott of classes within a week of its establishment.

The armed forces and the police created the Derg mainly for the purpose of bringing to justice the officials of the *ancien régime* who were supposed to be responsible for the backwardness of the country on account of being corrupt and inept and also answerable for the deaths of about 100,000 people because of the 1973-4 drought, the realities of which they were supposed to have covered up. In spite of this mandate, the Derg concentrated on the question of power. It considered alternative forms of government to the *ancien régime* and, on 12 September 1974, converted itself into a provisional military government. On that day, not only did it formalize its powers but also institutionalized the abolition of democratic rights in Proclamations 1 and 2, 1974. The fact that it was a military government and the fact that it had strict policies on democratic rights brought it into conflict with the civilian and military activists who were opposed to the establishment of a military government. These groups felt that those who had been active in the early 1974 uprising should have been included in the government and should be able to enjoy the democratic rights that they had gained under the previous regime and particularly in the course of the uprising. By December 1974 the Derg was able to assert its will against anyone who cared to oppose it including its own members who sought to be independent-minded, other members of the security forces and the civilian population.

However the manner in which it managed to assert its will led the Derg to become dictatorial. The establishment of a military

government itself and the subsequent abolition of democratic rights effectively excluded the civilian population from participating in government affairs and from the right to express its wishes. Further, the summary execution of Derg members who did not toe the line meant that all other members were accountable to the Derg and not to the units which had elected them; and the disbanding of the rebellious military units and the unit co-ordination committees meant that the Derg's accountability to the armed forces and the police, which had created it in the first place, was brought to an end. Finally the arbitrariness with which it disposed of the then helpless officials of the *ancien régime* and the military activists that it had already placed under arrest showed that the Derg was not under the law even when that law was made by itself. Hence by the end of 1974, the Derg had become a law unto itself; a dictatorship that was to rule Ethiopia for years to come by decree, or, rather, by considerations of expediency.



PART II

*The formative years of the post-revolutionary  
order (December 1974–February 1977)*



## CHAPTER 4

### *The socio-economic reforms of 1975*

The main preoccupations of this chapter are the socio-economic reforms adopted by the Derg in the course of 1975. According to most writers these reforms (nationalization of land and financial, industrial and commercial undertakings) transformed the military *coup d'état*, examined in the previous chapter, into a revolution. Those reforms are discussed in sections A to C of this chapter. An attempt is made in the relevant sections to indicate which government departments were involved in the drafting of the measure of nationalization concerned although this has not always been easy due to lack of sources.

Haile Selassie's government had realized that the early 1974 popular uprising was not limited to corporatist demands like pay increases, dismissal of departmental officials and recognition of union rights but, more importantly, extended to reforming the government itself. It had, accordingly, established a constitution-drafting committee which completed its work in the summer of the same year by drawing up a liberal constitution. At the height of the uprising, Endalkachew's cabinet was, apparently, divided among those who sought to leave all questions of reform to the government which was to be formed in accordance with the new constitution, and those who sought to start adopting reforms right away.<sup>1</sup> No doubt prevarications of the cabinet along these lines undermined its credibility and contributed to its downfall.

By the summer of 1974, the popular uprising had died down, and, with it, the pressure it had brought to bear on the government. What survived the emergence and subsequent assertion of authority by the Derg was the pressure of the radical left to have the government adopt Marxist-Leninist programmes and to have the Derg replace itself with a 'provisional people's government'. Unlike Endalkachew's cabinet, the Derg did not prevaricate on

the question of reforms; in the course of 1975, it pursued a series of nationalization measures which, as will be argued later, were in line with those demanded by the radical left and were adopted in order to appease them. The most important demand of the left (the immediate establishment of a provisional people's government) was, however, postponed indefinitely, as were all other questions to do with the establishment of parties and a non-provisional government.

The nationalization measures to be taken needed to be based on some political and economic programme; 'Ethiopia First', which was adopted by the Derg in July of the same year as its programme of action, did not have a policy on the national economy to speak of, and even less, on the more particular question of nationalization. At the time, in fact, the Derg went out of its way to reassure domestic and international businessmen that it did not have any intentions of nationalizing their assets.<sup>2</sup> Despite that, it found it appropriate to confiscate the assets of the royal family including those of the King and the aristocracy. However, these measures were taken, not as a result of any economic policies, but partly as a result of the Derg's decision to confiscate the assets of the *ancien régime's* officials who did not hand themselves over when asked to do so and partly as a result of the simplistic creed reiterated by the Derg that even if the masses of the people had for centuries fought against foreign invaders to keep Ethiopia independent and, hence, were entitled to an equal share of the wealth of the country, the aristocracy had become rich by usurping the share of the poor.<sup>3</sup>

The left charged that 'Ethiopia First' contained no guiding principles and condemned it as an embodiment of ethical and propagandist pronouncements devoid of any class content.<sup>4</sup> The Derg responded by saying that the opposition consisted of the partisans of the student movement, and were therefore in the minority when contrasted to the number of people who supported the government; and that the Derg's actions would continue to be based on Ethiopia's cultural values.<sup>5</sup> The official media, in fact, went as far as declaring that Marx, Engels and Lenin were not appropriate solutions to Ethiopia's problems.<sup>6</sup>

It was on 20 December 1974 that the Derg's first fundamental political and economic programme, 'Ethiopian Socialism', was issued. The Derg's policy statement explained that it was derived

from an interpretation of 'Ethiopia First' and from Ethiopian culture and religions. It further explained that even though it was a twelve-page document, it was capable of being subsumed under five basic principles: sovereignty, the absoluteness of Ethiopia's unity, self-reliance, the dignity of labour and the precedence of the public good. Elaborating the policies of the programme in the economic sphere, it said that those assets which were beneficial to the public would be nationalized and those which, if left in private hands, would not go contrary to 'Ethiopia First', would be left in the private sector. It was also stated that land would be owned by the people and that cottage industries would be promoted.<sup>7</sup>

In an article called 'Ethiopian Socialism or Scientific Socialism?', *Voice of the Masses* criticized the programme for falling foul of the Marxist-Leninist approach to revolution. It denied the existence of more than one kind of socialism and asserted that references to 'British socialism' or 'national socialism', as in the case of Hitler's Germany, were wrong because those were not cases of socialism at all. It expounded, further, that there could not be Ethiopian electricity, Somali electricity, etc. since the fundamental law of electricity everywhere was the same. By the same token, it argued, socialism could only be the same everywhere; if there were differences between nations, they could only be secondary.<sup>8</sup>

*Democracia* also devoted an article entitled 'What Kind of Socialism?' to reviewing the programme. It declared that it was not impressed by the inclusion of the word 'socialism' in the programme because it was a word used in different senses by many governments including Kenya's, Tunisia's and Hitler's. It also took exception to the programme's rendering of the history of exploitation by statements like: exploitation had been introduced into Ethiopia in the preceding forty years prior to which the people had exercised self-reliance; at the time the leaders had been close to the people; they had ruled in accordance with the wishes of the people; realizing this, the people had looked upon the leaders as their own fathers; and the religious leaders had curbed oppression by the political leaders. The article stated that blaming Haile Selassie for everything was to deny the existence of class contradictions and its preponderance over the centuries. It also pointed out that even if the programme condemned imperialism, its assertion that Ethiopia had never been under its

domination was tantamount to denying that imperialism was one of the enemies of the people.

The *Democracia* article then took the main principles of 'Ethiopian Socialism' to task. It saw the programme's reference to 'the precedence of the public good' as posing a contradiction, not between classes, but between the individual and society, which the article scorned as a moral precept. The reference to the 'absoluteness of Ethiopia's unity' was condemned as giving precedence to the unity of the country over the independence, rights and benefits of the broad masses and as being Fascist in outlook. The programme's perception of 'labour' as hard work rather than as a class of people who live by selling their labour was taken as an indication of a lack of desire to abolish exploitation. Finally, the article pointed out that the programme's reference to 'equality' was vague. It explained that, to the bourgeoisie, it meant equality before the law which, in any case, cannot be realized and which cannot do away with exploitation. To the working class, it continued, equality has political and economic aspects which can only be realized by recognizing the political rights of the progressives, resolving national rights democratically, and by nationalizing all the means of production like banks, insurance companies, industries, big commercial companies and land.<sup>9</sup>

'Ethiopian Socialism' appears to have been envisaged by the Derg as a compromise between the demands of the radical left for a Marxist-Leninist programme, on the one hand, and of the interest groups and voices of moderation, on the other. However, the capitalist class, not to mention the landed gentry, did not have a vanguard organization to articulate its interests and its influence on the Derg remained minimal. When, in the course of 1975, the Derg translated 'Ethiopian Socialism' into practice by adopting a series of nationalization measures, it was obvious it was implementing the programmes of the radical left. In this regard it is interesting to note the similarities between the suggestions in *Democracia* concerning nationalization (cited in the last sentence of the previous paragraph) with the 1975 nationalization measures.

'Ethiopian Socialism' was, most probably, adopted by an officers' junta of the Derg and rubber-stamped by the General Assembly of the same body. The tenor of the language is consistent with earlier pronouncements of the Derg and, according to

Lefort, the government ministers learnt of the programme only from radio broadcasts.<sup>10</sup>

(A) THE NATIONALIZATION OF BUSINESS ORGANIZATIONS

It appears that like the adoption of Ethiopian Socialism, the decision to nationalize the private banks and insurance companies that came soon after it (1 January 1975) was the decision of the Derg and the Derg alone. Other government agencies do not appear to have been involved in the process of its drafting nor its adoption. The issue before the Derg was very simple: if such an institution was not in the service of the masses, it had to be nationalized.<sup>11</sup> The official explanation confirmed this view. On 2 January, the major official newspaper, *Addis Zemen*, explained that the nationalization of the financial institutions was in order to make them render equal service to the ordinary traders, farmers and workers (presumably meaning equal service with the other classes). This, it was explained, was consistent with Ethiopian Socialism.<sup>12</sup>

The banks that were nationalized consisted of the Commercial Bank of the Addis Ababa Share Company, the Banco di Roma Share Company and the Banco di Napoli Share Company. These three, which were the only private banks in the country, were brought under the administration of the Ethiopian Central Bank like three others which already existed as government banks. A later legislation which merged the nationalized banks under the administration of one bank (the Addis Ababa Bank) stated that their rights and obligations were transferred in full to the new bank so merged<sup>13</sup> and that the capital of the new bank was 20 million birr (about 10 million dollars).<sup>14</sup> From this it appears that the nationalized banks were relatively small and that the assets gained by the state were minimal.

Of the three nationalized banks, the Commercial Bank of Addis Ababa was the most indigenous. The process of its establishment had begun in 1962 when it started off with 10,000 shares valued at about 125,000 US dollars and owned by 2,000 Ethiopian nationals mostly drawn from the business community. When two years later a law requiring a minimum paid-up capital of 2 million birr (about 1 million US dollars) was issued, the Commercial Bank of Addis Ababa was able to raise the required amount and register with the

Ministry of Commerce and Industry within the same year. The bank achieved this by attracting foreign shareholders: Grindlays Bank of London bought 40 per cent of the total shares in 1964 and by the time of the nationalization of banks, 40 per cent of the total shares of the Commercial Bank of Addis Ababa were in foreign hands.<sup>15</sup> The Banco di Roma and the Banco di Napoli were branches of their parent companies in Italy, and, probably, Ethiopian nationals had very few or no shares in them. Further, at the same time, fourteen insurance companies were also nationalized on the same grounds as the nationalization of banks and brought under the administration of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry until such time as a new law redefining their status was enacted.<sup>16</sup> When enacted, the law that was so envisaged provided for the bringing of all insurance companies under the administration of one government agency, namely the Ethiopian Insurance Corporation. The law further provided that the assets, rights and obligations of the pre-existing insurance companies were to be transferred to the Ethiopian Insurance Corporation<sup>17</sup> and that the paid-up capital of the Corporation was 11 million birr (almost 5.5 million US dollars).<sup>18</sup> Again, not taking into consideration the credits and debts of the insurance companies, the assets that were nationalized were even less important than those of the banks. Figures showing the proportion of foreign investment in insurance companies are not available; however, the Insurance Proclamation of 1970 limited the percentage of total foreign investment in an insurance company to a maximum of 49 per cent.

The next to be nationalized were quite a number of commercial and industrial companies. It is not possible to ascertain the exact date but it appears that towards the end of 1974, the Derg established a high-powered economic policy formulation committee led by Captain Moges Wolde-Michael and Aircraftman Gesese Wolde-Kidan (first and vice-chairman of the Derg Economic Subcommittee respectively) and had the following as its members: Mebrate Mengistu (Minister of Natural Resources Development), Mohammed Abdurahmin (Minister of Commerce, Industry and Tourism), Tadesse Moges (Minister of State in the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Tourism), Dr Debebe Worku (expert in the Ministry of Commerce, Trade and Tourism), Tekalign Gedamu (Minister of Transport and Communications), Col

Belachew Jemaneh (Minister of the Interior), Tefera Degefe (Governor of the National Bank of Ethiopia), Birihanu Wakoya (Commissioner of the Ethiopian Planning Board), Ashagre Yigletu and Wole Chekol (representatives of the Provisional National Advisory Commission).

The committee held its deliberations in the Ministry of Natural Resources Development and drew up three documents: a general policy concerned with the industrial sector, which is contained in a little pamphlet called 'The Red Book', a list of the industrial and commercial organizations to be nationalized, and a preamble to go with the announcement of the nationalization of those organizations. The documents were then submitted to the Ad-hoc Supreme Organizing Committee of the Derg which approved them with a few amendments to the wording of the texts – amendments concerned with the style rather than the contents of the documents. On the same day, the documents were read to the General Assembly of the Derg and approved by a clapping of hands without any discussions, comments or questions. However, the Ad-hoc Supreme Organizing Committee did not allow the reading of the list of the nationalized business organizations to the General Assembly on the grounds that the confidentiality of the list would be betrayed by its members.<sup>19</sup> In spite of this, the organizations were deemed nationalized by the Derg as of 7 February 1975. Also, the broad outlines of the principles in accordance with which mining, industrial and commercial organizations were to be nationalized were enacted on the same day as 'The Government Ownership of the Means of Production Proclamation 26, 1975'.

That law distinguishes between three kinds of mining, industrial and commercial activities. The first were to be owned and operated by the government exclusively,<sup>20</sup> the second to be owned and operated by government and private investors jointly,<sup>21</sup> and the third to be owned and operated by private investors exclusively.<sup>22</sup> The preamble to the legislation explained that the activities under the first category were brought under state control because it was necessary to give precedence to public interest; those under the second category were opened to joint venture because they were not amenable to complete government ownership; and those in the third category were left to the private sector because doing so would not be harmful to society. It was further explained that

the basis for the distinction between the three categories was Ethiopian Socialism.<sup>23</sup>

If any of the economic activities under the first category were in private hands, they were to be nationalized.<sup>24</sup> It was in accordance with this principle that the Economic Policy Committee mentioned above shortlisted a total of seventy-two business organizations for nationalization by the Derg. The undertakings so nationalized included: thirteen food-processing industries, nine leather-processing and shoe-making industries, four printing establishments, eight chemical-processing facilities, five metal factories and eleven others not classified.<sup>25</sup> Obviously, no mining activities were nationalized because they were almost non-existent and the very few that existed were, in any case, owned and run by the state.

Further, it was provided that the government was to hold a minimum of 51 per cent of the shares in each of the joint ventures. If the extent of the value of its shares in existing joint ventures was less than that, it had to be readjusted accordingly.<sup>26</sup> Such readjustment was taken on twenty-nine joint ventures including eleven food-processing industries, two textile factories, six wood works, one pulp industry, three chemical industries, two metal factories and four petrol stations.<sup>27</sup>

There was no provision for the denationalization of industrial and commercial organizations which, in terms of the law, should have come under the third category. In other words, it was only those undertakings which were considered appropriate for the private sector and which, at the same time, were already in that sector, which were allowed to remain in private hands.

The private sector was further delimited by another piece of legislation which was enacted in December 1975. According to it, retailers were allowed a maximum capital of about 100,000 US dollars,<sup>28</sup> wholesalers about 150,000 US dollars,<sup>29</sup> and industrialists about 250,000 US dollars.<sup>30</sup> Five exceptions were made to these capital restrictions: business organizations which were already in private hands; construction works, surface transport, inland water transport and the publication of newspapers and magazines to be undertaken in the future;<sup>31</sup> wholesalers to be engaged in the sale of agricultural products, skins and hides;<sup>32</sup> retailers to be engaged in import-export businesses; and those who secured a waiver from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.<sup>33</sup>

Table 1. *Gross Domestic Product of 1970/1971 at constant factor cost 1960/1961*

| Sectors                            | %     | %   |
|------------------------------------|-------|-----|
| <i>Agriculture</i>                 | 52.7  |     |
| <i>Industries</i>                  | 15.3  |     |
| Mining                             |       | 0.2 |
| Manufacturing                      |       | 4.0 |
| Handicraft and small industry      |       | 4.1 |
| Building and construction          |       | 5.9 |
| Electricity                        |       | 1.1 |
| <i>Wholesale and retail trade</i>  | 8.8   |     |
| <i>Transport and communication</i> | 5.9   |     |
| <i>Other services</i>              | 17.4  |     |
| Banking, insurance and real estate |       | 1.3 |
| Public administration and defence  |       | 5.3 |
| Educational services               |       | 1.9 |
| Health services                    |       | 0.7 |
| Others                             |       | 8.2 |
| Total                              | 100.0 |     |

Source: Central Statistical Office, Statistical Abstract<sup>34</sup>

Thus the private sector was allowed to survive the reforms of 1975 and operate within the confines of these rules. There are some within it which are relatively big. An example of this is the Quat Share Company which actually received a waiver from the council of ministers and which exports *quat* (leaves chewed as a drug) to Djibouti valued at about 15 million US dollars per annum. Another is the chain of Bekele Mola hotels mostly in the resort areas of southern Ethiopia which predates the nationalization measures of 1975 and which deals probably with millions of dollars. The bulk of the others, however, are very small businesses like trucks, buses, taxis, small hotels, bars, barbers, tailors, shops, etc. Usually, one businessman owns only one of these undertakings.

To sum up, of the sub-sectors enumerated in table 1, the only ones affected by the nationalization measures under consideration were: manufacturing, small industries, and banking and insurance, which in 1971 together accounted for less than 9.4 per cent of GDP. Among those affected only the major

ones were actually nationalized. Even making allowances for the then government's tendency to exaggerate the importance of the modern sector by way of showing its effectiveness, the size of the sub-sectors affected by the nationalizations was minimal when compared to the share of other sectors of the national economy.

According to the figures of the Ethiopian Compensation Commission total foreign investments were as follows: Italian – 55 per cent, Dutch – 20.18 per cent, American – 7 per cent, British – 5 per cent, Swiss – 3.4 per cent, Austrian – 2.8 per cent, Greek – 2.5 per cent, West German – 1 per cent and Indian – 1 per cent. The following had less than 1 per cent each: Egypt, Japan, North Yemen, Canada, France, Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Armenia.<sup>35</sup>

However, although the Compensation Commission has not made available any figures showing the extent of foreign investment, one vague indication of this is the amount paid by the Ethiopian government in settlement of a compensation claim made on behalf of Italian nationals. The Italian and Ethiopian governments were able to resolve through negotiation a subrogation claim of Italy's by reaching an agreement that Ethiopia pay compensation of about 7.5 million US dollars. This implies that if 55 per cent of the total foreign investment (owned by Italians) was 7.5 million US dollars, the total amount of foreign investment was the meagre sum of just over 13.5 million US dollars. If we were to multiply this figure by a factor of two in order to make allowances for the fact that the amount paid in compensation was a result of a negotiated settlement and perhaps does not, therefore, reflect the actual value of assets nationalized, the sum involved would still be insignificant. This is not surprising, however, when we consider that much of the foreign capital inflow was the result of bilateral arrangements which were not affected by the nationalization measures. Obviously these estimates are extremely vague; nevertheless, they are the only indications available to show the extent of 'world capitalist penetration' about which so much emphasis is made by writers of leftist persuasion. In fact, a lot of the so-called foreign investors were residents in the country.

Another figure which is often cited by writers on Ethiopia and which goes some way towards indicating the amount of total value

of the nationalized assets is found in the statement of Ishetu Chole to the effect that in 1967 75 per cent of the private paid-up capital was foreign owned.<sup>36</sup> Assuming that this was more or less the proportion of foreign and domestic private paid-up capital that was likely to have been nationalized in 1975 and assuming further that the total value of foreign assets nationalized was, as indicated earlier, just over 27 million US dollars, this would give us the total sum of over 36 million US dollars for the value of total private paid-up capital affected by the nationalization of business organizations. Their estimate is, perhaps, not altogether unrealistic if we are to remember the facts noted earlier, namely, that the total capital of all the private banks (which were not nationalized) was about 10 million US dollars, that the comparable figure for the fourteen insurance companies was 5.5 million US dollars and that the bulk of the remaining seventy-nine or so businesses that were nationalized were extremely small. Obviously, if we were to use the per capita benefit to the population (which at that time stood at about 32 million) as the index for the need to nationalize the business organizations, the measure taken can only be rejected as having been misconceived.

The benefits of the nationalization measures to the national economy are not obvious either. In the first place, the Derg promised fair compensation to those who lost any assets as a result of the nationalization of the financial institutions<sup>37</sup> and the business undertakings.<sup>38</sup> Quite apart from the cost involved in running a full-fledged Compensation Commission which was established to negotiate with claimants, whatever assets the government gained through nationalization it would, in principle, lose by way of paying compensation. In reality, the bulk of foreign investors were able to claim compensation even if the payments were not necessarily prompt, adequate and effective; Ethiopian nationals, on the other hand, able to receive any compensation at all did so in dribs and drabs.

Also, one of the effects of nationalization of business organizations has been to bring them under the management of the state; as it transpired, the form of management chosen was central planning of the sort common to the socialist countries of Eastern Europe. From the perspective of the performance of the economy, this assumes that the state administrative machinery

involved in the formulation and implementation of plan tasks (the organs of the central government, the middle links and enterprises) is more efficient and productive than the system of company management, a theory hardly ever borne out in practice. Further, it is questionable whether governments would siphon off the surplus from nationalized enterprises and invest it in more productive sectors than would the private owner. Given the civil strife in Ethiopia and the hostile relations of the country with its neighbours, it was more likely than not that it would channel the surplus into sectors chosen for considerations other than economic.

The implication to the workers of the nationalization of the business organizations was minimal; after the nationalization they became employees of the state rather than of the private sector. In principle, the existing law would have entitled the government to disband their unions. In practice, however, the government brought the business organizations that were operating in a sub-sector of the economy under the administration of a sectoral corporation, allowed the latter a degree of autonomy from the ministry to which they were subordinate and authorized the workers in the enterprises to maintain their unions. In December 1975 a new law was issued politicizing and centralizing all the existing unions under the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs.

The measures are, perhaps, understood better from the ideological and political rather than the social and economic point of view. The Derg or its leaders saw themselves as carrying out the reforms demanded by the popular uprising of early 1974. With the uprising having died down by the summer of the same year, the only demands that continued to require its attention came from the civilian left. As noted earlier, the civilian left had been urging nationalization of the means of production owned by domestic and international capitalists and hence the abolition of 'imperialism' and 'national capitalism' in one fell swoop. It appears that this was the most important driving force behind the Derg's nationalization measures – the desire to be seen to be progressive in the eyes of the leftists and win them over to its side.

**(B) DESAIFICATION OF RURAL LANDS**

The reform of the land-tenure system was by far the most important undertaking of the government, in that it affected the lives of 88.7 per cent of the then 32 million population,<sup>39</sup> over 60 per cent of the GDP and 90 per cent of exports,<sup>40</sup> and in that it took the revolution from its urban base to the countryside. The move was in fact more than a reform; it was a radical transformation which was to change the social, economic and political scene of the country substantially.

The pre-1975 land-tenure system was extremely complex and varied from region to region, so that only mention of its main features will be made here. The Highlands, which are amenable to agricultural activities, were over-populated and, hence, subject to extensive fragmentation and subdivision of holdings. About half of the farmers were tenants working under a share-cropping arrangement and the bulk of the remaining were small owner-cultivators.<sup>41</sup> A small percentage of the rural population was landless; they lived among these petty cultivators and worked mainly as farm labourers. Even less important was the commercial farm sub-sector, which emerged as of the late 1960s supported by bilateral and multilateral aid, and which, by 1975, was using 2,900 tractors and 3,000 irrigation pumps on 480,000 hectares of farmland.<sup>42</sup> The rest of the country, which consisted of arid and semi-arid expanses of the lowland, was inhabited by nomads, who were very much part of the rural, if not the crop-producing, part of the population.

Of these, the share-cropping arrangement between the tenants and landlords was the most controversial and politically significant. It was generally believed that the tenants were made to forfeit an unfair amount of their produce to the landlord and the government, which allowed the contract of rent to provide for the payment of up to 75 per cent of the produce, was not doing enough about it. Further, it is often said that the tenants were subjected to feudal dues like working on the landlord's farm and giving him presents on special occasions not least because they sought to ward off eviction. In addition to the fact that the system was seen as unjust, it was considered as going against the promotion of productivity, since, it was believed, it did not give the tenants incentive to produce more because, it was alleged, they

lost a lot of the increased produce to the landlord. The most radical criticism of the land-tenure system came from the student movement, which, from the middle of the 1960s, made the slogan 'Land to the Tiller' its main rallying call and the attainment of land reform its main target. When, as of 1969, the issue surfaced concerning whether the southern part of the country was not a case of settler colonialism by people from the north, and whether, therefore, the southern tenants were reduced to this status on land which had once been their own, land reform acquired a much greater political poignancy than ever before. Also, academics, governments and aid agencies were very critical of the existing land-tenure system and urged for some kind of reform to be adopted.

One of Haile Selassie's government's responses to these criticisms was the establishment of a Ministry of Land Reform and Administration to deal with the matter. One notion promoted by that ministry, well before 1974, was the redistribution of individually owned land in excess of 20 hectares. A draft proposal to that effect was shelved for lack of support in government circles. The fact that the government officials and MPs had their economic, and hence political, power based on land is often blamed for the obstruction of the adoption of the draft proposal.

As noted earlier, the popular uprising of 1974 brought the question of land reform once again onto the government's agenda. Then parliament asked Endalkachew's cabinet to submit to it a draft legislation on land reform, so that, by the time the Derg took power, the question was already being studied in the Ministry of Land Reform. In doing this, parliament was merely reflecting the popular demand for land reform which had been the rallying call of the Ethiopian Student Movement for about a decade and which, in 1974, was being echoed by demonstrators and their placards and by underground papers circulating at the time. No doubt, Endalkachew's response to these demands was to refer the matter to the Ministry of Land Reform and Administration by asking it to come up with a draft proposal. It appears that the tendency within the Ministry was to revive the old proposal of placing a ceiling of 20 hectares on individually owned land and redistributing anything in excess of that to the land-hungry peasants as well as drawing up a tax system which would discourage leaving land idle. It is not clear whether Endalkachew also

referred the matter to the Constitution Drafting Commission. Nevertheless, articles 136 and 137 of the Draft Constitution which the commission prepared provided for the nationalization of all rural land.

It appears that towards the end of the summer, lands closely associated with the Chilalo Agricultural Development Unit (an agricultural development package programme launched in a sub-province of Arsi with Swedish financial aid) were to be redistributed to peasants in the form of private ownership, each peasant to receive a maximum of 10 hectares. It is said that the radical elements associated with the draft distributed the proposed legislation to the peasants as though it was a government-approved law and instigated them to consider the land which they were tilling as their own and to refuse the payments of rent. The Derg, which, from its inception, had been preoccupied with the demands of the civilian left, saw in the draft legislation a means of appeasing them, and, beginning from its seizure of power in its policy declaration of 13 September, for instance, it stated that very soon a new land law which would satisfy the requirements of the ordinary farmer and promote crop production would be studied and implemented.<sup>43</sup> This was further elaborated by 'Ethiopian Socialism' of 20 December which stated that land would be owned by the people.<sup>44</sup> By this time, it was obvious that the more influential officers in the Derg were favouring the nationalization of rural land as opposed to its redistribution in the form of private ownership. One of the reasons for this appears to have been that the Derg had referred the draft legislation prepared by individuals associated with the Chilalo project to a Committee made up of several university lecturers and a famous novelist who, by a majority decision, endorsed the draft legislation with one proviso, namely, that rural land should be nationalized. This solution was also upheld by the radical elements within the Ministry of Land Reform and Administration who had adopted the draft as their own and who were advocating its adoption by the Derg. However, the old idea of redistributing land in excess of 20 hectares in the form of private ownership was supported by the more pragmatic elements within the Ministry and may well have been the official proposal of the Government Department.

The Minister of Land Reform and Administration submitted the two alternative proposals to the officers' junta but argued

strongly against the adoption of the more radical draft on the grounds that it would require a substantial amount of expenditure and administrative substructure to implement, and that, contrary to the Derg's policy of a bloodless revolution, it would entail a lot of bloodshed. This was a voice in the wilderness. The nationalizing legislation was supported by the radical elements of the Derg, who had to work hard to persuade the others to their point of view and, at times, even had to invite the drafters from the Ministry of Land Reform and Administration to come and do some of the explaining. In the final analysis the issue before the officers' junta was whether its members were on the side of the poor peasants, in which case they should vote in favour of the nationalizing legislation, or on the side of the rich, in which case they could reject it in favour of the alternative legislation. The voice of moderation lost the day; the officers' junta adopted the radical legislation and had it rubber-stamped by the Derg, and, on 4 March 1975, that draft legislation was adopted as Proclamation 31 of 1975.

According to that legislation, all rural land was declared the collective property of the Ethiopian people.<sup>45</sup> With the exception of large-scale private farms which, in terms of the law, the government could run either as state farms<sup>46</sup> or convert into co-operatives,<sup>47</sup> all privately owned rural land was to be distributed to people who were willing to cultivate their holdings personally.<sup>48</sup> The intention of the legislation, as far as regards holdings in *rist* areas, was to transform them directly into co-operatives,<sup>49</sup> although in reality, they were also redistributed like privately owned land. Under the new legislation, the rights of the individual over his plot of land consisted of cultivating it personally<sup>50</sup> and of enjoying the fruits thereof,<sup>51</sup> which together amount to what the legislation calls 'use-right'. In other words, he does not own his plot<sup>52</sup> which, in any case, belongs to the Ethiopian people and cannot, therefore, be transferred to another person in any way whatsoever.<sup>53</sup>

An equally important facet of the legislation was its drive to organize the farmers into associations. According to it, farmers living within a maximum area of 800 hectares had to establish what the law called 'a peasant association'.<sup>54</sup> All tenants, landless persons, hired agricultural workers and landowners with less than 10 hectares each were to become members of the association,<sup>55</sup> but landowners with more than 10 hectares each had to wait until land

had been redistributed before they could become members.<sup>56</sup> Obviously, this excluded from membership residents who were engaged in occupations other than farming, like artisans, potters, teachers, nurses and the like. The leaders of an association were to be elected by the members.<sup>57</sup> At this juncture, the peasant associations were to be constituted at three levels: all the peasant associations within a *wereda* were to delegate representatives who would come together and establish a Higher Association at the *wereda* level,<sup>58</sup> and all the Higher Associations within an *Awraja* would delegate representatives who would come together and form the Awraja Peasant Association.<sup>59</sup> The legislation did not envisage the establishment of a peasant association as the provincial and national levels at this stage.<sup>60</sup>

There is no doubt that the land reform was the most popular measure adopted by the government and that it met with an almost universal acclaim. Various sections of the urban population went on massive demonstrations to express their support for it.<sup>61</sup> 'Voice of the Masses' called the reform historic and expressed its determination to collaborate with the forces that would struggle to implement it and fight against the reactionaries. Nonetheless, it had a proviso to its acclaim of the reform: it argued that progressives and the broad masses could emerge victorious only if they were better organized and armed than the reactionaries and that, in order to discuss views and achieve this, they needed democratic rights like freedom of speech, writing, assembly, organization and arming. The Derg, it said, had denied these rights but granted land reform which was tantamount to giving meat and denying the knife with which to cut it up.<sup>62</sup>

The only kind word *Democracia* ever had for any of the Derg members was in relation to land reform. It said that the fact that the privates, the NCOs and some progressive officers of the Derg were children of the workers and farmers was concrete evidence of their loyalty to their class allies (the broad masses) and they hoped that these pro-people elements would continue their struggle to the last for the fulfilment of democratic rights and the eradication of imperialism. *Democracia* also criticized the reform for not allowing the people to take power from the bureaucratic capitalists and establish their own government under the leadership of the workers; for giving the land to bureaucratic capitalists rather than the broad masses and, hence, protecting the interests

of the *petit bourgeoisie*, and for envisaging bureaucratic rather than democratic associations.<sup>63</sup>

Be that as it may, the implementation of the law (the establishment of peasant associations and the redistribution of land) was even more important than its proclamation. Starting from the 1950s, for instance, the *ancien régime* had been adopting a modern legal system intended to supplant the traditional legal order. In practice, however, both continued to operate side by side with the modern law being followed mainly in the urban centres and the traditional in the rural areas. This 'legal dualism' led some academics to be justifiably sceptical about the vigour with which the new government would and could enforce the land-reform law under consideration.<sup>64</sup> Despite such fears, the law was not to remain as a kind of ideal to be achieved at some indefinite date in the future and fall into disuse in the process; it was, in fact, fully implemented.

The main function of the peasant associations was, at least in the initial stages, to distribute land to their members as equally as possible.<sup>65</sup> As such, the establishment of peasant associations should have preceded the distribution of land; as it happened, however, both took place simultaneously. The tasks of establishing peasant associations and redistributing land fell primarily upon the Ministry of Land Reform and Administration, the Ministry of the Interior, the National Development Campaign and roving members of the Derg who supervised operations. Starting well before the promulgation of the land law, the two ministries conducted short seminars on different types of land-reform policies for their existing and newly recruited employees whom they then deployed in their provincial and sub-provincial branch offices.<sup>66</sup>

Participants in a National Development Campaign, consisting of teachers and students, were deployed in the countryside starting from 14 January 1975, in order to 'enlighten' the rural masses about development. Perhaps, what gave the most important boost to the establishment of peasant associations and the redistribution of land was the coming together of the land-hungry peasants and the civilian left (from among the students and teachers) occasioned by the campaign programme. It was noted earlier that, as of September 1974, the Derg had been finding it difficult to restrain the peasants from taking the law into their own hands and

refusing to pay rent to landlords on account of their belief that a law providing for the redistribution of land had been enacted or was on the verge of being enacted. Also, the focus of the student movement for about a decade had been land reform as exemplified by its most popular slogan 'Land to the Tiller'. When, as of January 1975, some 56,000 teachers and students were deployed to the countryside on the campaign programme, they set about instigating the already convinced peasants to organize themselves, oust the landlords and take the land for themselves.<sup>67</sup> When, in March, the law was finally issued, the campaign participants who were under the influence of the EPRP and, to a lesser extent, under the influence of the AESM, thought of it as an achievement of the 'revolution' or that of the student movement, but not that of the government. At any rate, the result of the alliance of the peasants and the campaign participants in particular, but also that of the government agencies concerned in general against the landlords, was to organize 4 million peasants into 16,000 peasant associations by July 1975,<sup>68</sup> and the bulk of the land considered to be in excess of what an individual farmer was legally entitled to had been redistributed by the end of that year.

The land reform meant different things to the different communities of the rural population. Obviously, big landowners and even those who had holdings of above a few hectares stood to lose from the reform more than other groups, whether they were cultivating their holdings personally or had rented them out to tenants. Although the law had provided that only individually owned land in excess of 10 hectares was to be redistributed, in actual fact land owned in excess of a hectare or even less was redistributed in order to accommodate the small cultivators and the landless. In fact, a landowner was entitled to an equal share of land with others only if he was willing to cultivate his holding personally; otherwise, he stood to lose everything. Given the hostility of the poor peasants and the campaign participants towards big landowners, and given the fact that these social elements were in charge of land redistribution, it is doubtful even if this limited right of the ex-landowner was honoured at all in some areas, particularly in the south. More often than not, the landowners were ridiculed as exploiting parasites and dispossessed of their holdings. In the south, where the landowners were often of a different ethnic origin from the tenants,

peasants and the campaign participants even resorted to violence in an attempt not only to oust them from their land, but also to drive the landowners out of those regions altogether.

The overzealousness with which the law was enforced, and the desire of the big landowners to defend their lives rather than to retain their land, drove them to take up arms and go to the woods from where they started threatening, beating up and killing those involved in the implementation of the land reform. At any rate, since at that time the government was attributing all forms of resistance in the countryside to the reactionary landlords it is difficult to decide how much of it was perpetrated by landlords because of the land reform and how much of it by them and other sections of the population for reasons unrelated to land reform. Historically, it had been common for law and order to break down during the transition from one king to the next and for warlords to rally local support and assert autonomy against other communities that tried to conquer them. In spite of Haile Selassie's policy of centralization, this tendency was not completely eradicated, especially in the northern part of the country, where, perhaps, the widespread armed resistance in certain sub-provinces of Gondar and Gojam was brought about by local notables trying to take advantage of the breakdown of law and order. In some cases, such notables could have been putting up an armed resistance more in support of the deposed monarch than in a desire to effect local autonomy. Also, when law and order broke down, it was common for certain communities to loot one another or nearby towns. In addition, the Derg's imprisonment and summary execution of the officials of the *ancien régime* drove many to escape to the refuge of their relations in the countryside from where they were able to rally local support and put up armed resistance against the government. In 1975 and 1976, the EPRP and the Ethiopian Democratic Union<sup>69</sup> also had men under arms operating in the northern provinces of the country and promoting rural dissension against the government more for political reasons than for reasons concerned with expropriating land. At any rate, pitted against the mass of the peasantry, the civilian left and the military might of the government, the landowners had to lose their struggle; by all accounts Ethiopia was cleansed of landlordism, and with it of power and prestige based on land ownership, by 1976.

As noted earlier, the reform affected not only the big land-owners (who were, in any case, numerically insignificant) but also the small owner-cultivators who in a lot of cases had about a hectare each. Since normally there was no extra land for redistribution they had to share their holdings with the ex-tenants or the landless on an equal footing. Further, the impact of the land reform on small owner-cultivators<sup>70</sup> was to weaken the control they had over their plots. It has already been noted that the right of the individual owner to transfer his holding to another person was abolished by the reform. This, in effect, meant that, whereas before the reform, the owner-cultivator could sell, pass on by way of inheritance or pledge his plot, he could do none of those things after the reform.<sup>71</sup> Upon his death, for instance, the plot did not go to a person he designated, but to persons specified by law or to the peasant association for redistribution by it to other members.<sup>72</sup> Further, whereas prior to the reform, he could pledge his plot and borrow from either private or public sources, the land had no such value to him after the reform. The diminution of control over his plot, coupled with the constant fear of losing it in the process of collectivizations or the periodic redistribution of land by peasant associations that ensued could only have a negative impact on his desire to make permanent improvements on his land, like irrigation channels, storage facilities, decent living quarters, barns and the like.

In this sense, the impact of the reform on *rist*-holders was similar to that on owner-cultivators who together accounted for almost all the cultivation of the arable land in the country. The *rist* land-tenure system prevalent in the northern provinces of Tigray, Gondar (Begemdir), Gojam and Wollo is often treated by writers on the subject as a form of family ownership because it was argued that any descendant of the presumed first settler family in an area now inhabited by an extended family could at any time claim a share of plot(s) from the group, and because it was presumed that land in *rist* areas was considered extra-commercium and hence alienable. The rights of the *rist*-holder, it is often stated, are limited to using his plot and passing it on to his heirs on his death. In other words, he can not sell his plot and is under an obligation to transfer some of it to a new member of the family who invokes his right to a share of it.

Contrary to these assumptions, however, there is growing

evidence to show that farmers in *rist* areas have, as far back as records go, been selling their holdings, albeit sparingly, because land was the only means of livelihood at their disposal. Moreover, the obligation to give up a part of their *rist* holding to a new claimant was more the exception than the rule since the pattern of migration was more towards the urban centres than the other way round. The reform law under consideration failed to recognize the highly individualistic ethos of the *rist* system and sought to transform 'the community of the family' directly into co-operatives rather than redistributing it to individuals. In reality, however, the effect was the same in the cases of both *rist* and the privately owned land: land was further subdivided and redistributed to individual farmers and the control the farmers had over their privately owned land or *rist* holdings diminished. One possible difference between the two relates to payments made to upper classes. In medieval Ethiopia the main means of surplus appropriation by the upper class was tribute estimated to be between a fifth and a third of the *rist*-holder's produce; however, with the decline of the upper class in the twentieth century, with the introduction of wages for the rural administrative elite and with the tax reforms of 1944 and 1967, it is not clear how much of the tribute and other feudal dues had survived. The reform would have abolished any residual feudal rights that might have persisted. Table 2 indicates the extent of privately owned land of the south and *rist* holdings of the north.<sup>73</sup>

It is often said – and the government's rhetoric is most emphatic about it – that the land reform under consideration was of the greatest benefit to the tenant farmers of Ethiopia who according to the table constituted 35 per cent of the crop-production community. The Ethiopian Civil Code of 1960 allowed the contract of rent to provide for the payment of up to 75 per cent of the tenant's produce to the landlord.<sup>74</sup> The reality was, however, different. The bulk of the tenants paid 25–35 per cent of their produce to the landlord by way of rent, and only in exceptional cases did that go as high as 50 per cent – hardly ever beyond that.<sup>75</sup> Some surveys have shown that in certain areas, the landlord also transferred to his tenants the obligation of paying land tax.<sup>76</sup> The tenant was also subservient to the whims of the landlord and had to buy his favour by working on his land, by presenting gifts on special

Table 2. *Distribution of tenants*

| Province   | Rural population | Wholly rented              | Part owned/<br>part rented | Total rentals              |
|------------|------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Arsi       | 690,600          | 307,764                    | 50,724                     | 358,488                    |
| Gondar     | 1,087,200        | 97,848                     | 62,232                     | 160,080                    |
| Gemu Goffa | 583,300          | 249,412                    | 21,633                     | 271,045                    |
| Gojam      | 1,344,500        | 172,785                    | 95,024                     | 267,809                    |
| Hararghe   | 1,435,570        | 703,429                    | 71,778                     | 775,207                    |
| Illubabor  | 515,375          | 376,224                    | 10,307                     | 386,531                    |
| Kefa       | 969,100          | 571,769                    | 29,073                     | 600,842                    |
| Shoa       | 3,585,000        | 1,828,350                  | 573,600                    | 2,401,950                  |
| Sidamo     | 1,987,590        | 735,408                    | 39,751                     | 775,159                    |
| Tigray     | 1,410,800        | 98,848                     | 257,218                    | 356,066                    |
| Wollega    | 1,064,100        | 574,738                    | 49,715                     | 624,453                    |
| Wollo      | 2,061,800        | 360,552                    | 474,214                    | 834,766                    |
| Totals     | 16,734,935       | 6,076,927<br>(36 per cent) | 1,735,269<br>(10 per cent) | 7,812,396<br>(46 per cent) |

occasions and by paying deference to him partly in order to fend off eviction.

The land reform swept away all rents and feudal dues in one fell swoop<sup>77</sup> and raised the status of the tenant to that of an owner of all his produce. However, the final verdict on whether his burdens were made any lighter has to be postponed until the pre-reform rents and feudal dues are weighed against the post-reform taxes, price controls, quota system under which he was made to sell to the government a part of his produce at a price much lower than the market value. These were in addition to his obligatory subscriptions to various mass organizations, subservience not to a landlord but to a multitude of government officials, peasant association leaders, and cadres, forced resettlements, collectivizations, villagization, cyclical labour and financial contributions that the new officials exacted from him. These impositions came later and it would be premature to consider them in any detail here.

Apparently, the landless who lived interspersed among the owner-cultivators and tenants were clear beneficiaries of the reform because they were given their own plots in the course of the land redistribution and because it can be presumed that to

have a plot of land however small would create a livelihood for them. There are no figures for the landless at the national level, but a 1981 survey, carried out in four *weredas* in the north-west, the west and the south of the country, showed that they ranged between 4 and 7 per cent of the population in those *weredas* and that they received the smallest plots compared to the ex-owner-cultivators and ex-tenants.<sup>78</sup>

By contrast, the land reform has been irrelevant to the lives of the nomadic peoples like the Afars, Issas and the Sidamo Oromos who together constitute some 6 per cent of the total population.<sup>79</sup> The land law under consideration stated that it was the responsibility of the government, besides other things, to settle the nomads for agricultural purposes.<sup>80</sup> The wisdom of such a policy is questionable, for various reasons: the nomads inhabit the extremely arid zones of the lowlands which are not amenable to cultivation; the semi-arid zones which they also inhabit can only be developed through capital-intensive projects; settling nomads around ponds, lakes and rivers could expose them to diseases like malaria; alternative development strategies exist; and settlement can only be secured and maintained through the use of force as it is contrary to the way of life of the nomads. The nomads have, therefore, been allowed to continue to roam the vast expanses of the lowlands in search of water and grazing land and fighting off intruders upon land they consider their own as they have done since time immemorial.<sup>81</sup>

Finally, mention must be made of the land-tenure system which has survived sixty years of Italian colonial rule and the radical reforms of 1975 and still prevails among the peasants of the Ethiopian Highlands. This is what is called *desai* (village ownership) and lends its name to the topic of the section under consideration. The *desai* socio-economic order is one of the most egalitarian and democratic institutions that has ever been devised. According to the system, access to land depends on membership of the community of the village which in turn depends on two considerations: whether an individual is a descendant of the family that had settled first in the area and whether the individual is a resident in the village or, at least, lives close enough to maintain his ties with it. Every seven years, all the family heads hold a general meeting which is presided over by the state-appointed local judge-administrator known as *chica*. After ritualistic sermons

by the elders and the priests about past disputes and the need to make peace and start anew, the *chica* nominates three recognized members of the community who in turn nominate twelve others: three to collect tax, three to help administrate the churches in the village, three to redistribute land and three to ensure that the redistribution is in accordance with established customs and practices. Members of the Assembly can and do criticize the nominees and by acclamation reject any one of them. Those in charge of redistribution then divide the land at the disposal of the village into four parts on the basis of the fertility of the land and on the kinds of crops that can be grown. This accomplished, plots of land are allocated to each member in each of the four parts by the drawing of lots. The right of the individual over his plots is limited to use-right which lasts for seven years. With minor differences from area to area, this is the outline of the *desai* system of the Ethiopian Highlands.

In fact the reform law under consideration failed to make a distinction between the *rist* and the *desai* tenure systems and sought to transform the community of the family (in the case of the *rist* system) and the community of the village (in the case of the *desai* system) into co-operatives. Save in some sample cases, co-operatives have not materialized in either system. In fact, in the case of the *desai* area, the reform made hardly any difference at all. Since the office of the *chica* was abolished, the peasant association filled the gap and presided over the seven-yearly assemblies that redistributed land democratically. Both the reform law and the traditional *desai* system gave to the landholder the use-right over his plots. It appears that the reform law has merely replaced the community of the village with the community of the peasant association.

As a matter of fact, the reform law refers to the measure taken under it as 'the public ownership of rural land' but since there cannot be any meaningful control of land by the public through its agent (the state) before collectivization and since collectivization has proved illusory in the case of Ethiopia, the law has not nationalized but abolished all the pre-existing land-tenure systems and replaced them with a form of *desai* system. Thus, though the reform perpetuated the *desai* system in its homestead (the Eritrean Highlands) it was less democratically introduced in the rest of the country because there each peasant association

redistributed land more frequently than every seven years and, more to the point, without consulting its members.

Finally, an impact of the reform on productivity needs to be mentioned. By the time of the reform, the arable land of the country had been subjected to extensive subdivision of holdings as a result of population pressure, with about 60 per cent of the farmers having plots of less than 1 hectare each.<sup>82</sup> In spite of the fact that the land reform legislation provided for the granting of up to 10 hectares to individual farmers,<sup>83</sup> it can be presumed that the size of plots actually distributed was, in most cases, either the same as or smaller than the holdings prevalent prior to the reform because the landless had now to be accommodated and the excess land that was nationalized was not enough for any bigger redistribution of land.<sup>84</sup> This assumption is, at any rate, confirmed in the case of four widely distributed *weredas* by a survey carried out in 1981.<sup>85</sup> This meant, in effect, that, assuming the farmers were in a position to introduce modern technology, the size of their plots would not be able to accommodate such innovations. In this regard, the reform can be accused of intending to tie down the farmers to their traditional agricultural implements, like the hoe, the plough and the farm ox, and hence freeze productivity to the pre-reform level.

It was, perhaps, intended to create a larger scale of farming by bringing neighbouring farms together to work their plots collectively. The reform law under consideration in fact talked of co-operative farms which it defined as '... any farm the possession and administration of which belongs to the farmers using the land'.<sup>86</sup> If this gave rise to the interpretation that the farmers who belonged to a co-operative could collaborate in some areas while retaining their property rights over their plots, that possibility was dashed by another legislation which was adopted in December 1975. According to it, the farmers were to bring their labour-force, their plots and their other instruments of production under the control or ownership of the co-operative and work collectively with their interest being limited to a share of the produce on the basis of labour-time contributed by them to the co-operative.<sup>87</sup> While collectivization could be presumed to solve the problem of sub-division of farm plots, at the same time, it raises a number of other problems of its own and has, in any case, proved illusory in the Ethiopian context.<sup>88</sup>

The scope of the land reform was limited in that it was not meant to address itself to all variables concerned with agrarian development strategy, notable examples being taxes and prices. The reform was primarily concerned with land tenure – with the kind of relationship that should exist between the farmer and his plot and, consequently, also between him and all others. The kind of tenure chosen as appropriate for the post-reform order was the granting to individual farmers of what is called ‘use-right’ over his plot (the right to decide to what kind of use his plot will be put subject to government directives, and the right to enjoy the fruits thereof). Like prices and taxes, however, the type of land-tenure system chosen can have implications for productivity, some of which have already been indicated in passing. For example, it has been noted that use-right does not give the farmer as much incentive to make permanent improvements on his holding, nor the facility to pledge it and borrow from private and public sources as does individual ownership of land. Also, it has been indicated that the reform has led to a further sub-division of holdings with negative implications to the farmers’ ability to make technological innovations. In view of this, it is perhaps in order to ask why use-right over sub-divided holdings has been chosen in preference to individual ownership over small or even large farms.

Nationalization of land is in line with the Marxist–Leninist principle of bringing the means of production under state ownership. Once the state is made the owner, land cannot be distributed to farmers in the form of ownership because two owners over one thing is not logically tenable and because the notion of mine and thine does not appear to be a desirable pursuit by Marxism–Leninism. However, use-right, which is chosen as more appropriate than individual ownership, is more akin to traditional categories of property relations and hence belongs to neither socialist nor capitalist relations of production. Its validity in the immediate aftermath of an aspiring socialist revolution rests on its presumed potential to be transformed into some kind of property relation controllable by socio-economic organizations like institutions, co-operatives, communes, or state farms.

It is perhaps unlikely that the full economic implications of such a reform and the complexity of the property relations involved were analysed sufficiently by its drafters in the Ministry of Land Reform and Administration and appreciated in any meaningful

way by members of the Derg, with the possible exception of a few. For the drafters it was enough that the reform was in line with what had been done in some other socialist countries, notably the USSR and China, and for the Derg it was enough that it was seen to be doing what the civilian left clamoured for and that the reform was just in the sense that it gave pieces of land to the poor peasants on an equal basis. The reform is, therefore, better understood not from the economic point of view (where it is seen as an agrarian development strategy intended to unleash the dynamics of agricultural productivity), but rather from the ethical, ideological and political points of view.

(C) THE NATIONALIZATION OF URBAN LAND AND EXTRA  
HOUSES AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF URBAN DWELLERS'  
ASSOCIATIONS

(1) *The nationalization of urban land and extra houses*

After the nationalization of the business organizations and rural land discussed in the previous sections, the next to be transferred to government ownership were urban land and extra houses. The task of drafting the law on the subject was entrusted to the Ministry of Public Works and Housing (later known as the Ministry of Urban Development and Housing) in which members of the Voice of the Masses group were dominant. Relevant agencies like the Addis Ababa Municipality and the National Statistical Office provided the data required by the drafting committee and probably participated in its proceedings through representatives.<sup>89</sup> The draft legislation was then submitted to the Council of Ministers who forwarded it to the Derg without so much as discussing it. The Ad-hoc Supreme Organizing Committee wanted to act on it with the greatest possible speed because it sought to pre-empt any underhand dealings by proprietors who had already learnt that the government was about to nationalize land and houses. The law was finally enacted on 26 July 1975, presumably by the Ad-hoc Supreme Organizing Committee since, at the time, a lot of the other Derg members were absent. Most were away in the provinces mainly engaged in the establishment of peasant associations, redistribution of land, and resolving local differences, and some were receiving political training abroad.

The most important provision of the legislation declared that, as of its effective date (7 August 1975), all urban land and extra houses would become the property of the government.<sup>90</sup> It provided, further, that the government would pay compensation for the nationalized extra houses<sup>91</sup> but not for the land.<sup>92</sup>

'Extra houses' means those which are in excess of what the legislation allowed a person to own. It allowed a person or a family to own one dwelling house,<sup>93</sup> a house or houses needed to run a business,<sup>94</sup> and/or a dwelling house or houses for employees of an organization.<sup>95</sup> The Ministry of Urban Development and Housing was authorized to determine the actual size of land to be allotted for the construction of a dwelling house,<sup>96</sup> but it was at no time to exceed 500 square metres.<sup>97</sup> No similar ceiling was placed on the size of land on which business premises or a dwelling house or houses for employees of an organization were to be built; the same Ministry was authorized to determine the appropriate size in each case.<sup>98</sup>

In part this meant that the owner of a house could transfer it to another by way of sale, barter, succession and the like,<sup>99</sup> but he could not do the same to the land that went with the house because that belonged to the government.<sup>100</sup> Nonetheless, when the owner transfers his house to another, his right over the land (referred to by law as 'use-right') also gets transferred to the new owner of the house. In the case of a dwelling house, for instance, the parking space, the garden and the play ground, if any, along with the land on which the house is actually built, gets transferred to the new owner of the house. It is as though the land is an intrinsic part of the house and must therefore bear the same incumbents.

On the face of it, the implications of the nationalization of rural and urban land appear to be the same. In both cases, land is owned by the state; the right of the individual over the land allotted to him is referred to as 'use-right' (the right to decide to what use the land should be allocated and the right to enjoy the fruits of such a decision). Nonetheless, in the case of rural land, the power to redistribute land is given to the peasant associations; whereas in the case of urban land, such power is vested in the Ministry of Urban Development and Housing. In fact the relevant legislations talk of 'public ownership of rural land' and 'government ownership of urban land'; but it is not clear whether the

differences in terminology are intended to refer to such distinctions. Also, the urban dweller who is allotted a piece of land seems to have more limited rights than does the farmer over his. On the whole, the former can use his land only for the purpose of building a house; once that is done, his land becomes a mere appendage of the house which he loses as soon as he transfers the house to a third party for any reason. By contrast, the farmer has a wider choice of purposes to which he can put his land and whatever he decides to do with the product, the land, which enjoys an independent existence from the products, is his to keep. Interestingly, the tenant of a government house which has, for example, a garden enjoys the same benefits on the land he possesses as does the owner of a house with the added advantage of not having to pay property tax.

Rural land is 'a means of production' and as such its nationalization may be explained in terms of Marxist categories of property relations. Urban land may not be 'a means of production'; nonetheless, the preamble of the legislation justifies its nationalization on three counts: to abolish the shortage of land and the soaring of prices caused by the concentration of land into the hands of a few feudal lords, aristocrats, high government officials and capitalists; to abolish the exploitation of the many by the few; and to abolish tax evasion. Perhaps, shortage of land, inflation and tax evasion could respond to different kinds of treatment; but the most direct treatment for 'exploitation' (by which is perhaps meant the renting of land) is nationalization. The rhetoric of the left was by now beginning to be adopted by the Derg policy statements. If this was the choice of language of the radicals who were drafting the legislation, the Derg was, obviously, quite happy to pass it as its own.

The nationalized extra houses were rented out to urban dwellers at rates fixed by the Ministry of Urban Development and Housing.<sup>101</sup> Mostly, rents of up to 100 birr (about 50 US dollars) were to be collected by Urban Dwellers' Associations (UDA) and rents above that were to be collected by the Ministry. All rents were to be used for providing services to urban dwellers in accordance with government comprehensive urban development plans and directives. In other words, UDAs were meant to use the rent they collected for developmental and other matters coming under their jurisdiction: maintenance of rented houses, payment of

salaries of UDA employees, common services for their members like latrines, water supplies, roads, kindergartens and basic health facilities. The rent collected by the Ministry was to be used for projects at the level of the cities.<sup>102</sup> According to the preamble of the legislation, one of the purposes for the nationalization of extra houses was control of soaring rents which had caused '... misery to the lives of the urban masses'. It achieved this control by following policies of static rents and lax rent collections, particularly of UDA houses. The service envisaged from rent proceeds was pursued with a fair amount of vigour in the immediate aftermath of the reform; since then, however, the pursuit has been abandoned.<sup>103</sup>

A most central purpose of such an urban development policy is the provision of adequate housing for urban dwellers, particularly for those that come within the low-income bracket. Housing cannot be said to have been adequate at the time of the reform; but, as the population grew, even more houses needed to be built. The reform recognized this need. It directed the Ministry of Urban Development and Housing, in collaboration with the concerned agencies like the Ministry of Finance and the National Bank, to assist urban dwellers to secure loans for the purchase and construction of houses.<sup>104</sup> In the immediate aftermath of the reform, this led to a flurry of construction of private houses by those who could borrow against the collateral of salaries and other securities; later, however, shortage of land and building materials, and liquidity crisis on the part of the mortgage bank put an end to it. Also, apart from the preambular commitments (like '... provide opportunities of work and shelter for the toiling people...' and '... help them regain their economic, social and political rights...'), the legislation said nothing of substance regarding the problem of how the poor were to acquire houses. All told, the two important impacts of the reform were dispossessing landlords and causing an immediate crisis in the supply of both rented and owned accommodation, effects which were felt with increasing intensity as time went on.<sup>105</sup>

### *(2) Urban dwellers' associations*

The peasant associations and the urban dwellers' associations (UDA) are a contribution of the new government to the social and

political scene of Ethiopia. These and other mass organizations were the most important forums in which the struggle for power by various factional contenders, including the Derg, was fought out in subsequent years. It is perhaps in order to say a few words on UDAs by way of explaining their essential features as well as those of the peasant associations since they are both fundamentally the same.

It was the same legislation which nationalized urban land and extra houses that organized urban residents into associations which it called 'co-operative societies' and later changed to 'urban dwellers' associations'. They were organized at three levels: at the local or *kebele*, the higher and central levels.<sup>106</sup>

All urban inhabitants were made members of UDAs except ex-landlords who were prohibited from voting in the election of UDA leaders or from being elected themselves for a year.<sup>107</sup> The organs of UDAs at each level included an executive committee, a public welfare committee and a judicial tribunal. The first of these is established through direct election by all members and the other two are then established by the executive committee.<sup>108</sup>

The primary task of delineating the boundaries of and organizing the UDAs was entrusted to the Ministry of Urban Development and Housing.<sup>109</sup> Hence, the Ministry divided the capital city, which then had a population of just over a million, into 300 *kebeles* (districts). The city's elections were held on 24 August 1975, leading to the establishment of 300 executive committees with five members each, 300 public welfare committees with three members each, 300 judicial tribunals with three members each and 300 control committees with two members each. The size of each of the committees and the establishment of control committees were decided by an organizing committee of the Ministry.<sup>110</sup> The establishment of UDAs in the provincial towns and villages did not start until the second half of October.<sup>111</sup> All these elections were concerned with the establishment of *kebele* UDAs; those of the higher and central UDAs were not held until the next round of general elections over a year later.

Like peasant associations, UDAs are given considerable powers over local matters. As noted earlier, the executive committees of UDAs are authorized to follow up land-use and building; set up

educational, health, market, road and similar services; collect land and house rent up to about 50 US dollars per piece of land or per house per month; and spend the rent they collect and the subsidy they receive on building economical houses and on improving the quality of life of their members.<sup>112</sup>

The task of protecting public property and the lives and welfare of the urban population at the local level is entrusted to the public welfare committees which were made accountable to the executive committees of UDAs.<sup>113</sup> The public welfare committees were the equivalents of the defence committees of peasant associations; both later came to be known as 'the revolution defence squads'.

The mandate of the *kebele* judicial tribunal is to hear and decide disputes between urban dwellers over land and houses;<sup>114</sup> that of the higher judicial tribunal, between *kebele* associations *inter se* and between *kebele* associations and urban dwellers;<sup>115</sup> and that of the central judicial tribunal, between higher associations.<sup>116</sup> Unlike the judicial tribunals of peasant associations, those of UDAs were not given jurisdiction to preside over criminal offences at least at this stage.

Prior to the reform, these economic, social and judicial functions would have been exercised by officials appointed by, and responsible to, the government. After the reform, however, those functions were entrusted to UDA leaders (and incidentally, to peasant association leaders) elected by, and responsible to, the people. In a country where prior to 1974 virtually the only elected institution was one of the two houses of parliament (the chamber of deputies), the establishment of UDAs and the granting to them of such powers and responsibilities was an admirable exercise of devolution of power quite consistent with the Derg's principle of 'self-reliance' which it reiterated in many of its policy pronouncements and which it enshrined in 'Ethiopian Socialism'.

However, the responsibility of UDAs to the people is partial in the sense that they are also responsible to the government for certain matters. It has been noted, for instance, that the officials of the Ministry of Urban Development and Housing that conduct the election of UDAs give them directives on land-use and building and on the disposal of the rent they collect and the subsidy they receive.<sup>117</sup> Also, even if decisions of UDA judicial tribunals

cannot be taken to the regular courts of appeal, the Ministry was empowered to review the decisions of the higher UDA tribunals which are the highest courts within the system.<sup>118</sup>

Further, the Ministry was authorized to designate persons who would organize the records and offices of the UDA courts and who would preside over their proceedings until such time as they became operational.

It is apparent from the preceding provisions that the government's role as far as regards UDAs is more supervisory and educational than interventionist and, hence, very different from a military command structure with which members of the Derg are familiar. In an age when most governments would claim, or at least practise, some kind of right to guide society towards a goal like, for instance, 'economic development' the kind of 'parental function' or supervising and guiding of the UDAs that the government assumed cannot be condemned as inappropriate. In the final analysis, however, the democratic content of the devolution of power envisaged in the UDAs rested on the extent to which the election of UDA leaders remained free and the extent to which the government's relations with the UDAs remained parental. As it happened, the popularly elected UDAs were responsible to a government which was not responsible to the people and the powers received by the UDAs were given rather than won and hence would be taken away at will. Subsequent developments, particularly the factional struggle for power, militated against democratic elections, transformed 'the parental' into 'the paternalistic' and reduced UDAs to instruments for subjugating the people into submission.

#### CONCLUSION

It appears that the decisions adopted up to the end of 1974 were taken by the Derg collectively and without the participation of ministries and other public agencies. Examples of some of the decisions so adopted were the summary execution of the sixty or so high officials of the *ancien régime* and others (23 November 1974), the Ethiopian Socialism programme (20 December 1974) and the nationalization of private banks and insurance companies (1 January 1975). At the time, the differentiation between officers and other ranking members of the armed forces and the police

within the Derg, between members of the Ad-hoc Supreme Organizing Committee and the other members of the general assembly, was in the making. As a result, the imprint made on the decisions by members of that committee would have been substantially greater than by the other members of the Derg.

As noted earlier, the drafting of the policies regarding later nationalization measures was left to ministries and other public agencies to be carried out in accordance with the Derg's principle, enunciated in the Ethiopian Socialism programme, that those economic activities which, if left in private hands, would not go against the spirit of 'Ethiopia First', should be nationalized, and in accordance with the precedent set by the Derg in nationalizing private banks and insurance companies. It was on the basis of these vague guidelines that the ministerial committee created for the purpose shortlisted some seventy-one industrial and commercial undertakings as appropriate for nationalization. Obviously, the vagueness of the principle gave the committee some discretionary powers to suggest which undertakings should be nationalized and which not. For example, the bulk of the businesses chosen by the committee as appropriate for nationalization were owned by aliens; on the other hand, however, it could have included on its list all, or most of, the businesses owned by nationals or, alternatively, it could have prepared a shorter list than it did. Given the cursory manner in which the Derg considered the draft concerned with the business organizations to be nationalized and approved in February 1975, it is very unlikely it would have rejected any alternative proposals that the ministerial committee might have made.

Compared to the nationalization of rural and urban land and extra houses, which actually affected nationals more than aliens, that concerned with the nationalization of business organizations was moderate. This can, perhaps, be explained by the fact that the committee which prepared the list of businesses to be nationalized was composed of ministers and other high government officials of the *ancien régime* who were never identified with the radical student movement or any form of radicalism of their own making. Also, the fact that the same list was submitted to the Ad-hoc Supreme Organizing Committee but kept from the assembly as being too confidential, shows the decline in importance of the latter. Obviously, the non Ad-hoc Supreme Organizing

Committee members of the Derg were, by then, being treated with less deference than the ministers who were made privy to confidential information.

It was the Ministry of Land Reform and Administration which was entrusted with the task of drafting the policy regarding the nationalization of rural land. There were, as noted earlier, two trends within the Ministry which held different positions on the subject. One advocated the nationalization and distribution of all land individually owned in excess of 20 hectares; the other opted for the mere nationalization of all rural land. However, the Derg was on the side of the latter option; it had already declared nationalization of land as the appropriate agrarian strategy in the Ethiopian Socialism programme and had replaced the Minister of Land Reform and Administration who was in favour of the conservative approach (Ato Belay Abay) by the more radical Ato Zegeye Asfaw. The new minister was later identified as having been a member of one of the Marxist underground organizations (the Ethiopian Oppressed People's Party) and a number of the other members of the drafting committee were identified as having been members of the other radical groups. Even if the more dominant members of the Derg had had more say in the draft legislation, it appears the discussions on and the adoption of it in March 1975 afforded the assembly more participation than did the nationalization of the business organizations a month earlier.

The task of drafting the policy regarding the nationalization of urban land and extra houses was entrusted to the Ministry of Urban Development and Housing. The minister of the department (Ato Daniel) was later identified as having been a member of one of the underground Marxist organizations (AESM). The affiliation of the minister suggests that members of the drafting committee would, in most cases, have been drawn from the same underground organization. When, in July 1975, the draft came to the Derg, it is very unlikely it received a reading beyond the Ad-hoc Supreme Organizing Committee. The need to consult the assembly had, by then, faded away and, in any case, a lot of the Derg members were away in the provinces busy helping in the implementation of the land-reform policy and in diffusing tension wherever it arose.

The above several paragraphs suggest the existence of a shift by

the Derg away from a reliance upon the technical services of bureaucrats to that of cadres, away from the technocrats and university lecturers of Haile Selassie's government first to radical elements within the state apparatus and then more particularly to cadres of AESM. In this sense, the nationalization of urban land and extra houses was a turning point; from then on, the Derg or the Ad-hoc Supreme Organizing Committee was to draw upon the expertise of the Voice of the Masses group for the adoption of its major policies for a couple of years.

The socio-economic reforms that the Derg was to introduce were completed in 1975; what came after that were minor amendments and follow-up additions to them. The impact of the reforms introduced in the industrial sector was to deprive aliens of whatever little investment the country had been able to attract (or the extent to which it had been incorporated into the global capitalist system), leave the insignificant domestic capital intact and transform the workers of the nationalized business organizations into state employees. The impact of the agrarian reform was to transform the semi-feudal relations of production into a kind of state-farmer tenancy agreement in which the individual farmer was given a piece of land by the landowner's (the state) local agent (the peasant association) – only now the farmer did not have the security of a fixed contract since he had to return the land when the peasant association or state so required. While the tenure lasted, the farmer could only work on his plot, and use the produce as he would. Like the nationalization of rural land, that of urban land and extra houses had as its main target the abolition of landlordism – a target concerning which both reforms were highly effective. The social effect of the reforms was to destratify Ethiopian society which had been divided along property relations. Also, a by-product of these reforms was the establishment of peasant associations and urban dwellers' associations which were intended to act as local governments but which actually proved to be more important as forums of political struggle in subsequent years.

Finally, it is clear that the reforms were adopted with Marxist-Leninist ideas in mind. As far as the economy is concerned, this meant that Ethiopia would in due course acquire a centrally planned economic system as, indeed, it did a few years later. However, a more central question was whether the existence of a

Leninist vanguard party is requisite for the adoption of Marxist-Leninist socio-economic reforms in view of the fact that such a party was lacking in the Ethiopia of 1975. If the answer to the question is yes, it would be difficult to see what the role of a Leninist vanguard party is. In other words, the issue of whether, according to the 'socialism programme', the adoption of socio-economic reforms can come before the formation of the party, or whether the latter should come first and adopt the reforms, had preoccupied the Ethiopian left until then and was to continue to do so in the subsequent years. As will be noted in the following chapters, the hidden agenda behind the issue was the aspiration of each of the political organizations to create the party under its control or to dominate the party to be formed by them jointly and in this way monopolize power.

## CHAPTER 5

### *The upsurge of political organizations*

When the Derg took power in the summer of 1974, the most important demand of the opposition was the establishment of a Provisional People's Government which would represent more sections of the population than did the Derg and which would pave the way for the establishment of a non-provisional government. If the opposition had had its way, then the Provisional People's Government and/or the non-provisional government that the latter would have created might have been expected to adopt socio-economic and political reforms demanded by the revolutionary movement of the time. Nevertheless, the Derg felt that it could deliver whatever another 'progressive' provisional or non-provisional government could deliver; it, therefore, continued to monopolize power and to adopt reforms, while at the same time promising to hand power over to a government of the people.

Thus, as discussed in the previous chapter, the Derg adopted, in 1974 and 1975, Ethiopian Socialism and, in accordance with this, a series of nationalization measures with far-reaching social and economic implications. Again, as will be noted in this chapter, in April 1976 the Derg adopted a National Democratic Revolution Programme which gave priority to the establishment of a Leninist Party rather than the formation of a non-provisional government. Ethiopian Socialism can be described as a variant of African socialism and the National Democratic Revolution Programme of Ethiopia as a variant of scientific socialism; it is with the processes of this ideological shift of the Derg that the present chapter is concerned.

The Derg's change in ideological outlook was influenced in large measure by the leftist political organizations which surfaced on the Ethiopian political scene as of 1974. Thus, sections A and

B are devoted to describing the political spectrum of the time. The Ethiopian Democratic Union, which is dealt with in section A, was, arguably, a proponent of a middle-class revolution; the section is, therefore, at the same time an attempt at explaining why such a revolution did not succeed in Ethiopia. The section also gives a brief overview of four leftist organizations which were important not so much in influencing the Derg's ideological outlook but in explaining subsequent political development. Section B deals with the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party and the All Ethiopian Socialist Movement which were the most important leftist political organizations in their own right and in influencing the Derg to adopt scientific socialism. Finally, section C describes the processes by which the Derg adopted the National Democratic Revolution Programme of Ethiopia in response to the challenges posed by the above political organizations. Chapters 3 and 4 have argued that the Derg had no ideological commitment other than nationalism when it assumed power in 1974.

#### (A) THE ETHIOPIAN DEMOCRATIC UNION

In the first half of 1974, a middle-class takeover of power seemed quite possible. Endalkachew's Draft Constitution envisaged a constitutional monarch and a cabinet accountable to a democratically elected parliament. It was quite likely that he would have wished to become the leader of the cabinet to be constituted in accordance with the new constitution. Under this contingency the government would have been dominated by Haile Selassie's technocrats and would probably have become more independent of the influence of the traditional aristocrats than ever before.

However, with the Derg's seizure of power in September 1974, and its subsequent falling under the sway of the civilian left, such a possibility dissipated very quickly. By the end of the year it had decapitated the middle class with the summary execution of the highest military and civilian officials of the *ancien régime*, and by the end of 1975 had broken its economic and political backbone through the nationalization of the major business organizations, rural and urban land, and extra houses. The insignificant national business community was too small to make a difference and was in any case composed of Ethiopian Muslims who had always found it

difficult to participate in the Christian-oriented government of Haile Selassie.<sup>1</sup> The middle-ranking bureaucrats who were active in the popular uprising of 1974 were later forced to toe the line of the Derg and the civilian left.

It has already been noted that, according to the Derg, the main reason for its establishment was the need to arrest and bring to justice the officials of the *ancien régime*, who were allegedly corrupt and hence responsible for the backwardness of the country. In the aftermath of its establishment, therefore, it carried out waves of arrests of such officials, and those who managed to evade the arrests fled to the safety of the countryside and from there to the neighbouring countries and beyond. Many ended up in Western capitals where they met up with those who had defected from Ethiopian embassies abroad and *defectees* from government missions.

The most important Western capital for the white *émigrés* was London, to which the crown prince, Merid Azmach Asfaw Wosen, had moved towards the end of 1974, from Switzerland where he had been having medical treatment since before the time of the popular uprising of 1974. It appears that initially the Crown Prince was a rallying point for the *émigrés*. At any rate, it was in London that the Ethiopian Democratic Union (EDU) was established, issued its publications and from where its recognized leaders lived and operated. The date of its establishment can be traced to March 1975 when the Chairman of the organization, Lieutenant General Eyasu Mengesha, made EDU's manifesto public for the first time.<sup>2</sup> However, EDU did not start issuing its organ (*EDU Advocate*) until December 1975, and its programme (*Aims and Objectives of EDU*) was not published until the summer of 1976.

EDU claimed that its membership consisted of all Ethiopians, whatever their class, nationality or ideology, so long as they were opposed to the Derg. In particular, the peasantry, who have by their own accord established themselves in opposition to the Derg and have come in under the umbrella of EDU, were seen as forming 'the broad base of EDU'. It has been suggested above that the leadership of EDU was drawn from the white *émigrés* who fled the country in the aftermath of the Derg's onslaught on the high civilian and military officials of the *ancien régime*. In the words of EDU's programme, the leadership was composed of 'traditional leaders' at whose ' . . . side are ranged an educated core of

modern Ethiopians, international civil servants, military officers, businessmen, diplomats, educators and government administrators'.<sup>3</sup> EDU saw itself as providing a command structure for all the forces opposed to the Derg. The highest organ in its structure was a supreme council with the mandate to formulate policies. It had seventeen members, each of whom apparently represented the different regions of Ethiopia. The responsibilities for implementing the decisions of the supreme council and for running the day-to-day activities fell on the executive committee, made up of eight members.<sup>4</sup> The chairman of both organs was the Eritrean Lt Gen Eyasu Mengesha, who had been the Ethiopian Ambassador to London until he defected some time towards the end of 1974. Two other well-recognized leaders, Ras Mengesha Siyum and Brigadier General Nega Tegegn, came from the neighbouring provinces of Tigray and Gondar respectively. They were recognized as leaders of EDU's military operations in the north-west and north and both were grandsons-in-law of King Haile Selassie.

Like many of the political organizations that emerged in the post 1974 period, EDU shied away from calling itself a party. It saw itself as a movement which did not 'covet power for itself'. Its primary task, it maintained, was the overthrow of the Derg through political and military struggle.<sup>5</sup> As soon as this was accomplished, EDU proposed to convert itself into 'a transitional administration for a fixed period' and at the same time to establish an elected 'constituent assembly' which would draft a new constitution to be ratified by the people. Pending the adoption of the new constitution and the handing over of power to the government which would be constituted in accordance with that constitution, the transitional administration (EDU) would return the security forces to their normal duties, revitalize the command structure within the armed forces, maintain law and order, protect members of the security forces from reprisals by the public, repeal all Derg laws, guarantee freedom of speech, assembly and association, organize and administer the economy on an emergency basis, negotiate with Eritrean representatives, grant amnesty for political prisoners and Ethiopian refugees abroad, re-open schools and institutions of higher learning, and dispatch goodwill missions to friendly neighbouring countries.<sup>6</sup>

All these would appropriately fall within the competence of a

provisional government, but there were others which seemed to require a long period of time to accomplish. For example, EDU argued that democracy and the creation of autonomous units within a federal structure were at the forefront of the demands of the 1974 popular uprising<sup>7</sup> and that these, together with land reform (the distribution of land to peasants in the form of individual ownership), constituted the three pillars of its programmes.<sup>8</sup> Further, EDU sought to secure the smooth functioning of the economy and the mobilization of the national work force and thereby solve the problems of inflation and unemployment.<sup>9</sup> Finally, EDU declared that it was committed to freedom, human rights and equality.<sup>10</sup> This perhaps suggests that, contrary to its assertions, EDU saw itself as a party; that it had an ideology (a pluralist political and economic order) which it sought to impose on the Ethiopian people; and that it had designs to launch itself as a non-provisional government after the overthrow of the Derg.

These allegations may be dismissed on the ground that its stated aims and objectives were matters it sought to advocate rather than impose on the people; what was more difficult to dismiss, however, was the allegation against it that it was restorationist (that it sought to reinstate monarchy and to de-nationalize land, extra houses and businesses that had been nationalized by the Derg). Here there is, perhaps, a case for arguing that EDU was more of a reformist than a restorationist organization. Most of its members, like for instance the educated Ethiopians, international civil servants, military officers, diplomats, educators, government administrators and businessmen, were not part of the aristocracy; they were technocrats whose interests did not depend on traditional institutions such as a feudal land-tenure system, birthrights, personal rule and the like. It is very likely, therefore, that EDU was sincerely committed to the policies cited above, like freedom, democracy, federal government and land reform based on private ownership.

It appears that the question of reinstating the monarchy after the overthrow of the Derg was raised by the founders of EDU and rejected because it was supported only by the Shoan aristocracy who were very much in the minority. The group that finally emerged as EDU was dominated by northerners who were traditionally not much committed to the Shoan dynasty, even

though some among them were aristocrats. An outstanding example of this was Ras Mengesha Siyum, who, though a grandson-in-law of King Haile Selassie, was recognized in his own right as a descendant of the Tigrain Emperor, Yohannis the fourth, and as a great reformer who often asserted his independence from the central government in ruling his province of Tigray. It is more likely than not that, given his temperament and zeal for reform, he might have fancied himself as a president rather than a king should the question have arisen.

If EDU had had its way, it would certainly have undone all the nationalization measures of the Derg and reinstated private relations of production at least to the previous level. In the Marxian sense, this would perhaps have amounted to turning the clock back, but would not amount to reinstating feudal relations of production and an aristocratic style of government. In view of this, EDU was perhaps genuinely committed to its statement that it was:

based on a fundamental conviction that the demise of feudal rule can only be replaced by a democratic reconstruction of the nation. No alternative is possible or desirable for Ethiopia and its development.<sup>11</sup>

Even though the members of EDU were too closely identified with the *ancien régime*, which affected their credibility, the organization nevertheless was at best as effective as any of the pan-Ethiopian political organizations in putting up resistance to Derg rule.

According to its policy statements, EDU's first and most important task was overthrowing the Derg, which to it was a 'Fascist regime'<sup>12</sup> which had deprived the popular movement of its aspiration to democratic rule.<sup>13</sup> The Derg's programme of Ethiopian Socialism is, EDU asserted, ' . . . a slogan meant to dress its terrorist rule in a respectable robe . . . ' and is 'neither Ethiopian nor socialist; it is a simplistic device intended to hoodwink progressive Ethiopians and world public opinion'.<sup>14</sup> Further, it argued that the land reform of the Derg was hastily improvised and muddled, deprived the peasants of ownership of land, herded them into communal arrangements and rendered them vassals of the state; and that the nationalization of urban houses deprived thousands of Ethiopians of their major source of income.<sup>15</sup>

It is for considerations like this that the EDU said that it sought

to overthrow the Derg; the means chosen to achieve this were political and military. As far as its political strategy was concerned, EDU attempted to expose the Derg internationally and domestically.<sup>16</sup> The conservative Islamic states of the region (Saudi Arabia, North Yemen and Sudan in particular) had been growing uneasy about the increasingly leftist stance of the Derg. What is more, Ethiopia was implicated in a July 1976 attempted coup against El Numeiri of Sudan.<sup>17</sup> In September 1976 the leaders of EDU were discussing a common strategy with Ali Mira (the traditional leader of the Afar people and their recently created 'Afar Liberation Front') and the leaders of the conservative Eritrean secessionist organization (the Eritrean Liberation Front). The venue was Jeddah (Saudi Arabia).<sup>18</sup> These developments brought EDU close to the conservative states and movements within the region, and particularly to Sudan, which later allowed it to use its radio station to broadcast hostile propaganda, against the Derg. No doubt EDU also benefited in terms of military aid from the same sources.

As far as its military strategy was concerned, EDU declared that even though its members were familiar with guerrilla warfare, it would go for a swift victory because that would not have detrimental consequences for the country. It argued that a majority of the Ethiopian people and a section of the army were opposed to the Derg and that EDU need only provide united command for the opposition.<sup>19</sup> As early as November 1975 it was reported that Lieutenant General Eyasu Mengesha, Ras Mengesha Siyum and Brigadier General Nega Tegegn, had met in Nega (in the north-west province of Gondar near the Sudanese border) in order to plan military operations.<sup>20</sup>

In May and June 1976 EDU was in a position to harass the Ethiopian army and help bring about the defeat of a peasant march against Eritrea, launched by the Derg<sup>21</sup> and to engage and, at times, defeat isolated military garrisons in the provinces of Gondar and Tigray.<sup>22</sup> However, the major confrontations between EDU and military forces of the government did not start taking place until 1977, when the former was able to capture towns and sub-provinces in the north-western part of the country near the Sudanese border.

Prior to 1974 most Ethiopians in the modern sector would probably have chosen to live in a pluralist socio-economic and

political order. However, there were no political organizations advocating such an ideology, mainly because Ethiopia had not been exposed to Western political processes or ideas; less touched by these than even the ex-colonial countries of Africa. The most that had been achieved in this regard was the incorporation into the Draft Constitution of Endalkachew of a provision that would have allowed the establishment of more than one party had it not been abolished by the Derg. The emergence of EDU was a belated attempt at instituting a pluralist socio-economic and political order, which was doomed to failure from the start because its adherents were identified closely with the *ancien régime*, which was by then totally discredited; because they were seen as trying to avenge their associates who had been executed by the Derg; and because the organization, being primarily based outside the country, had limited influence over the people.

The two most important political organizations, called the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP) and the All Ethiopian Socialist Movement (AESM), will be discussed in the following section. This section is concerned with four other leftist political organizations, which were not very important in influencing the Derg's shift of ideology, so much as in determining the outcome of political development in the subsequent years. There is no need to go in any amount of detail into their own ideological dispositions, since they had nothing new to offer other than what will be discussed in the following section in relation to EPRP, AESM and the Derg's adoption of the National Democratic Revolutionary Programme (NDRPE) in April 1976.

The political organizations concerned were the Ethiopian Marxist-Leninist Revolutionary Organization, the Ethiopian Oppressed People's Revolutionary Struggle, the Workers' League and Revolutionary Flame. The leaders of these organizations, with the exception of those of Revolutionary Flame, were active participants in the Ethiopian Student Movement, which will be discussed in section B; in that sense, the origins of the organization can be traced back to the student movement of the 1960s and early 1970s. There was, nevertheless, a new breed of communists drawn heavily from the army as of 1975 (trained either by the veterans of the Ethiopian Student Movement in political study groups and in the new Yekatit 1966 Political School, or in the socialist countries) upon which the Workers' League and the

Revolutionary Flame were dependent for the bulk of their membership.

(B) THE ETHIOPIAN OPPRESSED PEOPLE'S REVOLUTIONARY  
STRUGGLE

The Ethiopian Oppressed People's Revolutionary Struggle's paper (*Independence*) was launched in December 1975 and the first issue contained the programme of the organization. With the issuance of the National Democratic Revolutionary Programme in April 1976 which treated existing groups as political organizations which had to form a joint front in order to bring about a fully fledged party, the organization under consideration had to change its name from 'party' to 'struggle' in September 1976.<sup>23</sup>

The leaders of that organization were active participants in the Ethiopian Student Movement of the 1960s. The original cell of the organization may well pre-date the 1974 uprising,<sup>24</sup> though, as for all the organizations, the events of that and subsequent years were an impetus for its accelerated growth.

The main difference between the Ethiopian Oppressed People's Revolutionary Struggle and the other political organizations appears to have been the emphasis that the former placed on the 'oppressed nations and nationalities' of Ethiopia. In fact, on that question its programme reveals nothing different from what the other organizations state; but it is common knowledge that the organization saw itself standing for the cause of the oppressed 'nations' and nationalities more than the others. The bulk of its leadership, including its Chairman (Baro Tomsa), were from the biggest linguistic group in the country (Oromo). However, there was a sprinkling of individuals from the minority linguistic groups of the south in its ranks. It is doubtful if membership was open to other nationalities, especially to the more dominant linguistic group of the Amharas and Tigrains.

It appears that the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Struggle differed from the Oromo secessionist movement in that it believed in the continuation of an ethnically and religiously more just Ethiopia. Thus, like the other political groups under consideration the Ethiopian Oppressed People's Revolutionary Struggle was arguably pan-Ethiopianist; unlike them, however, it probably sought to subordinate the class question to the national

question, or at least gave the latter more prominence than did the other organizations.

*The Ethiopian Marxist–Leninist Revolutionary Organization*

By the end of 1975, the Ethiopian Marxist–Leninist Revolutionary Organization had started issuing its paper, *Revolution*,<sup>25</sup> but its programme was not made public until December 1976.<sup>26</sup> Some sources suggest that the organization was established as AESM's Youth League, and later broke away; others have maintained that AESM launched it deliberately in order to promote its own cause under the guise of another organization. These suggestions appear to be the result of the fact that the two organizations were working very closely with one another at a later stage; the Ethiopian Marxist–Leninist Organization's programme, for instance, states that the two had already formed a joint front, and that they were issuing a joint paper called *Truth*.<sup>27</sup>

However, there is evidence to believe that, like EPRP and AESM, the Ethiopian Marxist–Leninist Organization was an offshoot of the Student Movement and particularly of the latter's strategy, as of the early 1970s, of promoting political study groups in student circles. One such was established by a group consisting mainly of law students led by Ayed Ahmed, the Editor of the Addis Ababa University Students' Union paper, *Struggle*. It appears that it was this group that later developed as an independent political organization propelled mainly by the upsurge of political activities as of early 1974. Both the members of the organization and its leaders were generally younger than their counterparts in other organizations.

*The Workers' League*

A Dr Senaye Likke was the leader of the Ethiopian Students' Union in North America in 1971, and in August of that year he, and thirteen others, walked out of the nineteenth congress of his Union because it rejected its seventeenth congress decision that the national question in Ethiopia was of a regional character. The rejection of the decision was at the instigation of the newcomers from Ethiopia who later formed the EPRP and against the wishes of the Ethiopian Students' Union of Europe which later formed

AESM. Senaye's walk-out alienated him from the newcomers as well as from the Ethiopian Students' Union of Europe; the newcomers had ousted him and taken over his position, and the Ethiopian Students' Union of Europe had lost the support of the Ethiopian Students' Union of North America.

Later he completed his studies and returned to Ethiopia in 1972 when he started working for the Pasteur Institute in Addis Ababa. At the same time, he started teaching the air force cadets in Debre-Zeit some 50 kilometres outside the capital on a part-time basis. This brought him into contact with the air force personnel and through them with members of the Derg when that was created in 1974. It is often acknowledged by people close to the government that Senaye was quite close to the Derg in its early days and that later he was involved in teaching Marxism and Leninism to Major (later Colonel) Mengistu Haile-Mariam and his group in the Derg.

It is not known exactly when Senaye established his political organization (the Workers' League) but its paper (*Workers*) was in existence at least as of late 1975, and its programme was made public in July 1976. In a pamphlet he wrote at the end of 1976, Senaye endorsed the position of AESM discussed in the following section, glorified the victories of the 1974 'revolution' of Ethiopia and attributed the 'achievements' of the revolution to the Derg much less grudgingly than did AESM.<sup>28</sup>

The members of the Workers' League were partly recruited from among partisans of the Ethiopian Student Movement but mostly from among the army. The organization had cells in the various military units and it had absolute control of the Debre-Zeit air force base where Senaye was apparently worshipped. Recruiting members of the armed forces and the police was a departure from the practice of the other political organizations; the latter all seem to have shied away from recognizing members of the security forces as a revolutionary class in terms of Marxism-Leninism.

### *Revolutionary Flame*

Revolutionary Flame's programme was launched in August 1976 and its paper, *Seded (Flame)*, does not seem to have pre-dated the issuance of the programme by more than several months. If this is correct, Revolutionary Flame would be the last of the political

organizations to have come into existence; it was perhaps established some time in early 1976.

Apparently, during encounters between Major Mengistu and AESM leaders, the latter were accustomed to giving weight to what they were saying by reminding him that they were speaking on behalf of an organization. Major Mengistu needed no reminding; it was clear to anyone that AESM was using the official forums (like the mass organizations, and, later, POMOA and its branches, and discussion groups in all offices) to recruit members and grow by leaps and bounds. It seems that Senaye, who also feared AESM's domination, and Mengistu got their heads together and came up with the idea that the latter should create his own political organization and that Senaye would provide him with the necessary cadres to help in the endeavour. The result was Revolutionary Flame.

Apparently, it was difficult for the cadres of Revolutionary Flame and the Workers' League to see the difference between the two organizations since they were being instructed by their headquarters to work together closely. Also, people far outside the two organizations often claimed that Revolutionary Flame was merely the armed wing of the Workers' League. If this is correct, the claim often made that Major Mengistu was a member of AESM cannot hold water (except perhaps for the period prior to 1976), unless of course he was simultaneously a member of AESM and Revolutionary Flame as well as the Workers' League, which would not be an unusual practice for the time.

It was Major Mengistu and some thirteen of his supporters from the Derg that first established Revolutionary Flame. At the time, Major Mengistu was the first vice-chairman of the Derg and as of February 1977 he became the uncontested leader of the country. Consequently, to become a member of Revolutionary Flame meant to be secure and privileged – a fact which helped the organization to attract many members and to become powerful after that year.

(C) THE ETHIOPIAN PEOPLE'S REVOLUTIONARY PARTY (EPRP)  
AND THE ALL-ETHIOPIAN SOCIALIST MOVEMENT (AESM)

Unlike the origins of EDU those of the other pan-Ethiopian political organizations that sprang up in the 1970s could be traced,

directly or indirectly, to what came to be known as the Ethiopian Student Movement (ESM) of the 1960s. EPRP and AESM, to which the previous chapters have been referring as the 'Democracia' group and the 'Voice of the Masses' group respectively, were the most important and direct descendants of the ESM.

The origins of ESM have been traced to the late 1950s, but it was not until the mid 1960s that it acquired the organizational and ideological poignancy with which it was able to mobilize the university and later the school students and conduct an effective campaign against Haile Selassie's government. By then there were at least three main branch unions of ESM, operating independently of each other. Two of these were the Ethiopian Students' Union of North America (ESUNA) and the Ethiopian Students' Union of Europe (ESUE), composed of students who went there for further studies. Less important unions also existed among students in North Africa and Eastern Europe. The third important union, the University Students' Union of Addis Ababa (USUAA), representing all the colleges in the capital city, emerged as the dominant student union in the country after years of struggle against the students' union at the national level.

Towards the end of the 1960s all the branches of ESM advocated Marxism-Leninism as the correct ideology to be pursued by them as well as by Ethiopia. It is not easy to attribute this trend to one specific cause or another. However, the anti-West backdrop of the 1960s (the revolutionary movements in Latin America, the anti-Israel, anti-West struggle of the Palestinians, and anti-imperialist war in Indo-China, and the general student movement in the West) could only direct ESM toward the goal of struggling for the violent overthrow of the existing order. The organs of ESUNA and ESUE (*Challenge* and *Struggle* respectively) clearly showed the identity of ESM within these global movements.<sup>29</sup>

The trend within EUSUAA was the same. A certain amount of Marxist literature was available in the libraries, and those who had contacts received more of it from unions in Western Europe. These and various pamphlets from China and North Korea were freely circulated among students and read by them avidly, often at the expense of their academic careers. A lot of the school and university instructors from the West, who tended to identify themselves with the global movements, were sympathetic to and, in the case of the Marxists among them, advocates of the trends within

the student movement. Under the influence of factors like these, EUSUAA deliberately abandoned corporatist demands (like better food, better living quarters, better representation in the university administration) in favour of struggling for matters of national importance. It mobilized the university and school students into holding frequent rallies, demonstrations, class boycotts and into the distribution of anti-government leaflets. The main demands, often echoed by these militant actions, included 'Land to the Tiller' (as of 1965), 'National Self-Determination up to and Including Secession' (as of 1969) and democratic rights. By 1969 Marxism-Leninism had become the official ideology of ESM; EUSUAA which was at the forefront of the struggle against the *ancien régime* had become its most militant advocate.<sup>30</sup>

In December 1969, the EUSUAA leader (Tilahun Gizaw) was gunned down outside the main university campus. On the next day tens of thousands of university and school students held a rally in the campus and, with the aid of slogans, chants and placards, vilified the government, which they held responsible for the death of their leader. The focus of the rally was the corpse of the victim, which the students got hold of and refused to release either to the authorities or the relations. In spite of many hours of toing and froing between government representatives and student leaders no resolution to the problem was in sight. Then the soldiers who had been positioned within the campus fired a volley of shots into or in the direction of the crowd (it is not clear which), and, in the commotion that ensued, they pursued the dispersing students, bayoneting the bottoms and legs of those they caught up with. The extent of the casualties has since remained a matter of speculation.<sup>31</sup>

In previous years the government's measure against ESM had been limited to several days of detention accompanied by a certain degree of physical hardship, mainly intended to discipline the students. The events of December 1969, however, indicated to the students a change in government policy towards them: a change away from a paternalistic approach by the King to a heavy-handed policy intended to crush the movement. The measures did not quell the movement; it continued with greater ferocity, not least because it had the advantage of martyrs to dramatize its cause. One thing was true, nonetheless: greater numbers of students started going abroad on scholarships, partly because the

educational system in the country was often being disrupted by student activism, and partly because it was now too dangerous to continue the struggle from within Ethiopia. Some of the hard core of EUSUAA left the country by hijacking planes, others by trekking across the countryside. The new arrivals did not like what they found among students abroad. To them the students abroad were neither sufficiently committed to the cause of liberating Ethiopia nor followed the 'correct' Marxist-Leninist line on various questions. The adherents of ESUE and ESUNA tended to look at the new arrivals as infantile romantics, lacking in the rigours of Marxist-Leninist discipline. The effect of this was to divide the ESM into at least three recognizable factions: the new arrivals, led by Birhane Meskel Reda, who hijacked, with others, an aircraft from Ethiopia to the Sudan; ESUE, led by Haile Fida in Paris; and a wing of ESUNA, led by Senaye Likke in the United States.

The first and most important controversy arose over an article on the national question written under the pen-name of Tilahun Takele, but widely believed to have been the work of Birhane Meskel Reda. The new arrivals, who were attempting to dominate the students' movement abroad, supported the thesis of the article, while ESUE and a section of ESUNA opposed it. The main difference appears to be between those who wanted to treat the centrifugal tendencies in Ethiopia as national questions (the position of Birhane Meskel's group) and those who wanted to treat them as regional questions (the position of the veterans of ESM abroad). The issue was submitted to ESUE's eleventh congress in August 1971 (West Berlin) and the position of Birhane Meskel's group won the majority. The eleventh congress was attended by the leaders and prominent members of all branch unions. Within a week of the Berlin conference, ESUNA held its nineteenth congress in Los Angeles and reversed its decision on the national question adopted at its seventeenth congress, in order to go along with the position of Birhane Meskel's group. Disappointed with the outcome, Senaye Likke (President of ESUNA) walked out of the meeting with thirteen supporters, thus effecting the first faction within ESM;<sup>32</sup> later he created his own political organization.

It appears that as early as 1970 Birhane Meskel's group had floated amongst ESUE's leaders, including Haile Fida, the idea of

launching a communist party which would wage rural guerrilla warfare against Haile Selassie's government. However, neither side could see eye to eye on the question of timing nor on the nature of the party to be established. Despite that Birhane Meskel's group went ahead, and in 1971 created a provisional organizing committee which would prepare the ground for creating a party. Encouraged by its success in dominating the Ethiopian students abroad and in pushing through its thesis on the national question, the provisional organizing committee held a founding congress from 22 to 29 April 1972 and adopted the constitution and programme of the party. It was decided that the real name of the party would be the Ethiopian Communist Party, and that in its external dealings it was to be known as the Ethiopian People's Liberation Organization. For the sake of simplicity, the party will be referred to from now on as the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party, which is the name that the organization adopted as of August 1975. The congress elected members of the central committee and Birhane Meskel as its general secretary; in turn the central committee elected members of the politburo. It was further decided that the minimum programme of the party would be the consummation of the new democratic revolution and that the leadership would initiate a guerrilla unit which would raise a people's army from among the peasantry and wage protracted warfare in three stages: the strategic-defensive, the equilibrium and the strategic-offensive. In this way, it was believed, the cities would be encircled and finally fall.<sup>33</sup>

The beginnings of the foundation of AESM can be traced to a 1969 meeting in which the question of creating a political organization was discussed. The first chairman of that meeting was apparently Hagos (a veteran activist of ESUNA) and the second was Haile Fida of ESUE. It appears that Hagos fell out with the group, leaving Haile Fida to carry on with the task of leading the organization. If the events of those early years did not amount to the formation of AESM, there is no doubt that Haile Fida established it at about the same time as the foundation of EPRP or soon after. The kind of effective resistance that ESUNA put up against the onslaught of EPRP after the national question was discussed in 1971 can only be explained in terms of an organized response. There was a lot to be done: writing of polemical essays, printing

and distributing pamphlets, preparing and defending positions at the emotionally charged meetings of the congresses. All these were conducted on a bi-partisan basis.

An example of this was the question of mobilizing the Ethiopian students abroad into joining one side or the other, which was the preoccupation of both organizations at that time. EPRP took the initiative of proposing the establishment of federal structure among the branch unions of AESM to replace the previous and loosely organized structure of the World-wide Union of Ethiopian Students. ESUNA, which had come under the sway of EPRP, adopted the idea of federation, but ESUE resurrected it until its fourteenth annual congress in August 1974 (West Berlin). By then the Ethiopian students abroad were polarized into supporters of the World Federation of Ethiopian Students (called Federationists) and opponents of the idea of federation (called Europists). The differences between the two were so hostile, personalized and aggressive that they could no longer share a common platform after the fourteenth congress; the two organizations never met together after that.

Despite the hostility and downright hatred towards one another, both Federationists and Europists, led by EPRP and AESM respectively, professed Marxism–Leninism as the correct ideology for their organizations to pursue. Nevertheless, there were substantial differences between them. Besides their differences on the national and federal questions already alluded to, there was the additional issue of who had led the early 1974 popular uprising which proved intractable at the ESUNA fourteenth congress. To the Federationists, it had been the workers that led the uprising; to the Europists, it had been the *petite bourgeoisie* that led it.<sup>34</sup>

The early 1974 popular uprising that exploded on the Ethiopian political scene was as much a surprise to EPRP and AESM as it was to everyone else. Like EDU, both organizations were established abroad and the target of their activities until 1974 had been the Ethiopian students abroad whom, as indicated earlier, they managed to mobilize extensively. Due to limited presence in the country the organizations were unable to give the popular uprising any kind of leadership; on the other hand, however, the uprising confronted them with the challenge of having to integrate themselves not only with Ethiopians abroad but also with

the progressive forces and the masses in the country. In the following few years, they took up the challenge successfully, but only at the expense of polarizing the nation as they had already polarized the Ethiopian students abroad.

By July 1974, the central committee of EPRP had returned to Ethiopia and launched its organ *Democracia*. Even though the central committee of AESM did not return to Ethiopia until early 1975, it had sufficient followers within the country to live up to EPRP's challenge and institute its own organ, *Voice of the Masses*, in August 1974. As amply demonstrated in the previous chapters both organizations used these organs to advocate the abolition of the crown, to condemn the Derg as a Fascist junta dictatorship, to demand the immediate replacement of the Derg by a people's government, to instruct the literate population about Marxism-Leninism etc. Surprisingly enough their positions on these and other issues were almost identical until at least the summer of 1975; in fact, *Voice of the Masses* went as far as inviting the public to read both organs since, it argued, they were the only progressive papers in the country.<sup>35</sup> However, their papers were deceptive in this regard since, under the surface, the hostility between their adherents continued to rage.

There is no doubt that EPRP showed a greater capacity in organizational activity than AESM and had the upper hand in this until at least the summer of 1975. In accordance with the mandate given to it at the time of its formation, the leadership of EPRP laid the foundation of its armed wing (the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Army) by sending sixteen of its members from Algeria to Eritrea for guerrilla training by the Eritrean People's Liberation Front in September 1973,<sup>36</sup> and by installing the same in the tortuous mountains of Assimba in Tigrai province in February 1975.<sup>37</sup> Later, other Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Army bases were established in the north-western province of Gondar. The protracted people's war that was initially intended to fight Haile Selassie's government had now reached an advanced stage and was poised for a guerrilla war against the Derg.

EPRP's organizational activities among the urban population were even more remarkable. The windfall that swelled its ranks came with the deployment in early 1975 of the 60,000 or so teachers and students to the countryside under the National Development Campaign Programme of the Derg. EPRP activists

established study clubs which they called Secret Youth Associations, and engaged the campaign participants in a day in, day out discussion on the study of Marxist–Leninist literature, the achievement of the Ethiopian revolution by the Ethiopian Student Movement, the usurpation by the Derg of the revolution, the failure of the Derg to implement effectively the land-reform policy, and the obstruction of the implementation of the same by local officials which was again attributed to the Derg. The convinced participants of the Secret Youth Associations, which by this time also existed in almost all the major towns of the country, were then channelled into one of the mass organizations created by EPRP (like the Ethiopian Workers' Associations, the Ethiopian Women's Organization and the Ethiopian Students' Revolutionary Organization) depending on whether they were workers, women or students. All this came under the umbrella of yet another superior mass organization, namely the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Youth League, suggesting that most of EPRP's activities were directed towards the youth. In addition to the politburo and the central committee, which have already been mentioned, the party itself was structured at the regional, sub-regional, zonal, basic and cell levels. The mass organizations were used by the party for raising funds, distributing pamphlets and generally agitating for the party's line.<sup>38</sup> In this way, EPRP was able to mobilize to its side not only the campaign participants (who can be described as adherents of the University Students' Union of Addis Ababa) but also to infiltrate the Confederation of Ethiopian Labour Unions and the Ethiopian Teachers' Association, and to have them adopt its line in their annual congresses. By August 1975 it felt so well integrated with the progressive social groups that it issued its programme officially, while maintaining at the same time that it was an underground party, and changed its name from the Ethiopian Communist Party or the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Movement to the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party.

The leadership of AESM returned to Ethiopia *en masse* in early 1975 with two things in mind. First, its characterization of the Derg's members as *petit bourgeois* and, according to it, the Marxist conception of such a class as opportunist and as capable of taking sides with either the reactionary or progressive class enabled it to give what it called 'critical support' to the Derg. In other words,

the leaders of AESM returned to work with the Derg until and on condition that it pursued progressive programmes. Having alienated the officials of the *ancien régime* through the deposition of the monarch and through its executions, the Derg had need at the time of alternative sources of support and had extended an invitation to intellectuals abroad to return to their homeland and help it construct the new Ethiopia. Accordingly, it interviewed all the returnees upon their arrival and assigned them to posts considered appropriate by both sides. This latter led to a collaboration between the leaders of AESM and a faction of the Derg led by Mengistu Haile-Mariam. Haile Fida (leader of AESM) and others from his organization and the one-time leader of the Ethiopian Students' Union in North America (Senaye Likke) who had returned to Ethiopia several years earlier were by the summer of 1975 giving Mengistu and members of his faction their first lessons in Marxism-Leninism.

Secondly, AESM claimed to be a Marxist-Leninist political organization and as such sought to integrate itself with the progressive social groups. In this regard, the most important opportunity offered itself with the creation of mass organizations particularly the Urban Dwellers' Associations starting from the end of 1975. The Minister of Urban Development and Housing (who was responsible for running the elections of Urban Dwellers' Association leaders) together with a number of others he was able to attract to work under him were part of the leadership of AESM. Further, the Derg was quite willing for AESM to have its members dominate the Urban Dwellers' Association leaderships because of the alliance already forged between a faction of the Derg and AESM. If a particular Urban Dwellers' Association was infiltrated by EPRP supporters, a re-election of the leaders with a view to replacing them with pro-Derg pro-AESM individuals could be held at any time.<sup>39</sup>

In fact, there is a symmetry in the way the social organizations came down on the side of one or the other of the two political organizations: as EPRP infiltrated the Urban Dwellers' Associations so did AESM infiltrate the Confederation of Ethiopian Labour Unions, the Ethiopian Teachers' Associations and the Students' Movement. The fact remains, nevertheless, that the Campaign Programme was to EPRP as the Urban Dwellers' Association was to AESM.

With the withdrawal of the campaign participants to the cities, the activities of both organizations became even more focused on the urban social groups than was the case before. There is no doubt that, like EPRP, AESM also laid the foundations of its organizational structure within these groups. However, it is unlikely that it organized a set of mass organizations alternative to those of the Derg. It appears it was content to share with the Derg the mass organizations created by them jointly.

Though the differences between them had been simmering under the surface for a long time, EPRP and AESM did not make them public until the end of 1975. As of then, the papers of EPRP and AESM (*Democracia* and *Voice of the Masses* respectively) started attacking each other for the first time. A column in the official daily (*Addis Zemen*) called 'Revolutionary Forum' was devoted for several months in early 1976 to the purpose of airing their differences publicly. The positions of the two organizations could also be seen in their programmes. As already noted, EPRP issued its programme in August 1975; AESM's programme was not issued until April 1976. The name of the organization (the All Ethiopian Socialist Movement) was actually adopted in the programme for the first time and, according to its preamble, the choice of the word 'movement' as opposed to 'party' was made partly because the organization did not feel it was sufficiently integrated with the progressive classes and partly because it wanted to work closely with other political organizations of which by then there were several. More to the point was, perhaps, the implication of calling itself a party to the relations between AESM and the Derg; if the former had claimed to be a full-fledged party, it could have been accused of having intended to take power to the exclusion of all others including the Derg. The rest of this section is devoted to describing the major differences between EPRP and AESM as reflected in the above-mentioned documents.

#### *The National Democratic Revolution (NDR)*

The one thing on which EPRP and AESM agreed was the characterization of the then ongoing socio-economic and political change as what they variously called the Revolutionary Democratic Dictatorship of the Workers and Oppressed Peasants, the Democratic Revolution, the New Democratic Revolution, the

National Democratic Revolution etc. According to them, this is a period during which feudalism, imperialism (especially that of the US) and capitalism, including bureaucratic as well as comprador capitalism, were liquidated by the working class in alliance with the peasants and the progressive *petite bourgeoisie* (progressive students, intellectuals, small merchants, soldiers and poor urban dwellers). Thus, the unfolding events since 1974 were seen as an uncompromising and violent struggle between the exploiting and exploited classes and their respective appendages. The struggle would come to an end when the exploiting classes were crushed, when the people's democratic republic was established, and when, in this way, the NDR gave way to the era of socialism.<sup>40</sup>

A February 1976 article written under the pen-name of Petros Heraclitos, who could easily have been an adherent of either EPRP or AESM, made an attempt at tracing the historical development of the idea of NDR with citations from Marx, Engels, Lenin and Mao. It explained that, during the English and French Revolutions, the working class allied itself with the capitalists against feudalism, but that later, as it became obvious that the capitalists' interests diverged from those of the working class, the alliance gave way to antagonism. Marx and Engels were reported to have said that the role of the peasants in the 1848 'anti-capitalist' revolution in France was one of indifference or even downright pro-monarchy. However, the article went on, with the penetration of capital into the countryside in the second half of the nineteenth century, the poor farmers found themselves unable to compete with the rich ones, a fact which made the farmer politically conscious. Apparently, this development encouraged Marx and Engels to 'improve', as of 1870, their previous position on the poor peasants and treat them as a revolutionary class and urge communist parties to become active in the countryside as well. In other words, with the world domination of capital in the second half of the nineteenth century, the old contradiction between the aristocratic and middle classes gave way to an alliance between the imperialist, capitalist and feudal classes, forcing the workers and peasants to forge an alliance against them.

The article went on to explain that, to Lenin and Mao, their respective revolutions had to go through two stages: Democratic Revolution and Socialist Revolution. The former of the two

revolutions is 'democratic' because it is led by the workers who would rule in the interest of the oppressed majority as contrasted with the previous 'democracies' which ruled in the interest of the privileged minority. Mao is reported to have said in 1949 that the workers must lead the NDR because that class, more than any other, is far-sighted, selfless and absolutely revolutionary.<sup>41</sup> For EPRP and AESM the validity of the characterization of the then on-going socio-economic and political change in Ethiopia rested on citations from Marxist-Leninist literature and not on an application of Marxism-Leninism to or on an analysis of the particular circumstances of Ethiopia (the size of the working class, the consciousness of the worker and peasant classes, the contribution of those classes to the changes that were taking place at the time and their ability to lead the revolution).

*The Leninist vanguard party: EPRP or AESM?*

Both EPRP and AESM explained that, if the struggle of the broad masses (the workers, peasants and progressive *petit bourgeoisie*) against the exploiting classes was to succeed, they had to form an alliance under the leadership of an organized working-class party. Each of these organizations saw itself as the working-class vanguard party (actual or potential) which would lead the broad masses to victory against the exploiting classes. However, given the fact that both of them were avowed devotees of a single-party system, the question of which one of them was to lead the broad masses to victory became a most fundamental and intractable problem on which they were unable to compromise. One solution open to them was the formation of a joint front as might have been expected. In their programmes, both EPRP and AESM expressed an interest in forming such a front, not with each other but with the other leftist groups that were springing up at the time. The continued EPRP-AESM competition for the role of the vanguard party arguably constituted the most important difference between them, partly because they both endorsed the use of force and violence to get their way (which had grave consequences for both later) and partly because most of their other differences, which were tactical in nature, proceeded from the more fundamental aim of becoming the party in power.

*The Derg a Fascist or a mere petit-bourgeois government?*

If EPRP and AESM each sought to seize power for itself, that was a matter for the future; in reality, power was then in the hands of the Derg and the Derg alone. The two organizations had to, and indeed did, take positions on that fact.

EPRP saw the steering committees that sprang up in the various rebellious corporate groups during the popular uprising of 1974 as equivalents of soviets in the USSR.<sup>42</sup> As noticed earlier, EPRP was condemning the Derg as 'Fascist' from the time of its seizure of power mainly because it stifled the democratic rights of the steering committees which, according to EPRP, were progressive and hence on the side of the broad masses, and which would have been able to organize themselves and assume the position of leadership, had it not been for the Derg. It was never clear whether the characterization of the Derg as 'Fascist' was intended to mean that it was simply dictatorial (a common usage of the term in Ethiopia since the Mussolini invasion of the country in 1936) or whether it was intended to suggest that the Derg was pursuing the socio-economic and political policies of national socialism. As EPRP's condemnation of the Derg hardened, it seemed to move closer and closer towards the second proposition.

In a November 1975 article, EPRP argued that the three primary enemies of the broad masses with whom progressives could not compromise, even temporarily, were imperialism, feudalism and Fascism (the last being represented by the Derg). It explained that imperialism (the West) was arming both the aristocracy (EDU), which was trying to make a come-back, and the Derg, which was stifling the activities of the progressives and diverting the revolution from its correct path. The only difference between EDU and the Derg, it continued, was that each of them sought the power for themselves; otherwise there was a coincidence of interests between the two and imperialism, all of which were collaborating to reverse the course of the Ethiopian Revolution. The Derg was thus portrayed as a Fascist government equalled only by imperialism and feudalism in its enmity to the revolution; the broad masses were called upon to destroy the three enemies with equal vigour.<sup>43</sup>

It was soon after this that AESM started making its differences with EPRP public. It admitted that previously it had itself also

characterized the Derg as Fascist, but that it had now rejected the characterization because the Derg had recently shown its anti-feudal and anti-imperialist position through its reforms. AESM further explained that, being a *petit-bourgeois* group, the Derg could have come down on the side of the broad masses or on the side of the reactionary forces; that there were still leftist and rightist wings within it; and that it was the leftist wing that made the reforms possible. AESM saw its role as being one of collaboration with the left wing of the Derg and creating pressure on the remaining members with a view to forcing them to join the masses.<sup>44</sup>

*A Provisional People's Government versus a Provisional Military Government, or a Provisional People's Government versus the Politicization, Organization and Arming of the People*

It is difficult to trace the origin of the demand for a 'Provisional People's Government' in the context of the change that was taking place in Ethiopia. At the time of the early 1974 popular uprising, there were underground papers which demanded the establishment of a Provisional People's Government, primarily because Haile Selassie's government was crumbling and because there was no obvious organized group to replace it. In the summer of the same year, however, the Derg emerged to fill that gap. Despite that, both EPRP and AESM took up the demand for the establishment of a Provisional People's Government in place of the Derg, and agitated for it until they decided to make it an issue between themselves as of the end of 1975.

In an extensive article of November 1975, EPRP not only advocated the establishment of a Provisional People's Government more strongly than ever before but also attempted to give it a theoretical basis with citations from Lenin. The central thrust of the article was the proposed establishment of a 'Provisional People's Congress' composed of elected representatives of social groups (such as workers, farmers, soldiers, women and the *petite bourgeoisie*) and the formation of a 'People's Provisional Government' through election by the Congress. The People's Provisional Government was defined as a joint front of the politically organized oppressed peoples, and was to be led by the workers in alliance with the peasants. Its tasks were declared to be taking the necessary measures against the anti-people and anti-revolution

elements, granting unlimited democratic rights to the oppressed people, improving the economic and political conditions, resolving the nationalities question (especially the Eritrean question) and, in this manner, paving the way for the establishment of a 'People's Government'. The Derg, which was condemned for stifling the democratic rights of the masses, was declared to be unfit to act as transitional to a People's Government, and had, therefore, to be replaced by a Provisional People's Government; its coercive machinery, like the courts and the police force, had to be abolished; and its international agreements with the imperialist powers had to be repealed. It was further explained that Provisional People's Government had a historical precedent in Lenin's 1905 proposal for the establishment of a Provisional Revolutionary Government, which was no ordinary government but the dictatorship of the proletariat in alliance with the peasants.<sup>45</sup>

In a February 1976 article, AESM claimed that it was the first to raise the demand for the establishment of a Provisional People's Government in place of the Derg, but that it rejected it afterwards because it had realized that it would lead to a dictatorship by a section of the *petite bourgeoisie*. In a January 1975 article, written in reaction to EPRP's proposition above, AESM had explained its reasons for the rejection of the Provisional People's Government. The thrust of the argument was that only the *petite bourgeoisie* were organized and hence able to take part in elections; that the establishment of a Provisional People's Government at that stage would lead to the formation of a *petit-bourgeois* government; and that in order to establish a People's Government through elections in which only the oppressed masses would participate, feudalism and imperialism must first be violently destroyed through the insurrection of the people. To AESM 'People's' and 'Provisional' do not go together: a government established through elections in which the reactionary classes participate cannot be a People's Government; conversely, a government established through elections after the destruction of feudalism and imperialism is a People's Government and hence need not be provisional. AESM maintained that the establishment of a Provisional People's Government through election was the slogan not only of EPRP but also of EDU and CIA and of the Russian aristocracy on the eve of the Soviet Revolution, and that the

correct slogan for Ethiopia at that time (1975/6) was the call for the 'Politicization, Organization and Arming of the Masses'. EPRP was castigated for equating its Provisional People's Government with Lenin's Provisional Revolutionary Government, the latter of which could only (according to AESM) be established after the overthrow of the reactionary classes through the insurrection of the masses, when truly democratic elections could be held. EPRP was further criticized for misquoting Lenin, for quoting a passage from the works of Stalin and attributing it to Lenin, in order to evade being checked out, and for distracting the people from concentrating on their primary enemies of feudalism, imperialism and bureaucratic capitalism.<sup>46</sup>

Variations of this theme continued to be vigorously advocated and defended on the pages of *Addis Zemen* in the early part of 1976. EPRP identified the mass organizations with the steering committees of the corporate groups which were co-ordinating resistance to the *ancien régime* at the time of the 1974 popular uprising and equated them with the soviets in the Russian revolution. It demanded confidence in them rather than in the Derg to lead the revolution to victory.<sup>47</sup> For its part, AESM insisted that EPRP's call for an elected Provisional People's Government was a call for the depoliticization, disorganization and disarming of the masses; that it was EPRP's ploy to get to power through a shortcut; and that AESM would agitate for the violent abolition of feudalism and imperialism.<sup>48</sup>

It must be noted that both EPRP and AESM were aspiring Leninist parties and, as such, were not only theoreticians but also strategists. It is obvious that, if the Derg, which was then coming closer to AESM, was removed and replaced by a Provisional People's Government, EPRP might have hoped to absorb what it called the left wing of the Derg under its leadership and take over power for itself. The Derg adopted its 1975 nationalization measures in the absence of any party and AESM might have hoped to fill the gap. In this sense, the issue under consideration was arguably 'a Provisional People's Government versus a Provisional Military Government, as EPRP formulated it', rather than 'a Provisional People's Government versus the Politicization, Organization and Arming of the Masses' as AESM would have it.

*Limited versus unlimited democratic rights*

The programmes of EPRP and AESM both had extensive provisions on democratic rights.<sup>49</sup> However, those provisions talked about the status of democratic rights only at some future date: the EPRP programme dealt with rights under 'The National People's Congress', which it envisaged as coming before the formation of the People's Provisional Government; and that of AESM dealt with rights under 'The People's Democratic Republic' which it envisaged as the period that comes after the consummation of the National Democratic Revolution. Since both organizations had, therefore, made their positions on the status of future rights clear, it can perhaps be assumed that the debate on limited versus unlimited democratic rights that raged on the pages of *Addis Zemen* in early 1976 was intended to relate to rights under the Derg.

To take an example of the status of future rights for a moment, EPRP's programme provided that the National People's Congress would safeguard the freedom of activity of all political parties, organizations and individuals, on condition that they were anti-feudal, anti-imperialist, and anti-bureaucratic-capitalist;<sup>50</sup> AESM's programmes provided that the 'unrestricted rights' of speech, press, assembly, organization, demonstration and strike of the people would be guaranteed under the People's Democratic Republic.<sup>51</sup> It is obvious from these provisions that EPRP sought to limit democratic rights to the broad masses after the removal of the Derg and during the period of National Democratic Revolution, and AESM sought to extend them to all the people, albeit after the declaration of socialism when all reactionary classes would have presumably been ousted from power. Despite this projection of democratic rights, however, the arguments in *Addis Zemen* made out that EPRP (advocates of unlimited rights) sought to extend democratic rights to the reactionary classes, and AESM (advocates of limited rights) sought to limit them to the broad masses. As suggested earlier, the debate relates to the time of the Derg.

Articles written in support of AESM's position argued that in no class society are rights the same for all classes; that proletarian dictatorship is brought about not through the granting of rights to the reactionary classes but through violent and bloody struggle

with them; and that if democratic rights are not limited to the masses, the opportunists, swindlers and reactionaries would confuse the people and reinstate the old order.<sup>52</sup> For its part, EPRP argued that the claim that reactionaries might use rights given to them to their own advantage was indeed a problem but at the same time showed lack of confidence in the broad masses who had resisted the *ancien régime* heroically and thereby showed the degree of their consciousness; that, rights or no rights, the reactionaries were shedding blood all over the country; that it was not laws but the people who could curtail the freedom of action of the reactionaries; and that if rights were granted for a given class but not for another, there would be a problem concerning who was to act as the arbiter on the question of who was and was not reactionary.<sup>53</sup>

Here, EPRP seemed to be caught unprepared; it seemed to want to give a modicum of rights to the reactionary classes. However, given the provision cited from its programme above and given its other records (its agitation for the violent ousting of landlords from their land, its condemnation of EDU, etc.) it is impossible to assume that it was any more reconciliatory toward the reactionary class than AESM. At any rate, the question of limited versus unlimited rights was perhaps the most dangerous of the issues raised by the two organizations because of its implication that EPRP itself could be characterized as a 'swindler, opportunist and reactionary' organization and, at best, be denied the democratic right to organize and agitate among the people or, at worst, be eliminated by the Derg, as happened later.

*Privatization versus nationalization of rural land*

EPRP's programme went along with most of the ideas contained in the Derg's measure of nationalization of rural land of March 1987. Thus, the programme announced that EPRP would advocate the redistribution of land to peasants, the settlement of nomadic people for agricultural purposes, the gradual and voluntary collectivization of holdings and promotion of state farms. One important departure from the Derg's policy was that EPRP would base its redistribution of land not on use-right but on private ownership of holdings.<sup>54</sup> As noted earlier, the only Derg measure that the EPRP had accepted wholeheartedly was the

nationalization of rural land; the reasons for its deviation from that position later are not altogether clear. There is no doubt, however, that it constituted a change of mind which brought it closer to the position of EDU than AESM.

On the other hand, AESM's programme endorsed the Derg's agrarian strategy in its entirety, and declared that its only concern was the correct implementation of that policy.<sup>55</sup> *Addis Zemen* articles written in support of AESM's position on the question rejected EPRP's endorsement of private ownership of redistributed holdings as going against Marxism.<sup>56</sup>

*People's versus bureaucratic control of the economy*

By and large, both EPRP and AESM went along with the Derg's nationalization of urban land and extra houses, industrial and commercial enterprises and financial institutions particularly those owned by aliens.<sup>57</sup> The difference between the two groups related to the appropriate management of the nationalized means of production and other undertakings; EPRP seemed to want to pursue a more decentralized form of management than did AESM. EPRP's paper (*Democracia*) had throughout been condemning the Derg's nationalization measures because, it claimed, they transferred the means of production from private to bureaucratic control instead of transferring them from private to people's control. EPRP's programme reiterated the same position: for instance, it guaranteed that rural land would come under 'the full control of the broad peasant masses in practice';<sup>58</sup> that industry and finance would not come under the monopolist control of the bureaucracy; that their 'economy and finance' would be brought under the people's control;<sup>59</sup> and that 'all banks, insurance companies, corporations, power stations, big transport companies, communications, basic industries, mines . . .' of the state would be brought under 'the direct control of the people in practice'.<sup>60</sup> Further, EPRP's overall management strategy was declared to be 'to plan for a balanced and self-reliant economy based on the correct relationship between agriculture and industry and between light and heavy industries'.<sup>61</sup>

AESM made no such reference to people's control of the nationalized micro-economic units in its papers or programme. On the contrary, it welcomed the nationalization of rural land by

the Derg;<sup>62</sup> the retention as public property of the nationalized industrial, distributing and commercial companies;<sup>63</sup> and the placing of all foreign trade under the 'control of the state'.<sup>64</sup> AESM's programme further provided that its policy concerning the management of the economy was to be based on 'a strong and centrally planned . . . national economy . . .'.<sup>65</sup>

EPRP's notion of the people's control of the micro-economic units was never explained but it can perhaps be interpreted to mean peasant associations and workers' control of the units rather than control by the government bureaucracy. This, coupled with the idea of the national plan (the purpose of which was not to bring the national economy under central control but to iron out imbalance between the agricultural and industrial sectors and between light and heavy industries), gives the impression that EPRP was in favour of a decentralized, democratic economic order. Conversely, AESM's espousal of a 'strong centrally planned national economy' and its emphasis on the industrial sector (as reflected by the declaration in its programme that 'with agriculture as the foundation of the economy, all possible efforts are to be made to establish and expand heavy and light modern industries that will play a leading role in the development of the economy throughout the country')<sup>66</sup> suggest that its strategy was more urban-based and centralization-orientated than that of EPRPs.

#### CONCLUSION

Despite the publicity given to the debates, it is doubtful whether the population, save those within it who were already versed in Marxist literature, was any the wiser for it. In the first place, Marxist terminology was new to the official language (Amharic) in which the debates were conducted; as a result, a lot of new usage of old terms and the coining of new phrases had to be made. A more confusing problem was the multiplicity of the topics raised and discussed but not sufficiently distinguished one from the other. An enumeration of the types of government discussed in the debates makes the point clear: the *ancien régime*, the Derg, the Provisional People's Congress, the Provisional People's Government, the People's Revolutionary Government, the People's Republic, the party etc. To make matters worse, each of these in

turn had a multitude of names by which they were called. The bulk of the debate revolved around the question of what a Leninist party's position ought to be towards these different stages of government in the process of attaining a socialist political order.

As argued earlier, most of the issues raised by the two organizations were concerned with strategies of how to get to power and reflect the time when they were debated (end of 1975 and 1976). As such, the positions adopted cannot explain the essence of the differences between the EPRP and AESM since their existence as different organizations precedes the controversies under consideration. Perhaps the real importance of the public debate lay in widening the already existing gap between the two organizations; in arming their adherents, the members of the Derg, and the society at large with slogans and polemics, with which they fought verbal wars; and in defining the cleavages along which the civil war was fought out later.

On the theoretical plane, it could be argued that EPRP espoused Maoism and AESM Stalinism. The former talked about the New Democratic Revolution, raising a people's army and encircling the cities into submission from a rural base, and about people's control of the nationalized means of production, which were more similar to the locally managed communes of China than to the centrally run collectives and enterprises of the USSR. As of the middle of 1975, however, EPRP seemed to revise its earlier positions and move towards moderation and an urban-based revolutionary strategy. Thus, it advocated the need to develop capitalist relations of production before a successful socialist revolution could be carried out;<sup>67</sup> private ownership of redistributed rural land; the formation of a provisional government made up of the mass organizations (which were mainly urban-based) to lead the revolution to victory; in addition to which it abandoned its idea of a rural people's army in favour of an urban armed struggle against AESM and the Derg as of the autumn of 1976. Conversely, AESM was, during the same period, moving away from the more reconciliatory stance of inviting the public to read the progressive paper of EPRP, beside its own, to initiating a public controversy with it. Thus, the leaders of AESM returned to Ethiopia in early 1975 to ride the tide of change – an event which they apparently likened to Lenin's return to revolutionary Russia – and subsequently identified themselves with the

highly centralized government of the Derg; advocated a strong centrally planned national economy and the mobilization of the national economy by giving a leading role to the industrial sector. These positions coupled with the fact that it had no rural revolutionary strategy could, arguably, identify AESM with Stalin rather than with Mao.

Nevertheless, it is doubtful if these theoretical questions were at the bottom of the differences between the two organizations. First, most of those differences in outlook developed after the emergence of the two as different organizations. Secondly, most of those differences did not figure substantially in the controversy under consideration. Finally, the fact that both of them were changing their positions on some of the questions distorted whatever clarity there might have been previously.

It is suggested that the real differences between EPRP and AESM remain deeply embedded in the annals of the Ethiopian Student Movement of the early 1970s: in the differences of going abroad at different times, in personal rivalries, and in group competition for leadership of student bodies. The conflict that flared up in student circles then was later fed with fiery polemics and slogans to justify and sustain the notion that the differences between the two organizations were no mere splitting of hairs but rooted in irreconcilably antagonistic ideological foundations. For Ethiopians, as perhaps for most peoples of the world, the art of politics is not the art of compromise but of victory – a cultural bias which the traditional factional infighting common to Marxist groups did very little to mitigate.

## CHAPTER 6

### *Scientific socialism and the structure of the government*

#### FROM AFRICAN SOCIALISM TO SCIENTIFIC SOCIALISM

With the return from abroad of the radical left and especially of the adherents of EPRP and AESM as of the summer of 1974, Ethiopia started acquiring the first generation of organized progressive revolutionaries. Within a year, they dominated the political scene of the country by entrenching themselves in the already politicized corporate groups and movements and were in a position to challenge the monopoly of power of the Derg. The adoption by the Derg of the ideology of the civilian left not only seemed to offer the hope of closing the gap between it and the leftist political organizations but also came nearest to exonerating the Derg's atrocities against the high civilian and military dignitaries of the old order as well as providing a theoretical basis for its measures of nationalization. The adoption of liberal politics such as was represented by the Ethiopian Democratic Union meant, in part at least, having to account for measures that were not appropriate or legal. It was for considerations like these and its nationalist-populist sentiments (and not because of a pre-existing commitment to radical politics) that the Derg set in motion, as of September 1975, the process of adopting Marxism-Leninism as an appropriate ideology for Ethiopia.

On the occasion of the inauguration of Revolution Square in Addis Ababa on 11 September 1975, the chairman of the Derg (Brigadier General Teferi Bante) gave a strong indication that the process of adopting a new ideology by the government was underway. He said that the Derg's programme of action for the following year of the Ethiopian calendar (September 1975–August 1976) would include, among others, a new labour legislation to help workers become organized, politicized and more productive;

political education for the peasants; the establishment of a mass Political Education and Co-ordination office under a People's Organizing Political Committee (the latter of which had apparently already been created by the Derg); and the 'leadership of the masses by revolutionary democracy'.<sup>1</sup> From then to April 1976, the rhetoric of the Derg began to change: mostly it continued to talk of 'Ethiopia First' and of 'Ethiopian Socialism'; at times, however, it started using the terms and phrases of the leftist groups. A communiqué of the Derg issued towards the end of September 1975 declared that it would hand power over to the workers, peasants and the true progressives after it had destroyed the reactionary classes.<sup>2</sup> Also, in his December 1975 address to a seminar on the implementation of a new labour legislation, the first vice-president (Major Mengistu) emphasized that a revolutionary workers' organization is one which is anti-feudal, anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist.<sup>3</sup> Further, on the occasion of the Adwa victory day anniversary (3 March 1976), the first chairman of the Derg talked of anti-feudal, anti-capitalist and anti-colonial struggle<sup>4</sup> but concluded his speech on the occasion of another victory day a month later by saying: 'May the Lord of Peace, the all-powerful God allow us to have peace and enable us to celebrate the occasion again next year.'<sup>5</sup>

The same trend was reflected in the legislation of the Derg at the time. The preambles to those legislations started dropping 'Ethiopian Socialism' in favour of just 'Socialism' and the new labour legislation and the Peasant Association Consolidation Proclamation of December 1975 gave trade unions and peasant associations extensive political roles in their relations with their members. Thus, unions had to function in line with socialist principles and co-operate in the formulation of political directives;<sup>6</sup> and Peasant Associations were directed to enable the peasantry to participate in the struggle against feudalism and imperialism by building its consciousness in line with socialism, and were directed to establish, among other things, co-operative societies and peasant defence squads.<sup>7</sup> Similarly service co-operative societies were obliged 'to give education in socialist philosophy and co-operative work in order to enhance the political consciousness of the peasantry'<sup>8</sup> and the agricultural producers' co-operatives 'to struggle for the gradual abolition of exploitation from the rural areas and to refrain from any kind of

exploitation', and 'to engage in continuous political involvement in order to enhance the political consciousness of the members'.<sup>9</sup> Similar provisions existed for the politicization and the arming of the Urban Dwellers' Associations as well. The idea of defence squads, which were envisaged for both Peasant Associations and Urban Dwellers' Associations, was none other than what AESM and EPRP had been advocating as the arming of the masses in order to defend the revolution against its enemies. Thus, while EPRP and AESM were agitating for the politicization, organization and arming of the masses, the Derg was implementing the same, not under the control of these organizations but under its own.

The People's Organizing Political Committee, which the first chairman mentioned on 10 September 1975 as already having come into existence, appears to have been made up of seven Derg members as well as Lij Michael Imiru (political adviser to the chairman of the Derg) and four ministers. The members of the Derg on the committee were Major Mengistu Haile-Mariam (chairman), Major Sisay Habte, Captain Moges Wolde-Michael, Captain Alemayehu Haile, Lieutenant Colonel Asrat Desta, Major Birihanu Baye, and Major Debela Dinsa.<sup>10</sup> Obviously, this committee was launched for the purpose of articulating the ideology required to involve the masses in what the chairman of the Derg called: 'revolutionary democracy'. As it happened, the committee seems to have chosen to delegate this mandate to another committee made up of individuals better versed in the subject matter while retaining for itself the power of supervision. As already noted, the impending establishment of such a committee (the Mass Political Education and Co-ordination Committee) was announced by the chairman of the Derg on 10 September 1975. Soon after, the members of that committee were interviewed and recruited by the People's Organizing Political Committee and the committee was in full swing as of December 1975. Its members were Haile Fida (chairman), Senaye Likke (vice-chairman), Negede Gobeze, Tesfaye Shewaye, Fikre Merid, Wond-Wosen Hailu, Melese Ayalew, Mesfin Kasu, Alemu Abebe, Bezabh Maru, Nigist Adane, Andargachew Asegid, Yonas Admasu, Ishetu Chole and Asefa Medhane. With the exception of several of these like Senaye Likke (leader of Workers' League), Yonas Admasu (member of EPRP who probably joined the committee without declaring his allegiance to that organization), Tesfaye Shewaye,

Melese Ayalew, Ishetu Chole and Asefa Medhane (Independent Marxist), the others were members of AESM.

By 20 April 1976, the Mass Political Education and Co-ordinating Committee had completed drafting what came to be known as 'The National Democratic Revolutionary Programme of Ethiopia' (NDRPE) and the People's Organizing Political Committee and the Derg had approved the same.<sup>11</sup> In a radio and television address to the nation on the same day, Major Mengistu explained the outlines of the Programme in a fair amount of detail. He said that feudalism had emerged in Ethiopia towards the end of the Axumite Empire (the end of the millennium) and had spread first to northern Ethiopia and then been imposed by Emperor Menilick on the pre-existing feudal system of southern Ethiopia towards the end of the nineteenth century. Imperialism had come to Ethiopia, he continued, with the scramble for Africa in the late nineteenth century; although political independence had not been lost by the country as a result, imperialism had penetrated Ethiopia and started exploiting the people. Then, feudalism and imperialism had created the instrument of exploitation (bureaucratic capitalism) which co-ordinated them in their drive to exploit the people. Bureaucratic capitalism was described as devoid of nationalism and any intention of liberating the country; rather, it was interested in using its power to amass wealth illegally. These three (imperialism, feudalism and bureaucratic capitalism), as well as comprador bourgeoisie, he explained, constituted the enemies of the Ethiopian people.

Pitted against these were, he explained, the workers, farmers, the anti-feudal, anti-imperialist *petite bourgeoisie*, and similar classes, who had been resisting exploitation over the years and who, since February 1974, had been scoring a number of victories against the reactionaries. The exploited classes, he continued, constituted the bulk of the population, and had to rise and fight for the NDRPE. He explained further that the programme was called 'National' because it liberated the people from neo-colonialism and imperialism; and it was called 'Democratic' because it abolished feudalism and bureaucratic capitalism, made the masses owners of the means of production, gave them democratic rights and resolved the national and workers' questions democratically. The difference between a *bourgeois* and a democratic revolution was that the former was led by the *bourgeoisie* and abolished feudalism,

whereas the latter was led by the workers and abolished feudalism, imperialism and bureaucratic capitalism.

Mengistu concluded his speech by making an impassioned appeal to progressives. He said that the neighbouring states were not supportive of revolution or of a strong socialist Ethiopia; that Ethiopia was the land of many oppressed people and not of many revolutionaries; that time is life; and that, therefore, 'it is the duty of revolutionaries to form a joint front quickly and fight feudalism, imperialism and bureaucratic capitalism'.<sup>12</sup>

The NDRPE was published in the daily papers the next day (21 April 1976).<sup>13</sup> The Programme was envisaged to govern the period during which the progressive forces and the broad masses would be politicized, armed and organized in order to eliminate the reactionary classes, the workers' party formed, and the people's democratic republic established.

The Programme declared that the government would give its urgent attention to the following matters. The broad masses were to be engaged in 'a continuous revolutionary process' under which they would be involved in mass consciousness, in the setting up of mass organizations and in being armed in order to eliminate the class enemies of the people. In this way the masses were to struggle for the establishment of a people's revolutionary front and the government would back them in the endeavour.<sup>14</sup>

Further, the government acknowledged that, in order for the masses to become politically conscious, organized and armed, only the anti-feudal, anti-imperialist and anti-bureaucratic-capitalist forces should be allowed to exercise democratic rights, including freedom of speech, press, assembly, holding peaceful demonstrations, and of forming organizations.<sup>15</sup> Also, the government recognized that the programme would be assured of victory when the anti-feudal and anti-imperialist parties and organizations formed a united revolutionary front; that the struggle of democratic parties under the umbrella of the anti-feudal and anti-imperialist objective would strengthen the common revolutionary mass struggle; and that the victories of the united revolutionary front would be consolidated when the vanguard of the revolution (the working-class party) was established. Thus the government committed itself to extending 'unceasing support' to revolutionary parties whose struggle would be aimed at the establishment of a working-class party, the

'necessary moral and material support to democratic parties willing to work under the joint front',<sup>6</sup> and 'special assistance' to the working-class party.<sup>16</sup>

Something not declared to require the urgent attention of the government and hence, perhaps, a matter of long-term interest, was the establishment of a non-provisional government. It was stated that after the masses were organized and the revolutionary joint front formed, the people would elect the members of a people's revolutionary assembly through free and secret ballot. The candidates were to be representatives of parties and organizations that took part in the struggle to organize the masses and to form the joint front. The people's revolutionary assembly was declared to constitute 'the highest political office in the government'. Then, in line with a constitution to be approved by the representatives of the people (perhaps meaning a constitution to be drawn and approved by the people's revolutionary assembly), the people's democratic republic would be established under the leadership of the working-class party.<sup>17</sup>

As noted in the last chapter, AESM was working in close collaboration with the Derg; in fact it is often said that the leader of AESM (Haile Fida) personally drafted the NDRPE. Under the circumstances, it is not surprising that AESM's positions as described in the previous section were incorporated wholesale into the NDRPE. The emphasis on politicization, organization and arming of the masses; the granting of democratic rights exclusively to the masses and to progressives; the holding of democratic elections only after the elimination of the reactionary classes; and the establishment, in this way, of the people's democratic republic were all positions emphatically claimed by AESM as its own. Perhaps, the most important difference in this regard between EPRP and AESM was concerning the duration of the Derg; EPRP sought to abolish it right away in favour of what it called 'The Provisional People's Government' while AESM showed its willingness for the Derg to continue to rule by evading the subject, by according the Derg what it called 'critical support' or by expressing a desire to collaborate with what was, to it, 'the left wing of the Derg'. Here, too, AESM's position was upheld by the NDRPE, since the latter envisaged the continuation of the Derg until the establishment of the people's democratic republic.

The Derg's intention to preside over the implementation of the

NDRPE and all that it entailed is seen more clearly in the legalization of the committees which were primarily responsible for the drafting and approval of the programme. On 21 April 1976, a proclamation was decreed inaugurating the establishment of a new agency called 'The People's Organizing Provisional Office', later re-christened 'The Provisional Office for Mass Organizational Affairs' (POMOA). This agency was a fully fledged government department, which was to receive a budgetary allocation from the Treasury;<sup>18</sup> manage affairs coming within its jurisdiction under the direction of a body called 'The Supreme Organizing Committee' to be established by the head of state (perhaps the Derg);<sup>19</sup> and submit quarterly reports on its activities to that committee.<sup>20</sup> The Supreme Organizing Committee was most probably what was referred to earlier as the People's Organizing Political Committee chaired by Mengistu.

POMOA's leading organ was its commission of fifteen members who were directed to organize themselves into four permanent subcommittees in the areas of philosophy dissemination and information, political education, current affairs, and organization affairs.<sup>21</sup> The commission is none other than The Mass Political Education and Co-ordinating Committee discussed earlier. Also, POMOA was to have branch offices at the provincial, *Awraja* and *wereda* levels, for which the commission was to review periodic reports on their activities<sup>22</sup> and to which it had to assign cadres.<sup>23</sup> In addition, the commission was entrusted with the task of heading the new Yekatit 1966 Political School, established for training cadres.<sup>24</sup>

Further mandates of POMOA included: enforcing and interpreting the scope of a democratic rights proclamation (a proclamation which was promised but never decreed); preparing articles and directives on the philosophy of socialism in the languages of various nationalities and disseminating the same; and preparing directives and plans for training of cadres at home and abroad.<sup>25</sup> The developments which were not specifically envisaged by the legislation but which followed in the wake of POMOA's establishment were the launching of its paper (called *Revolutionary Ethiopia*) used for the dissemination of Marxism-Leninism, and a weekly discussion meeting lasting two hours in all governmental and non-governmental organizations in the country.

As is obvious from the names of the permanent subcommittees and the discussions above, the main task of politicizing the masses along Marxist–Leninist lines, for which AESM had been agitating so much, was entrusted to POMOA (which was dominated by AESM but controlled by the Derg). The other question for which it had been agitating as much (the organizing of the masses into mass organizations) had, however, to be shared by POMOA with government agencies created partly for the purpose, like the Ministry of Urban Development and Housing and Ministry of Agriculture. The third focus of AESM’s agitations (the arming of the masses) was, nevertheless, retained by the Derg completely. The fact that the law on democratic rights was promised but never enacted not only hindered the emergence of new political organizations but also left the existing ones in limbo. It must be noted that what was stated in the POMOA proclamation was much more concrete than what was stated in the NDRPE, since the former is a legal document and the latter a declaration of policy.

Be that as it may, the NDRPE constituted a massive ideological shift on the part of the Derg, not for the first time either. ‘Ethiopia First’ of July 1974 could be described as the programme of a *coup d’état*; ‘Ethiopian Socialism’ of December 1974 as a programme of African socialism; and ‘the NDRPE’ of April 1976 as a programme of scientific socialism. The first of these programmes did not have a policy on the question of party formation but merely criticized the officials of the old order and talked about the ‘general good’ as something to be pursued in the future. ‘Ethiopian Socialism’ was also inward looking: ‘the political philosophy should spring from the culture and the soil of Ethiopia and should, moreover, emanate from the aspiration of the broad masses and not be imported from abroad like some decorative article of commerce . . . The political philosophy which emanates from our great religions which teach the equality of man, from our tradition of living and sharing together, as well as from our History so replete with national sacrifice, is Hibretesebawinet’ (Ethiopian Socialism).

Further, it saw the Ethiopian society as a mere extension of the family: not only did it assert that contradictions between the rulers and the ruled had emerged only in the previous thirty years, but it also argued that the appropriate party for Ethiopia was: ‘a single mass party embracing the whole of society, engaging the people in

a free exchange of ideas and acting as a check against government ineptitude . . . '. The NDRPE, on the other hand, saw the Ethiopian society as divided into classes, and the unfolding events since 1974 as part of a workers' world-wide movement towards socialism. It further provided for the establishment of more than one party, but such parties had to be anti-feudal, anti-imperialist, and anti-bureaucratic-capitalist, and also had to aim at establishing a single workers' party.

To sum up, because of the preponderance of leftist movements in the wake of the 1974 uprising, the Derg was persuaded to adopt, not only increasingly radical socio-economic reforms as discussed in the previous chapter, but also Marxism–Leninism as the official ideology of Ethiopia. It would appear that the Derg need not have involved the radical left in its decision-making processes. However, starting from well before 1974, the Students' Movement had established the orthodoxy that to be Marxist was to be progressive. Consequently, upon its seizure of power, the Derg invited leftist individuals at home and abroad to come and work with it and, when they did, assigned them to work in its headquarters as well as in key government positions. This gave factions of the civilian left ample opportunity to influence members of the Derg and, as will be noted in the following chapter, to involve them in the factional feuds of the civilian left.

To conclude, some have dismissed ideology as unimportant on the ground that Marxism–Leninism is a smoke screen for justifying the seizure and exercise of power by the military. This may well have been the intention of the Derg in adopting NDRPE. However, in the first place, the adoption of an ideology by the Derg has provided it with a kind of legitimacy to rule or as much claim to power as the civilian left. Secondly, Marxism–Leninism has been important in rallying certain sections of the partisans of the ideology and of the masses of the population behind the government. Thirdly, the ideology was crucial in influencing the direction of the revolution. Marxism–Leninism has in practice concrete programmes: nationalization of the means of production, central planning of the economy, an anti-West pro-East foreign policy and the like. As will be noted in the following chapters, it was this direction that Ethiopia followed, more determinedly than ever, after the adoption of the NDRPE and after Mengistu's ascent to absolutist powers.

THE ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE OF THE GOVERNMENT

In the immediate aftermath of the Derg's establishment in late June 1974, its 106 or so members divided themselves into four subcommittees and a general committee in order to discharge their tasks effectively. The four subcommittees were: an Executive Committee, an Information and Public Relations Committee, a Planning and Directives Committee and a Discipline Committee. The general committee, sometimes referred to as the Politburo, was made up of representatives of the subcommittees and was the supreme organ of the Derg. Membership of these committees was decided by vote of the general assembly of the Derg.<sup>26</sup>

At the time, the members of the Derg lived and worked in the headquarters of the Fourth Division. They were, therefore, able to attend general and subcommittee meetings at will. In fact, the need to secure a majority vote among so many participants explains, in part at least, the sluggishness with which the Derg took its early decisions, the 'creeping coup' in the summer of 1974 being a case in point. As a result, the subcommittees which came into existence soon after the Derg's establishment were revised starting from September 1974 with a view to making the operations of the Derg efficient.

By the end of 1974, their number had been expanded to include the following subcommittees: Political and Foreign Affairs, Defence Administration, Legal Affairs, Information and Public Relations, Economic, Social Affairs, Cultural Affairs, Security, Confiscations, Prison Affairs and National Development Campaign. The chairmen of the subcommittees together with the chairman and the first and second vice-chairmen of the Derg constituted yet another committee called 'the Ad-hoc Supreme Organizing Committee'.<sup>27</sup> The last committee replaced the General Committee of the previous arrangement. Again, membership of these committees and positions of leadership in the same were determined by votes of the general assembly.

In the subsequent few years, there were a number of revisions, concerning, primarily, change of some of the chairmen of the subcommittees. For example, according to a report of the Derg, there were six such revisions by September 1975.<sup>28</sup> Nonetheless, the thirteen committees, including the Ad-hoc Supreme Organizing Committee, remained a constant feature of the Derg's

organizational framework until the revisions of December 1976 and February 1977, when major changes of the Derg's structure were introduced for the final time.

The structural changes that were introduced as of September 1974 were to result in the discharge from their Derg functions of the non-members of the Ad-hoc Supreme Organizing Committee. On 17 October the Derg's office was transferred from the headquarters of the Fourth Division to the Grand Palace; this meant that the offices of the chairmen of the Derg and of the subcommittees were housed there. From then on, the Derg members who were not elected as chairmen of subcommittees were made available for various assignments outside the Derg offices. They were assigned to government agencies and their branch offices as watch-dogs, dispatched as roving ambassadors to provinces to explain Derg policies to local officials and the people, and later sent to socialist countries for political training or posted permanently to head provincial and sub-provincial administrations. Even among the ones kept in the palace, the lower-ranking members were used as clerks and messenger boys.<sup>29</sup>

However, the Derg was not disbanded altogether; rather, it was retained and continued to play a role at least in one respect. When the Ad-hoc Supreme Organizing Committee agreed on a given policy, it might call the general assembly (which usually consisted of those who happened to be in the capital city at the time) and push its decision through, with hardly any debate at all. The March 1975 decision to nationalize rural land is a case in point. However, when a difference arose among the members of the committee, there ensued a clamour to influence all the members of the Derg to one point of view or another after having called them to a general assembly from wherever they were. Though the execution of the sixty or so officials of the old-state can be cited as an example, this scenario was more typical of later days than the period under consideration. On such occasions, the general assembly was the final arbiter on the point at issue.

This left the members of the Ad-hoc Supreme Organizing Committee to carry out the day-to-day functions of the central government. In fact, in early November, the civilian left had started referring to these men as constituting a 'Fascist officers' junta' as the repository of real power.<sup>30</sup> Almost all of them lacked

experience in government affairs but some among them were highly educated and able.

On 29 November 1974, the Derg elected the more amenable non-Derg member, Brigadier Gen Teferi Bante, as its chairman to replace Lt Gen Aman Andom who had been killed a week earlier.<sup>31</sup> Majors Mengistu Haile-Mariam and Atnafu Abate, who, at the inception of the Derg, were elected first vice-chairman and second vice-chairman of the Derg, respectively, retained their positions. Though in practice it led to periodic jurisdictional conflict between the two, Mengistu was given overall responsibility over security and political affairs and Atnafu over social and economic affairs.<sup>32</sup> All three were graduates of the Holeta Military Academy. Teferi was not a member of the Derg but Mengistu and Atnafu were; the latter two represented the Third and Fourth Divisions. While Mengistu was identified as radical from the time of the Derg's inception, the other two were regarded as moderates.

Of the remaining members of the Ad-hoc Supreme Organizing Committee, perhaps Major Sisay Habte and Captain Moges Wolde-Michael stood out as having been the architects of the Derg's 1975 and 1976 socio-economic and political reforms and later as serious contenders for leadership. Major Sisay, who came from the air force, had an MA degree in electrical engineering and was chairman of the Political and Foreign subcommittee while Captain Moges of the Airborne Brigade had a BA in Economics, and was chairman of the Economic subcommittee.

No less ambitious proponents of radical change were Captains Alemayehu Haile, Major Asrat Desta and Major Kiros Alemayehu. They were, respectively, chairmen of the Administration, the Information and Public Relations, and the National Development Campaign subcommittees. Captain Alemayehu was an undergraduate in the Faculty of Social Work and representative of Shoa Police, Major Asrat had an MA in Administration and was a representative of the Holeta Military Academy, and Major Kiros was a representative of the Airborne Brigade.

The remaining, who were not recognized for their independence of mind, included: Major Birihanu Baye, chairman of Legal Affairs, Major Demisse Deressa, chairman of Social Affairs, Major Tesfaye Gebre-Kidan, chairman of Defence Administration, Major

Nadew Zekaryas, chairman of Cultural Affairs, Major Teka Tulu, chairman of Security, Major Getachew Shibeshi, chairman of Confiscations, and Captain Kassayae Aragaw, chairman of Prison Affairs. Of these, Birihanu Baye of the Preparatory School for cadets of Harar had an LLB and Major Demisse of the Fourth Division had a BA in social work. The remaining five represented, respectively, the Tank Battalion under the Third Division, the Second Division, the Hararghe Police, the Airborne Brigade, and the Prison Police.

Out of these fifteen prominent members of the Derg, seven were graduates of the Holeta Military Academy, four from the Harar Academy, one from the air force, and three from the Police Abadina. The preponderance of the Holeta Military Academy graduates in the Derg can, perhaps, be explained by the fact that they lived and worked with the NCOs and privates who knew them well and, hence, were willing to elect them as their representatives to the Derg. Upon graduation, the Holeta officers were assigned to operational positions. It is also likely that the NCOs and privates, who are numerically by far the greatest in the individual battalions and brigades, found it easier to identify themselves with the Holeta graduates because of the similarity in their educational background.

With the exception of perhaps Major Asrat Desta, all the degree holders came from military academies other than Holeta. If found suitable, they were allowed to pursue further education after graduating from their military academies. The Holeta Academy was intended to provide practical officer courses for NCOs with very limited academic background. On the other hand, the Harar Academy, the air force, and the navy recruited from among school graduates and provided them with academic courses equivalent to three years' university education in addition to advanced military training. Obviously, the graduates of the last three academies were intended to constitute the elite of the armed forces.

Originally, the various departments of the Derg were intended to be run by subcommittees. Soon after the establishment of such subcommittees, however, they were headed and run by their chairmen with the other members being assigned to non-Derg functions. In effect, the members of the Ad-hoc Supreme Organizing Committee, who were also heads of the departments, emerged as the most prominent members of the Derg to play a

crucial role in the drafting and adoption of the Derg's early socio-economic and political reforms.

All these radical reforms could be said to have originated from the demands of the public and of the civilian activists. Once a policy was taken up by the Derg, however, it was up to the department heads to follow up their successful completion. Each one of them had one or more ministries and other public agencies under their jurisdiction to assist them in this endeavour. Following the initiation of a policy, a drafting committee was established in the relevant public agency over which the concerned head of the Derg's department presided. Again, after the completion of the draft, it was up to the same department head to submit and explain it to the Ad-hoc Supreme Organizing Committee. The latter would then approve it with or without referring the matter to a general assembly of the Derg.

The officers' junta with its powers and various departments used diverse methods to bring under its control the pre-existing state apparatus which it retained intact. For example, Lij Endalkachew's cabinet, which survived with a change of some of its members only, was made subordinate to the Derg, the powers of which were later taken over by the Ad-hoc Supreme Organizing Committee. One way in which this was done was through the appointment of the chairman of the Derg as the chairman of the cabinet as well.<sup>33</sup> The principal tasks of the chairman were stated to be presiding over the meetings of the cabinet and seeing to it that policy decisions of the Derg were implemented by it.<sup>34</sup> Another way in which the cabinet was brought under the control of the Derg was through its direct subordination to the latter. The responsibilities of the cabinet were explained to be deliberating over certain kinds of international agreements and having them ratified by the Derg;<sup>35</sup> advising the Derg on the manner of safeguarding the defence and integrity of the state and on the question of declaration of war;<sup>36</sup> and issuing regulations in order to implement higher laws enacted by the Derg.<sup>37</sup>

Given the fact that the individual government departments and their lower links were subordinate to the cabinet, one would have thought that the officers' junta would be content to have them implement its policies through the channels of the cabinet. But it was not to be so. As noted earlier, there were twelve Derg departments in charge of different areas of government activities. This

meant that the individual government agencies were responsible not only to the cabinet, but also to the Derg departments concerned. The government agencies could, at any time, receive directives from the cabinet or the Derg subcommittees and also be called upon to account for their actions by either of the two higher bodies, a case of double subordination.

The Derg did not satisfy itself with subordinating the individual government agencies and their branches directly through its departments and indirectly through the cabinet but also resorted to strengthening its grip over them by assigning to them individuals who were directly responsible to it. The assignees were heavily drawn from among the members of the Derg and of the ex-unit co-ordinating committees.<sup>38</sup> These committees, which had been leading the military and police units during the early 1974 uprising, were retained by the Derg upon its establishment. In the summer of 1974, they were restructured and instituted at the national, provincial and unit levels to act as a bridge between the Derg and the security forces.<sup>39</sup> Also, between July and November 1974 they were used to arrest the officials of the *ancien régime* and to confiscate their assets especially in the provinces.<sup>40</sup>

However, during the same period, some of the unit co-ordinating committees joined the civilian left in opposing the new government and, as a result, the Derg dissolved all of them towards the end of 1974. It gave some 276 of their ex-members a seminar on its programmes, dubbed them 'apostles of change', and, starting from 3 December 1974, assigned them to various government departments down to their lowest administrative units. By early 1975 almost all of the public agencies and their lower links had such representatives.

The functions of the ex-unit co-ordinating committee members were stated to be 'controlling' the implementation of Derg programmes by government officials, explaining Derg programmes to the people, and entertaining complaints by individuals.<sup>41</sup> The Derg explained that it had become necessary to assign the apostles of change to government departments because the officials there were reluctant to implement its laws.<sup>42</sup> The officers' junta also used them as its roving ambassadors. It sent them to the provinces to explain to the people such policy questions as 'Ethiopia First', the national development campaign, land reform, or to render instant decisions on problems that came their way.<sup>43</sup>

Yet another method employed to subordinate government agencies was to bring some of them, especially the new ones, under the direct control of the Derg itself. Examples of this were POMOA and the National Development Through Co-operation and Enlightenment and Work Campaign. The latter was established in November 1974 and declared to be an autonomous agency responsible to the Derg.<sup>44</sup> It was intended to 'exorcise' (through education and enlightenment) the rural population of all evils associated with backwardness such as lack of education, morality and of the existing unjust land-tenure system.<sup>45</sup>

It was decided that the participants were to be teachers and students of the last two years of all academic and technical secondary schools and those of institutions of higher education.<sup>46</sup> These teachers and students started being sent all over the country beginning on 14 January 1975 and, by September of that year, some 56,000 of them had actually been deployed in the field.<sup>47</sup> Also, some 982 officers and other ranking members of the armed forces and the police were deployed alongside the teachers and students: partly, it was explained by the Derg, to run the campaign centres and partly to provide security to the campaign participants.<sup>48</sup>

The National Development Campaign had its own framework of administrative structure. It had to work in co-operation with other public authorities<sup>49</sup> but was said to be autonomous from them.<sup>50</sup> However, it was subordinated to the Derg via the centre administrators, the provincial branch offices of the organization itself, its headquarters in the capital city, and the National Development Campaign Department of the Derg.

By way of conclusion, it is possible to compare the exercise of power by the Ad-hoc Supreme Organizing Committee to that of the King whom it had replaced. Besides being a head of state, the King had enjoyed extensive executive and legislative powers under the Revised Constitution of 1955. On the whole, however, he left the questions of initiating, drafting and implementing laws and policies to the cabinet and other relevant public authorities while retaining the power of final ratification for himself.<sup>51</sup> The Committee inherited the King's powers and, like him, left the question of initiating, drafting and implementing laws and policies to the cabinet and the other public authorities concerned with the matter at hand, subject to final approval of the policy by itself.<sup>52</sup>

Arguably, it is, perhaps, more apt to compare the new regime to communist parties of the socialist countries than to the King of the old-state. In their structure and operations, the Ad-hoc Supreme Organizing Committee and the Derg's assembly came to resemble, respectively, the politburos and the central committees of Leninist parties in the socialist countries. Further, the individuals assigned by the Ad-hoc Supreme Organizing Committee to work in the various government agencies down to their lowest levels were heavily drawn from the security forces. Hence, these men found it easy to identify themselves with the military regime and be loyal to it. Also, to oppose the Derg meant to incur severe punishment including summary execution. As a result, the individuals acted like cadres and party factions do in socialist countries: advocating the Derg's cause and its policies, controlling the agencies in which they worked and providing the regime with easy access to information about them.

Acting in the name of the Derg, the Ad-hoc Supreme Organizing Committee, like the kings of Ethiopia and politburos of Leninist parties, towered above the state apparatus issuing directives and retaining final say on all important matters. Until the spring of 1976 that Committee was able to effectively preside over the adoption of extremely radical socio-economic and political reforms like the nationalization of businesses, rural land, urban land and extra houses, and the proclamation of Ethiopian Socialism, and 'scientific socialism'. The adoption of NDRPE in April 1976 was the last important and collective act of the officers' junta. After that, grit was thrown into the collegiality of its members by the increasingly intense power struggle that emerged among themselves and among the political organizations which, as will be noted in the following chapter, had a tendency to reinforce each other and throw the Ad-hoc Supreme Organizing Committee into disarray.

## CHAPTER 7

### *From a junta to an autocratic dictatorship*

The previous chapters have shown how the Derg emerged as a collective body of absolute government power in 1974; how that power fell into the hands of an officers' junta by the beginning of 1975; and how that junta adopted radical socio-economic and ideological policies in 1975 and 1976. The adoption of NDRPE (scientific socialism) was the last important collective act of the junta. The adoption of this ideology was perhaps important in giving the changes some sense of direction; at the same time, however, it appears to have brought to the forefront the question of power, which has a greater claim on the minds of those engaged in the business of politics than does ideology. The present chapter is concerned mainly with the power struggle within the officers' junta and with the process of Mengistu Haile-Mariam's emergence from that as the absolute head of state.

The chapter is divided into three sections. Section A deals with the configuration of coalitions among the political groups in the country and with how, as part of the leadership of one of these coalitions, Mengistu rallied support around himself, thus posing a challenge to the pre-existing collegiality among the officers' junta of the Derg. Section B deals with the response of the junta to Mengistu's challenge; and section C with Mengistu's victory over the junta.

#### (A) MENGISTU'S CHALLENGE TO THE OFFICERS' JUNTA

As noted in the previous chapter, no less than seven pan-Ethiopianist organizations had sprung up on the political scene of Ethiopia by 1976. The proliferation of the pan-Ethiopian political organizations was matched by an even greater number of

secessionist movements, several of which had a much longer history than did the former. The most important of the secessionist movements were the Eritrean Liberation Front, the Eritrean People's Liberation Front, the Tigray People's Liberation Front, the Afar Liberation Front, the Oromo Liberation Front and the Western Somalia Liberation Front.

By the autumn of 1976, three important coalitions seemed to emerge, which brought about co-operation between the pan-Ethiopianist and secession organizations, and in some cases involved the neighbouring states. The first of these coalitions concerned the conservative Ethiopian Democratic Union (EDU). It has already been explained that the conservative states of the region, like Saudi Arabia, North Yemen and the Sudan, had been growing uneasy about the Derg's radicalism,<sup>1</sup> and that this had facilitated the conclusion of an agreement (summer 1976) between EDU and two of the conservative secessionist movements (the Eritrean Liberation Front and the Afar Liberation Front) concerning joint military operations against the Derg.<sup>2</sup> As the result of these developments, EDU was able to broadcast hostile propaganda against the Derg from the Sudanese radio station and, more importantly, to have access to Ethiopian territory through the Sudan and Eritrea.

Thus EDU was able to engage the Derg's military forces in the northern provinces of Gondar, Tigray and Wollo. EDU's strength was furthered by the alliance it could forge with the local traditional leaders in the areas of its operations and, through them, in having access to the peasants from whom it could raise fighting men. Although agricultural tenancy had been abolished by the Derg's nationalization of land, in the northern provinces, where tenancy was, in any case, limited, the reforms were of less import. In a lot of the cases the tenants in one locality were, at the same time, landlords in another; and though there were sizeable minorities whose members could only become tenants because they had no hereditary or other titles to land, they were too isolated to make a difference in the region's balance of power. On occasion the official media made out that certain of the bureaucracy were in secret league with EDU; however, EDU's urban presence in any organized form is extremely doubtful. As already noted, the essence of EDU's existence, according to its own programme, was the destruction of the Derg, just as the

Derg's had become the destruction of the forces of reaction, under which category it included EDU.

The second coalition concerned the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP) which had both a rural and an urban revolutionary strategy. Its early agitational successes among the peasants of southern Ethiopia were coming unstuck, mainly as a result of a counter-campaign which portrayed the government as the primary agent of the land reform of 1975 and hence as the one which 'gave' the peasants their land. EPRP had no military presence in the south. In the northern provinces, however, EPRP had bases and young revolutionary men and women under arms, drawn from among the student activists who were taking part in the campaign programme of the Derg. The success in the north could be explained, in part, by the receptiveness of the local population to agitation against the Derg, which could not be seen to have given land to many of them, and, in part, because the Derg could easily be portrayed as a dictatorial and illegitimate government. No less important to EPRP's success in the north was the agreement it reached with the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (the radical wing of the Eritrean secessionist movement) conferring guerrilla training facilities and passage to the interior in exchange for recognition by EPRP of Eritrea's right to secede from Ethiopia.<sup>3</sup> Further, a lot of weapons in Assimba (one of EPRP's bases) had the insignia of some of the radical Palestinian factions. It is not clear whether the weapons were delivered to EPRP as a result of a direct agreement between it and the factions, or transferred from the Eritrean People's Liberation Front; at any rate, it suggests that one or both organizations were working in collaboration with radical Palestinian movements. While the EPRP fighters in the countryside were recluses earning themselves the name of 'Cave Intellectuals', EPRP's urban armed struggle was pursued vigorously. In a relatively short period of time, it was able to infiltrate the unions and various other associations, and later the newly created Urban Dwellers' Associations. By the summer of 1976 it looked poised to oust the Derg from power.

With the adoption of the NDRPE in April 1976 and with the call by the programme and by Mengistu for the formation of a joint front among progressive forces, one might have expected that the gap between EPRP and the Derg would narrow and disappear. However, this was not so. While EPRP accepted the invitation to

form a joint front in principle – and this was in itself a most dramatic deviation from its unwavering position against any firm co-operation with the Derg – it attached so many conditions to its acceptance that it could only be taken as a rejection of the invitation.

First, it proposed five points that should be discussed by members of the joint front and incorporated into their common programme: the front must be led by the workers and must include the farmers, the *petite bourgeoisie* and other sections of the oppressed people; the front must be a forum for their united struggle against the reactionary classes, as well as a forum for struggling amongst themselves to promote the divergent interests within the oppressed classes; some sixteen enumerated mass organizations, movements and national and regional political groups must be represented in the front; the programme of the front must be discussed and adopted by member organizations; and all this must be carried out publicly and not behind the backs of the people.

Secondly, EPRP demanded that in addition to its nine-point minimum programme (points which were not really different from those of the NDRPE) the following six should also be incorporated: all treaties concluded with imperialist states, especially with the US, West Germany and Israel, which were prejudicial to the interests of the people and to the independence of the country, were to be repealed; the right of national self-determination up to and including secession was to be recognized, especially for Eritrea, and the organization leading the secessionist struggle in Eritrea was to be recognized as a legal representative of the people; the workers and peasants were to be armed immediately so that they could lead the revolution; the organizations that had become members of the joint front were to be given the freedom to agitate among the armed forces and recruit members from among them; since the bureaucracy, including the one within the armed forces and the police, had shown that it was anti-revolutionary, it should be demolished completely; and a provisional people's government was to be established by the forces that came under the joint front. EPRP also rejected POMOA because it was under the control of the government, because the appointment of its members was undemocratic, because it was not representative of the various

progressive sections of the population and because it represented the interests and the voice of one narrow group.

The above were presented by EPRP as points of negotiation between it and the government; much more important, however, were the following five points which EPRP insisted had to be met by the government before negotiations on the previous points could begin. The five points were: the repeal of all laws that curtailed democratic rights and the enactment, in their place, of laws guaranteeing unlimited democratic rights for the supporters of the anti-feudal, anti-imperialistic and anti-bureaucratic-capitalist revolution, namely, the workers, farmers, the *petite bourgeoisie* and the groups and movements that represented these classes; the immediate cessation of military campaigns against the Eritreans and other nationalities; the immediate and unconditional cessation of massacres of the masses, like the workers and peasants, which was still going on; the immediate release from prison and the cessation of persecution of progressives (like workers, teachers, members and leaders of peasant associations, that had taken part in national movements) and of members of the armed forces and the police who had been arrested for their participation in political activities; and the publication on radio, in the press and other mass media of the fact that the government had accepted and implemented these points. EPRP concluded these conditions with an invitation of its own: if the government was unwilling to meet the above prerequisites and start negotiations, it was the historical duty of all progressive and democratic forces to join it (EPRP) and, without the involvement of the government, form a joint front.<sup>4</sup>

It is worth citing the above EPRP response to Mengistu's call for the formation of a joint front on 20 April 1976, because it constituted the final rupture between EPRP and Mengistu's faction within the Derg, because it led to a division among the officers' junta of the Derg on the question of how to deal with the civilian left and because it finally led to the white-red terror confrontation between EPRP and the third coalition.

The third coalition concerned the remaining five pan-Ethiopianist organizations of the left (the All Ethiopian Socialist Movement – AESM, the Ethiopian Oppressed People's Revolutionary Struggle, the Ethiopian Marxist-Leninist Revolutionary Organization, the Workers' League and Revolutionary Flame). It

should be noted that there was no obvious affiliation between these and any of the separatist movements and external powers, with the exception perhaps of the Ethiopian Oppressed People's Revolutionary Struggle which was commonly believed to have colluded with the Oromo-based secessionist movements. Also, AESM, which was the biggest of these political organizations, was becoming identified with the southern part of the country because the north was dominated by EDU, EPRP and a string of secessionist movements and because, as an advocate of the Derg's land reform law, which 'granted' land to the tenants of the south, it could relate to the peasants more readily than could EPRP, which appeared to oppose the reform.

More importantly, however, all of the five organizations were urban-based, and whatever following they had was concentrated in the cities, and especially in Addis Ababa. With the acceptance by them of the government's NDRPE it became possible for them to dominate the official forums like POMOA, the Yekatit '66 Political School, the Urban Dwellers' Associations and, to a certain extent, the mass media. *Revolutionary Ethiopia* (a paper of POMOA), which was also at their disposal, became the instrument by which official ideology was expounded to the public. This third coalition used these forums to lump together the other two above-mentioned coalitions (those of EDU and EPRP) and condemn them with increasing monotony as reactionaries in league with imperialism, the CIA, the conservative Arab States, feudalism and bureaucratic capitalism.

The five organizations which formed the coalition were able to work closely with one another for different reasons. As noted in the previous chapter, the leader of the Workers' League was on POMOA's Commission helping draft the NDRPE with the leaders of AESM; there was hardly any difference between the Workers' League and Revolutionary Flame; and AESM had worked very closely with the Ethiopian Oppressed People's Revolutionary Struggle and the Ethiopian Marxist—Leninist Revolutionary Organization. When the NDRPE was finally adopted on 21 April 1976, it was easy for these groups to identify themselves with it and work under its prescriptions. By the summer, they had all expressed interest in the idea of forming a joint front among themselves, though the formal establishment of the front did not take place until February 1977.

An important aspect of this third coalition was the fact that it included within it some of the most powerful members of the Derg, namely Mengistu Haile-Mariam and his faction. After the execution of Lt Gen. Aman Andom, Mengistu had been enjoying the most prominent position in the government as the first vice-chairman of the Derg, because Aman's replacement as chairman (Brigadier General Teferi Bante) was relegated to presiding over the affairs of the subservient Council of Ministers, and since he was in any case a non-Derg member.

Also, Mengistu had formed his own faction within the Derg with the help of which he had created his political organization (Revolutionary Flame). It was this faction that AESM had been referring to as 'the left wing of the Derg'; further, AESM had been expressing interest in collaborating with that faction with a view to subsuming the remaining and willing members of the Derg under the joint leadership of Revolutionary Flame and AESM and ousting the unwilling members of the Derg from power.

There is perhaps no need to raise the question of whether the third coalition was the brain-child of AESM's leaders or a result of Mengistu's drive to effect a rupture among the civilian left and bring a section of it under his influence. The fact remains, nonetheless, that the formation of Revolutionary Flame and the *modus vivendi* arrived at between the five organizations including Revolutionary Flame was to boost Mengistu's power base within and outside the Derg. For his actions in the Derg, Mengistu could now count on the support of the Derg members who were at the same time members of Revolutionary Flame as well as those Derg members who were also adherents of the four other political organizations within the coalition. Further, he could now play a more effective role in influencing the government and non-governmental organizations through the cadres of the five groups.

This turn of events threw grit into the collective operation of the officers' junta, which had survived intact the adoption of the radical socio-economic reforms of 1975 and the NDRPE of April 1976. In the first place, the mere fact of the emergence of relatively strong political organizations and their close association with the Derg led its members to become suspicious of each other's affiliations with the political organizations. The affiliation of Mengistu's faction in the Derg to the third coalition was obvious;

though there is no concrete evidence to show that the remaining members of the Derg were full-fledged members of one political organization or another, it was also obvious that some among them were at least sympathisers or supporters of the other coalitions, especially that of EPRP. As a result, the officers' junta was unable to speak with one voice about the approach to be taken towards the civilian left.

More important were Mengistu's rallying of the third coalition around himself (with the result that he could now influence the outcome of events within and outside the Derg more effectively than ever before) and AESM's 'exaltation' of Mengistu's faction as the left wing of the Derg and its condemnation of the rest as reactionaries who needed to be brought under the leadership of Mengistu's coalition or else ousted from their positions. This was an open threat to the position of power of the members of the officers' junta that requires no further explanation.

Yet another point of friction was the Eritrean question, on which two parallel and contradictory policies were emerging at the time. In his address to the nation on 20 April 1976, concerning NDRPE, Mengistu had classified the Eritrean separatists as being in the camp of anti-revolutionaries (on an equal footing with landlords and the EDU) because, he argued, they had failed to form a joint front with Ethiopian progressives (as the Chinese communists and nationalists had done against Japan) and because they had instead attacked the revolution in collaboration with the conservative Arab States and the West.<sup>5</sup> About the same time, the government had launched a militia mobilization campaign apparently intended to raise a 400,000-strong peasant army, especially in the northern provinces and had started marching them north for deployment in Eritrea as of the end of May. EPRP opposed the move as being genocidal between oppressed brothers, as unlikely to succeed and as going against the successful outcome of the revolution.<sup>6</sup> EDU went further and claimed that it had helped to defeat the peasant march by attacking them on their way to Eritrea.<sup>7</sup>

By contrast, there was a policy in Eritrea which was issued on 17 May 1976, under the title 'A Policy Intended to Solve the Eritrean Problem Peacefully'. It was a nine-point policy, one point of which provided that the government would give full support for the co-operation of Ethiopian and Eritrean progressives to agitate,

organize and lead the working people of Eritrea on the basis of NDRPE and to facilitate the unity of the Ethiopian and Eritrean broad masses.<sup>8</sup>

The expectation of certain sections of the civilian left was that the adoption by Ethiopia of Marxism–Leninism would subsume under it contending ideologies (like religion and nationalism including both its chauvinist and local variants), and bring about greater unity within the country. Contrary to such expectations, however, it led to the emergence of warring factions among its proponents – factionalism which later engulfed members of the Derg. This turn of events led to a great deal of friction, not only among the civilian left but also among the officers' junta, over questions like ideology, the civilian left and Eritrea and, most importantly, over the question of power. Arguably, these were, in the final analysis, responsible for the bloody confrontation that followed in the wake of the adoption of NDRPE.

#### (B) THE DECLINE OF MENGISTU'S COALITION

The first to challenge Mengistu's newly acquired prominence was Sisay's group. After Majors Mengistu Haile-Mariam and Atnafu Abate (first and second vice-chairman of the Derg, respectively), Major Sisay Habte was the most influential member of the Derg, being entrusted with the task of heading the Political and Foreign Relations Department of the Derg. He was an air force major and, according to René Lefort, a radical intellectual with a master's degree from an American university and the architect of the rapprochement between the Derg and the civilian left.<sup>9</sup> Probably, he was also the most important author of 'Ethiopian Socialism' and an important contributor to the drafting and adoption of NDRPE.

It has already been noted that the functions of organizing and politicizing the masses were entrusted to POMOA when it was established along with the adoption of NDRPE. This meant that the day-to-day operation of those functions was overseen by Haile Fida, who was the chairman of POMOA and the leader of AESM, with Sisay's role in these matters being limited to sitting on POMOA's supervisory body (the Supreme Organizing Committee) chaired by Mengistu.<sup>10</sup> As a result, Sisay's role in domestic politics was substantially curtailed. The activities of his department

(Political and Foreign Affairs) were limited to overseeing the operations of the Foreign Office; as far as regards receiving diplomats and foreign guests, the chairman and first vice-chairman of the Derg had precedence over him.

Apart from the narrowing down of the scope of his functions, or perhaps, because of it, Sisay found himself at odds with Mengistu over certain matters. One instance of this concerned EPRP's rejection of Mengistu's call for the formation of a joint front among progressive organizations. After this incident, Mengistu wanted nothing else but the declaration of an all-out war against EPRP; Sisay, on the other hand, sought to pursue a more conciliatory approach towards that organization. Needless to say, AESM aided and abetted Mengistu's position.<sup>11</sup>

Similarly, Sisay and Mengistu were at odds over the Eritrean question. After the May declaration of the nine-point policy concerning Eritrea, a committee led by Sisay had started secret negotiations with the leaders of the Eritrean People's Liberation Front. However, the negotiation was not making much headway, not least because Haile Fida, who was also on the committee, was at loggerheads with Sisay on this question as on all others. As opposed to Mengistu who went for the aggressive policy on Eritrea as described earlier, Sisay apparently sought to give a chance to the peace offensive as reflected in the nine-point policy declaration of the Derg.

In early July, Captain Moges Wolde-Michael led a high delegation to Moscow to explain Ethiopia's adoption of scientific socialism and to seek economic aid.<sup>12</sup> Apparently, Sisay was supposed to lead that delegation but had declined when asked to do so, perhaps because he was preoccupied with other concerns. On 10 July he is said to have launched an abortive *coup d'état* which, according to most observers, was directed against Mengistu. The coup is said to have involved Major Kiros Alemayehu (head of the National Development Campaign), Lt Sileshi Beyene (member of the Political and Foreign Affairs Department), General Nadew Zekarias (commander of the armed forces in Eritrea and a non-Derg member) and many more non-Derg members, mostly from the armed forces. Some nineteen of these including Sisay and Getachew Nadew were arrested by Daniel Haile (head of the Derg's Security Command) and executed on 13 July.<sup>13</sup> A month later, Kiros was reported to have

committed suicide while in prison;<sup>14</sup> Negash and a Lt Col Alemayehu Asfaw of the paratroop battalion, who was not a member of the Derg, defected to the Eritrean People's Liberation Front and to EPRP, respectively.<sup>15</sup>

It is not clear whether Daniel's move against Sisay and his group was authorized by the Derg as suggested by John Spencer,<sup>16</sup> or by Mengistu acting on his own behalf as suggested by most other observers. In fact, René Lefort takes the second proposition further and suggests that, in a 16 July general assembly meeting of the Derg, one member demanded that Mengistu explain by what right he had alone decided the execution of Aman Andom a few years earlier and that of Sisay and his group then. Mengistu reacted by demanding the arrest of the questioner but the Derg refused to grant the request.<sup>17</sup> The speed with which the action was taken against Sisay's group and its similarity with the earlier circumstances in which Aman and others were executed dictates the conclusion that Mengistu and his close associates did indeed perpetrate the summary execution of the group upon discovering the possibility of the existence of a plot to overthrow the government.

Obviously, the general assembly of the Derg was called to a meeting after the event; it was called in order to get an explanation of the incident. Sisay was accused of having been in the habit of changing his flight schedules whenever he was sent abroad on missions in order to make contacts with agents of imperialism, and of having refused to undertake his revolutionary duty of leading a high-level delegation to the Soviet Union. Apparently, such allegations were first made by EPRP and what the general assembly was being asked to believe was that the reason EPRP accused Sisay was because they intended to cover up the existence of their collusion with him.<sup>18</sup> It is not clear whether Sisay was accused in the assembly of having planned to overthrow the government, but the official line has since been to compare Pinochet's coup against Salvador Allende to the abortive 'counter-coup' of Sisay, in alliance with EPRP, the Eritrean Liberation Front and the CIA against the Ethiopian revolution. However, there is no independent evidence to show whether Sisay's group sought to pursue an even-handed policy towards the civilian left in general or whether it was sympathetic towards EPRP and even collaborating with it in order to get rid of Mengistu's coalition.

What is more, it is not clear whether the Derg was convinced by Mengistu's explanations at all.

The elimination of Sisay and his group only deepened the crisis of the officers' junta and opened the way for the assembly of the Derg to reassert itself even if only temporarily. In the first place, the issues over which Sisay and Mengistu had been at odds (what to do with the civilian left, the disastrous peasant march, the Eritrean question in general and the jockeying of members of the officers' junta for positions of influence) continued to be divisive. Also, such important positions as had been occupied by Sisay and Kiros had to be filled by new individuals to be elected by the assembly. To make matters worse, the old rivalry between Mengistu Haile-Mariam and Atnafu Abate resurfaced in the assembly's proceedings, especially over conflicting claims by the two concerning what matters should come under their respective jurisdictions, and over Atnafu's accusation that Mengistu was becoming a dictator. Unable to resolve all these difficulties and convinced of the clumsiness of its own proceedings, the general assembly asked Mengistu and Atnafu to leave the meeting and instituted a fifteen-man committee mostly made up of the department heads. Moges Wolde-Michael was appointed chairman of the committee. Judging by the outcome, the committee's mandate appears to have been not only to delimit closely the functions of Mengistu and Atnafu (first and second vice-chairman respectively) but also to overhaul the structure of the Derg once more. The committee's deliberations lasted from August to December 1976.<sup>19</sup>

In the meantime the propaganda warfare between EPRP and Mengistu's coalition was stepped up, followed by an armed confrontation between them as of the second half of September. A lengthy article written in the official daily (*Addis Zemen*) in September referred to EPRP by name for the first time, and argued that it was not the workers' vanguard party but that in reality it was an anarchist organization since it had destroyed property and since it had instigated workers to go on strike. In conclusion, the article called upon the Ethiopian people to expose EPRP, and promised that the government would place at the disposal of the people anything required to fight the organization.<sup>20</sup> Within a few days, another article in the same paper claimed that EPRP had destroyed 80 million birrs worth (about

40 million US dollars) of agricultural products in the two provinces of Shoa and Arsi alone and that Mengistu and other members of the Derg had gone to the places of destruction and seen it all for themselves.<sup>21</sup> These articles were written in the name of the Derg; they must, however, have been the result of multiple sovereignty, since it is difficult to imagine that all of the Derg or junta membership would have endorsed them.

The tenor of the language used by these *Addis Zemen* articles was in keeping with that of POMOA's paper *Revolutionary Ethiopia*, which also mentioned EPRP by name for the first time instead of referring to it indirectly as an anarchist or a *petit-bourgeois* organization as it had previously done. In September, the paper argued that the difference between EPRP and the Ethiopian progressives was not a case of two lines among progressives but between reactionaries and progressives (between EPRP, EDU and imperialism, on the one hand, and Ethiopian progressives, on the other). It concluded by repeating its call for the arming of the masses against the reactionaries.<sup>22</sup>

Conscious of the increasingly aggressive stance of Mengistu's coalition against EPRP since the latter's rejection of the call for the formation of the joint front, the central committee of EPRP had, by September, met and decided to conduct urban armed struggle against the coalition and had authorized its politburo to map out a strategy. The latter met in October and decided to intensify both rural and urban armed struggle, provoke general insurrection, and in this way pressurize Mengistu's coalition into submission.<sup>23</sup> EPRP's defence and operation squads had already been put in place and had gone into action by the second half of September, in accordance with the decisions of its central committee. The fate of a suspected 'anti-people' individual (one who was suspected of being a supporter of Mengistu's coalition) was followed up mainly by the mass organizations of EPRP (the organizations for the youth, women and workers) and, based on information provided by them, the appropriate organ of the Party decided whether he was to be eliminated or not. In the event that he was found guilty, it was up to the operation squad to hijack a car, kidnap him and hand him over to a defence squad for action. Many others were simply gunned down in their places of work or residence or while walking in the streets.<sup>24</sup>

The first intended victim was Mengistu himself; towards the end

of September, an assassination attempt was made on him, but he survived it with a minor injury.<sup>25</sup> The first real victim was Fikre Merid (a prominent member of AESM and of POMOA's commission) who was shot and killed in his car while waiting to collect his wife from work. His two assassins were caught shortly afterwards.<sup>26</sup> Towards the end of October, the EPRP exploded an incendiary device in the Yekatit 1966 Political School with damage to life and property.<sup>27</sup> The urban armed struggle had begun in earnest.

According to most observers, the Derg had restricted Mengistu's freedom of action after his August confrontation with members of the officers' junta, but perhaps relaxed it after the onset of the armed struggle with EPRP.<sup>28</sup> He certainly was able to pay EPRP back double and triple the losses to his side. Nevertheless, the relaxation did not go as far as freely arming the mass organizations, especially the urban dwellers' associations, and unleashing them on EPRP. For the time being, therefore, Mengistu's coalition had to satisfy itself with using the mass media and the forums of the mass organizations to condemn EPRP and to demand the arming of the broad masses.<sup>29</sup>

In early November, the second round of elections of Addis Ababa urban dwellers' associations' leaders was held.<sup>30</sup> At the time, *Revolutionary Ethiopia* complained that the urban dwellers' associations had not rejected EPRP, as peasant associations had done, and insisted that, like the latter, the urban dwellers' associations should create their own revolutionary committees as well as defence squads and take 'revolutionary action' (summary executions) against anti-revolutionaries.<sup>31</sup> A few weeks later, the same paper blamed EPRP for starting terrorism during the previous September and compared it to how the '*petit-bourgeois* social democrats' started terrorism during the Soviet revolution and even wounded Lenin. The paper concluded by citing the Soviet Government's reaction: 'all reactionaries and those who support them will be held responsible for assassination attempts against workers and against those who struggle for a socialist revolution. The government of the workers and peasants will counter the reactionary terror of its enemies and launch a general terror against the *bourgeoisie* and their agents.'<sup>32</sup> The theoretical basis of the red-white terror that was to engulf the urban centres of Ethiopia as of early 1977 was laid out thus.

While Mengistu's coalition was thus locked into an urban armed struggle with EPRP, it was surprised by a further and drastic clipping of its wings. This was done in the name of reforming the structure of the Derg through a legislation drawn by the fifteen-man committee appointed by the Derg in August 1976. The legislation (Proclamation 108/1976) came into force on 29 December 1976. According to it, the Derg was to continue to enjoy the legislative and executive powers discussed in chapter 2. Instead of a general assembly, subcommittees and a kind of central committee, the relationships between which were never clear, the Derg was now to have a Congress consisting of all Derg members, a Central Committee of forty Derg members, and a Standing Committee of seventeen Derg members. It was provided that the members of the last two committees were to be elected by the Congress.<sup>33</sup>

Under the new arrangement, General Teferi Bante became not only the effective chairman of the three organs of the Derg (the Congress, the Central Committee and the Standing Committee), but also the head of state, the commander-in-chief of the armed forces, chairman of the Defence and Security Council, conferrer of high appointments and promotions, supervisor of the implementation of the decisions of the three organs of the Derg and of the Council of Ministers, and the one who approved the decision of the Council of Ministers etc.<sup>34</sup> Previously, he had been the chairman of the Derg, but only in name; his real task had been presiding over the affairs of the subservient Council of Ministers – in effect, a prime minister subject to the whims of the officers' junta of the Derg.

Atnafu Abate retained not only his position as second vice-chairman of the Derg but, in addition to being responsible for heading the militia, was put in charge of their politicization, organization and arming. Further, a new and key post (secretary general of the Derg) was created and given to Captain Alemayehu Haile who was one of the prominent members of the committee which drafted the law under consideration. As such, he was responsible for acting as the secretary general of the three organs of the Derg, managing the secretariat and budget of the Derg, co-ordinating the activities of the three organs of the Derg, channelling to each, matters falling within its jurisdiction and ensuring that decisions of the three organs were transmitted to

and implemented by the relevant officers.<sup>35</sup> These three men (Teferi, Atnafu and Alemayehu) became the main functionaries of the Derg after the December reorganization.

Mengistu, on the other hand, was stripped of practically all his Derg functions. Since he was a member of the Derg and since he had retained his first vice-chairmanship, he could attend the proceedings of the three organs of the Derg and vote in them; further, he was specifically authorized to act in place of the chairman in his absence. Otherwise, he was given as his main task the previous functions of Teferi Bante, namely, presiding over the functions of the Council of Ministers. As such his tasks consisted of chairing the meeting of the Council of Ministers, making administrative decisions on matters referred to him by individual ministries and other government agencies,<sup>36</sup> and submitting to the head of state (Teferi Bante) periodic reports concerning the activities of the Council of Ministers.<sup>37</sup> In carrying out his duties, Mengistu was responsible not only to the three organs of the Derg (as were Teferi, Atnafu and Alemayehu),<sup>38</sup> but also to the Council of Ministers which he was supposed to lead.<sup>39</sup> Under the previous arrangement, Mengistu had all the powers that were now given to Teferi.

Apparently, Mengistu's reverses were not limited to him but extended to his supporters in the Derg who were also stripped of their Derg functions and assigned to the provinces or sent abroad, ostensibly for political education. For example, Lt Col Mersha Admassu was posted to Eritrea. Captain Ashebir Amare to Tigray, and Lt Col Zeleke Beyene to Hararghe while Lt Col Teka Tulu, Lt Col Getachew Shibeshi, and Lt Col Gebreyes Wolde-Hana were sent to East European countries for political education.<sup>40</sup>

Finally, the legislation sought to divest Mengistu's coalition not only of governmental functions but also of any role in political activities. It did this by abolishing POMOA's supervisory body (the Supreme Organizing Committee, chaired by Mengistu) and by bringing it under the direct control of the organs of the Derg. This meant that Mengistu's role in the politicization and organization of the masses was removed completely, while his supporters in POMOA's commission, who were very much in the majority, could be removed or their functions restricted by the Derg. Thus, it was up to the Derg's Congress to issue directives on the establishment of political parties and mass organizations;<sup>41</sup> up to the Central

Committee to ensure the implementation of the political and other policies of the country;<sup>42</sup> and up to the Standing Committee to:

issue directives on the enforcement of democratic rights and to take the necessary measures to give political consciousness, to organize and arm the broad masses with a view to making the NDRP achieve its objectives.<sup>43</sup>

If under the new arrangement any individual Derg member was intended to have powers over political matters, it could only have been Alemayehu who, as secretary general of the Derg, was made responsible for ensuring that all decisions of the three organs were transmitted to, and implemented by, 'the concerned officers',<sup>44</sup> a term which certainly includes government agencies, like POMOA, but perhaps also mass organizations. Obviously, such a strategic position would provide the secretary general with a great deal of room for manoeuvring developments in the sphere of political activities.

(C) MENGISTU'S ASCENT TO ABSOLUTE POWER: 'THE  
REVOLUTION IS TRANSFORMED FROM A DEFENSIVE TO AN  
OFFENSIVE POSITION'

In his address to the nation on 29 January 1977, Teferi Bante condemned the conservative Arab states for supporting EDU and the Eritrean separatists with a view to making the Red Sea an Arab lake of peace; and the leaders of the Sudan and Somalia for posing a threat to Ethiopia's integrity and revolution by claiming that the country was weak and divided and trying to exploit that situation. He admitted that, because of the revolution and ensuing power struggle, there had emerged many groups with immense differences among them and that the differences were affecting not only the integrity but also the economy of the country and that, had they been more careful previously, the groups would have formed a joint front and a party by then. He concluded by stating:

What we beg of Ethiopian progressives and intellectuals at this hour and from this platform is that there must be unity; a party must be established; a joint front must be formed; and, until that happens, our revolution will always be in danger.<sup>45</sup>

Two days later, Teferi reiterated the same sentiments in another speech delivered to a rally of the people of Addis Ababa in Revolution Square.<sup>46</sup>

The uneasy truce between the groups of Mengistu and Teferi in the Derg finally came to a head-on collision. On 3 February there was a great deal of gunfire in the headquarters of the Derg for all Addis Ababans to hear. On the next day, it was explained that 'revolutionary action' had been taken against some seven Derg members: General Teferi Bante, Captain Alemayehu Haile, Captain Moges Wolde-Michael, Lt Col Asrat Desta, Lt Col Hirui Haile Selassie, Captain Tefera Deneke, and Corporal Haile Belay. It was further explained that these were agents of EPRP and EDU in the Derg, because Teferi had failed to condemn EPRP in his speeches of 29 and 31 January, and because, as a forty-seven-page programme of theirs showed, they had planned to reverse the revolution by rehabilitating EPRP, kidnapping progressives, abolishing POMOA and by executing a fascist *coup d'état* in collaboration with imperialism and neighbouring conservative states. Finally, the explanation declared that the revolution had been transformed from a defensive to an offensive position.<sup>47</sup> In his 4 February address to a rally of Addis Ababans, Mengistu lumped together those killed on the previous day with EPRP, EDU, the Eritrean Liberation Front, the conservative states of the region and imperialism, as enemies of the Ethiopian revolution.<sup>48</sup>

Obviously, these were some of the differences which had divided Mengistu's and Sisay's groups and which must have continued to divide the officers' junta of the Derg thereafter. More important was, however, the power struggle in the officers' junta partly provoked by these differences. All observers agree that the group which was eliminated on 3 February was not led by Teferi, who according to them was used as a pawn in the power struggle, but by Alemayehu and Moges and that it was the same group which had stripped Mengistu's coalition of practically all governmental and political functions in the previous December. There is, however, no evidence to show that Teferi's group sought to take this further and eliminate members of Mengistu's group or dismiss them from the Derg, nor is there evidence to show that they were intending to abandon the NDRPE altogether (as suggested by the accusation that they had planned 'a Fascist *coup d'état*' in alliance with imperialist powers). More likely than not,

Teferi's group was trying to pursue an even-handed policy towards the civilian left in accordance with a recommendation made to the Derg by a committee in the Intelligence Department which was created to instigate the real causes of the EPRP–AESM frictions. Apparently the committee interviewed some of the leaders of the two organizations, found the EPRP was incensed by the fact that the Derg or a section of it should collude with AESM, and recommended that the Derg as a government should stand aloof from factional feuds.

The circumstances suggest that the move against Teferi's group was not a case of Mengistu taking advantage of a shoot-out that took place on 3 February nor a case of Mengistu's reaction to Teferi's speeches on 29 and 31 January, as suggested by René Lefort and others,<sup>49</sup> but a plan carefully worked out over time. It has been argued earlier that it was Mengistu who first formed a coalition with the civilian left with a view to bringing all members of the Derg under the leadership of the coalition, and ousting from power those unwilling to co-operate, and that this initiative of Mengistu's caused a disequilibrium within the officers' junta, from the time when Sisay's and Teferi's groups rebelled. It would appear that Mengistu had foreseen that some members of the junta would react against his initiative (as did Sisay's and Teferi's groups) and that he had been prepared to meet such a contingency. Further, Mengistu and his coalition accepted their decline from August to January as something temporary, not least because they were acting defiantly throughout that time. The member organizations of the coalition were busy not only fighting it out with the EPRP on the military and propaganda levels but also mobilizing the mass organizations and cadres to reject Teferi's group and come to their support.<sup>50</sup> It is also worth noting that the individuals killed during the February shooting were only those who were responsible for assigning Mengistu to an inferior government position and stripping him of his roles in political activities. In fact, according to some reliable sources, it was the greatly feared Lt Col Daniel Asfaw (head of the Derg's Security Department), Dr Senaye Likke and Mengistu who planned the coup and presided over its execution. Apparently, when Yohannis (a supporter of Teferi's group and the second head of the Derg's Security Command) learnt of what had happened, he opened fire at Daniel and Senaye killing the first and fatally wounding the

second. It seems he also went for Mengistu but was cornered and killed in the process.

Be that as it may, the 3 February incident opened the way for Mengistu's meteoric ascent to the heights of absolutism. On 12 February Proclamation 110/1977 (amending Proclamation 108/1976 which had reorganized the structure of the Derg during the previous December) was issued<sup>51</sup> and it was announced that Mengistu and Atnafu were elected as chairman and vice-chairman, respectively, by the Derg.<sup>52</sup> Thus, not only did Mengistu inherit all the powers of Teferi as noted earlier, but was also authorized by the amended version of the legislation to retain his prime ministerial position.<sup>53</sup> Further, the amended version created a completely new power and entrusted it to the chairman of the Derg, namely, the power to take measures against 'anti-people and counter-revolutionary elements'.<sup>54</sup> All the amendments introduced in the new legislation had to do with the powers and responsibilities of the chairman. It is believed, nonetheless, that a consideration of the chairman's relations with the organs of the Derg and of the continued dispersal of the Derg members will throw more light on the matter than a discussion of the amended provisions of the new legislation.

The chairman was directed to exercise his powers and responsibilities in accordance with directives issued to him by the Congress, the Central Committee and the Standing Committee.<sup>55</sup> This, coupled with the mandate of the Congress to take 'serious' measures against offending Derg members, seemed to suggest that the chairman's powers were not absolute. Unlike the Standing Committee, which was declared to be responsible to the Congress and to the Central Committee (and to which it was bound to submit periodic reports),<sup>56</sup> no similar obligations existed for the chairman, thus depriving the organs of the Derg of any effective means of evaluating whether he had carried out their directives or not. Also, it was provided that the Congress could take serious measures against Derg members only at the recommendation of the Standing Committee;<sup>57</sup> should the Congress discover dereliction of duty committed by the chairman in some way and seek to take measures against him, it would first have to overcome the difficulty of securing a recommendation from the Standing Committee which could only be convened by the chairman himself.<sup>58</sup> In addition, if members of the Congress sought to

challenge Mengistu, there was always the concern that they might also face the fate of those who had done that in the past (like Aman, Sisay, Teferi and their associates). At any rate, according to the drafters of Proclamation 108, the new structure 110 was intended to enable the Derg to operate on the basis of Marxist-Leninist principles<sup>59</sup> – principles which in practice have been seen to favour a highly centralized monolithic government structure rather than the more diffuse structure of the separation of powers operating on the basis of checks and balances.

When all is said and done, the organs of the Derg did not survive Mengistu's February *coup d'état*; they could, therefore, not restrain any absolutist tendencies on the part of the chairman. During the Congress's first meeting after the coup (May 1977), it was agreed that the Congress should be convened once a year and the Central Committee twice a year. This in itself would not have given the two organs adequate time to discharge the multitude of functions entrusted to them by the law;<sup>60</sup> the fact remains, nevertheless, that no such formal meetings have really ever since been held by either of the organs concerned. No doubt, there have been several meetings held in the name of the Congress but those meetings involved only those Derg members that happened to be in the capital city at the time; in any case, such meetings, of which there were about four, persisted only until the middle of 1978. The only way in which the Congress (the Derg) survived as a body was in its annual 28 June meetings held not to discharge its legal functions (as envisaged by Proclamation 110/1977 and by the May 1977 decision of the Congress) but to commemorate the establishment of the Derg on 28 June 1974.

As individuals, however, Derg members continued to enjoy privileged positions in various departments of the government. It has previously been noted that their assignment to positions outside the Derg (to offices in the capital as well as the provinces) had begun as early as 1974. In August 1978 this trend was reinforced when six Derg members were appointed as chief administrators of provinces,<sup>61</sup> and when within three months of that twelve of the fourteen provinces were given similar administrators.<sup>62</sup> Many more Derg members were appointed as administrators of sub-provinces or given positions in various other departments mainly in the capital.

The idea of assigning Derg members to government

departments was instituted by the Derg for the purpose of using them as watch-dogs in their places of work. However, their function was never sufficiently articulated until December 1976 when a Directive was issued along with Proclamation 108/1976. The Directive provided, *inter alia*, that Derg members assigned to government departments were to act as senior cadres in their places of work and oversee the implementation of the NDRPE, and were to politicize, organize and to arm the masses, the people's militia and the revolution squads; in addition it stipulated that government officials had a duty to collaborate in helping the high political officers (members of the Derg) carry out their functions.<sup>63</sup>

Obviously, the functions of these Derg members overlapped with those of POMOA and the Joint Front of Ethiopian Marxist-Leninist Organizations,<sup>64</sup> and their functionaries. POMOA was brought under the direct control of the Derg's Standing Committee by Proclamation 108/1976; this status of POMOA was retained by Proclamations 110 and 119 of February and July 1977, respectively.<sup>65</sup> Similarly, the Derg members assigned to various government departments were directly accountable to the Standing Committee which in the final analysis meant Mengistu himself. Interestingly enough, he played the Derg members against POMOA's functionaries especially those in the provinces, with the result that the influence of the former fluctuated until the establishment of the Commission for the Organization of the Ethiopian Workers' Party in early 1980. More often than not, however, the Derg members enjoyed a very privileged position in the society, exacting deference as factions of a head of state – a hangover from Proclamations 1 and 2 of September 1974, which made all Derg members collectively head of state – rather than a reflection of Proclamation 108 of December 1976, and 110 of February 1977, which appointed the chairman of the Derg as the only head of state. It must be noted, nevertheless, that the continued enjoyment of power and prestige rested on their loyalty to Mengistu and not on their membership of the Derg.

The absence of the Congress and Central Committee raises the very important question of who was to exercise the functions that had been entrusted to them by law. Unlike those of the latter, the powers of the Congress were extensive and crucial, especially as far as policy-making was concerned. For example, according to

Proclamation 110/1977, a government department prepares a draft budget and submits it to the Council of Ministers,<sup>66</sup> which, with or without amendments, passes it on to the Congress through its chairman (Mengistu),<sup>67</sup> since the organ of the Derg was the one authorized to approve the consolidated budget of the nation.<sup>68</sup> This was the procedure for the adoption of a Proclamation, the most important kind of law in the country; that type of law was the instrument by which all important policies of the central government were promulgated. In other words, law-making power was given to the Congress of the Derg and not to the Central Committee, the Standing Committee or the chairman of the Derg.

Of these Derg organs, it was only the Standing Committee which was retained as a body; it continued to hold fairly regular meetings under the chairmanship of Mengistu, until at least the formation of the Ethiopian Workers' Party in 1984, when it, with the addition of more members, became the politburo of the Party. As noted earlier, draft Proclamations ended up at the desk of the Derg's chairman since he was at the same time the chairman of the Council of Ministers. The relevant question is whether he submitted such Proclamations to the meetings of the Standing Committee or simply promulgated them as laws. Obviously, he was under no obligation to submit them since the Standing Committee lacked competence over the matter. As a matter of practice, however, it appears that he submitted some Proclamations and not others; he retained the power to issue Proclamations with or without consulting the Standing Committee and with or without his own amendments. As it happens, it is not uncommon to hear departmental officials complaining about their draft Proclamations rusting away on the shelves of the chairman's office, either because he did not like the contents of the draft legislations or because he could not spare the time to review them, whereas Proclamations initiated by him would be issued readily. This was the way that major policies and legislations were adopted at least until the inauguration of a new Constitution in 1987. The legislation under consideration (Proclamation 110/1977) had an impressive-looking list of functions that had to be discharged by the Standing Committee collectively. However, there was a separate provision in the same legislation which directly or through interpretation could be said to confer the

same functions on the chairman.<sup>69</sup> This meant that the chairman could convene the Standing Committee in order to discharge the functions collectively or refrain from exercising his power of convening the Committee and fall back on his power to discharge the functions personally. If there were certain functions that fell within the exclusive domain of the Standing Committee, they were relatively unimportant and in any case could not be discharged by the Committee without it having to rely on the chairman convening a meeting. The difference between the Standing Committee and its predecessor (the Ad-hoc Supreme Organizing Committee) was the difference between personal and collective responsibility; while the first could be accused of being a more dictatorial scheme than the second, it has in its favour the fact that it could and did bring order to the Derg which had been subject to a series of convulsions in its previous few years of existence.

All this is at any rate in the realm of theory; perhaps, the practice would throw a clearer light upon the question. The chairman always came to the meetings with a ready-made decision; he would arrive at such a decision in consultation with anyone from within or outside the government, including diplomats, and then impose it on the members of the Standing Committee. By all accounts, the main function of the members in the Committee was to make a caricature of the correctness of the chairman's sentiments and positions on the matter under consideration.

The only member who is widely believed to have even aired his opinions in the meeting, without necessarily contradicting the chairman, was, and is, Captain Fikre Selassie Wog-Deres (then General Secretary of the Derg). This procedural scheme (of processing a decision through a brow-beaten meeting after it has already been made outside) later became so well-established, particularly in the activities of political organizations and the Workers' Party of Ethiopia, that it had a name specially coined for it, namely, 'organizational operation'.

Moreover the obedience of the Standing Committee members was exacted by the memory of the fate of those who had dared to challenge Mengistu in the past (like Aman, Sisay, Teferi and their associates) and by his readiness to exercise his power 'to take measures against anti-people and counter-revolutionary elements'. The last to fall prey to the excesses perpetrated against

prominent Derg members was Atnafu Abate who was the vice-chairman of the Derg and a member of the Standing Committee. On 13 November 1977, he was executed in as mysterious a manner as Aman and the others. The official charges against him were numerous but on the whole revolved around the accusation that he had always been reactionary and continued to be so, despite advice against it by members of the Derg.<sup>70</sup> From the circumstances of the time and the emphasis made in the charges against him, it appears that the main bone of contention between him and Mengistu was the desire by the latter to 'intensify' the 'red terror', against EPRP, extending it to include AESM which had fallen out with Mengistu's coalition three months earlier. Atnafu appears to have pleaded moderation on this as well as on the government's radical stance on a number of political questions.

According to the official reports, Atnafu was executed in pursuance of a decision of the Congress which was adopted during a November meeting held in its name<sup>71</sup> – a decision which it could adopt legitimately under its mandate 'to take serious measures against Derg members'.<sup>72</sup> According to other sources, the decision was taken by Mengistu personally<sup>73</sup> – a decision which, arguably, came under his mandate 'to take measures against anti-people and counter-revolutionary elements'.<sup>74</sup> Be that as it may, the demise of the man who had done much more than anyone else to bring about the formation of the Derg in the first place meant the abolition of the office of the vice-chairman and the gobbling up of the functions of that office by Mengistu. As always, he was the beneficiary (in terms of powers gained) of the executions of prominent Derg members.

The size of the Standing Committee was reduced from seventeen to sixteen because of the abolition of the office of the second vice-chairman in the February reorganizations of the Derg. The bulk of the members of the Standing Committee would have been members of his coalitions; their promotion to that status was no doubt a reward for the support they had given to Mengistu in his struggle against members of the officers' junta who were opposed to his assertion of power. With the exception of Fikre Selassie Wog-Deres and Teka Tulu (who are widely believed to have been members of the Workers' League and the Ethiopian Oppressed People's Revolutionary Struggle, respectively) and Atnafu, who was neutral, the others were most probably founder members of

Mengistu's political organization (Revolutionary Flame). Since these organizations as well as AESM and the Ethiopian Marxist-Leninist Revolutionary Organization had together formed a coalition effectively, under the leadership of Mengistu, they had obviously taken a common stand against the EPRP and EDU coalitions and against those in the Derg who went against the wishes of their coalition.

Thus, the strength of the Standing Committee members rested not so much on the power they were to wield collectively but on the loyalty they had and continued to have for Mengistu. Over the years, the Derg subcommittees which were established to oversee particular spheres of government activities had been moving away from being run by Derg subcommittees and begun turning into departments run by the chairmen of the subcommittees. It was these offices that the members of the Standing Committee inherited from their disgraced predecessors in February 1977. As heads of these departments, they emerged as the most powerful men in the country after Mengistu; they became his personal assistants in matters coming within their competence. Each one of them was in charge of one or more government departments and, as such, exacted as much deference from their subordinates as did Mengistu from themselves.

However, the process of running spheres of government activities through individuals rather than subcommittees was not complete in 1977; the two concepts of 'subcommittees' and 'departments' are, therefore, used interchangeably in the list of names given below. The military ranks given are as they stood at the time. According to the February 1977 reorganizations, the members of the Standing Committee were as follows:

1. Lt Col Mengistu Haile-Mariam: First Vice-Chairman (June 1974–February 1977), and Chairman (February 1977– );
2. Lt Col Atnafu Abate: Second Vice-Chairman (June 1974– );
3. Captain Fikre Selassie Wog-Deres: member of the Social Affairs Subcommittee (1974–August 1976), head of the Revolutionary Campaign Department (August–December 1976), and General Secretary (February 1977– );
4. Major Fisiha Desta: member of the Administration Subcommittee (1974–1977), and joint head of the Administration and Legal Affairs Subcommittee (February 1977– );
5. Col Tesfaye Gebre-Kidan: Chairman of the Defence Adminis-

- tration Subcommittee (1974–February 1977), and joint head of the same Subcommittee (February 1977– );
6. Major Addis Tedla: member of the Defence Administration Subcommittee (1974–December 1976), and joint head of the same Subcommittee (February 1977– );
  7. Sergeant Legese Asfaw: personal assistant to Mengistu (1974–December 1976), member of the Political Affairs Subcommittee (December 1976–February 1977), and head of the Military Political Affairs Department (February 1977– );
  8. Major Birihanu Baye: Chairman of the Legal Affairs Subcommittee (1974–July 1976), head of the Political and Foreign Relations Department (July–December 1976), head of the Legal Affairs Department (December 1976–February 1977), and head of the Foreign Affairs Department (February 1977– );
  9. Lt Col Teka Tulu: Chairman of the Intelligence Subcommittee (1974–December 1976), sent for political training abroad (December 1976–February 1977), and joint head of the Intelligence Subcommittee (February 1977– );
  10. Major Kasahun Tafese: member of the Intelligence Subcommittee (1974–February 1977), and joint head of the same Subcommittee (February 1977– );
  11. Leading Technician Gesese Wolde-Kidan: member of the Economic Subcommittee (1974–December 1976), and Chairman of the same Subcommittee (December 1976– );
  12. Major Endale Tesema: member of the Social Affairs Subcommittee (1974– );
  13. Major Getachew Shibeshi: Chairman of the Confiscations Subcommittee (1974–December 1976), sent for political training abroad (December 1976–April 1977), and head of the Derg's Security and Revolutionary Campaign Department (April 1977– );
  14. Lt Gebeyehu Temesgen: Chairman of the Information and Public Relations Subcommittee (February 1977– );
  15. Petty-officer Tamrat Ferede: member of the Social Affairs Subcommittee (1974–February 1977), and Acting Chairman of the Information and Public Relations Subcommittee (February 1977– );
  16. Major Wubishet Dese: member of the Legal Affairs Subcom-

mittee (1974–July 1976), Chairman of the same Subcommittee (July–December 1976), sent abroad for political training (December 1976–February 1977), and joint head of the Administration and Legal Affairs Subcommittee (February 1977– ).

#### CONCLUSION

Haile Selassie was an absolute monarch who had supreme powers in the legislative, executive and judicial spheres of the government. He could initiate any laws or veto those initiated by parliament or by the cabinet. He could, on petition from anyone or on his own initiative, make administrative decisions on any matter or veto decisions made by the executive branch including the cabinet. He had a judicial office (chilot) over which he presided and overturned decisions made by the courts of the land. He had a separate department under him (the Ministry of Pen) with the help of which he made his decisions known to the subordinate organs of government. These offices constituting the monarch's court were all based in the palace.

When the Derg overthrew the monarch in September 1974, it started exercising his powers collectively; by the time the year was out, the powers had devolved on the officers' junta within the Derg; and in February 1977 it had reverted back to an autocratic control. In this sense, the emergence of Mengistu as an absolute ruler can be seen as a continuation of Ethiopia's political culture. The resemblance is all the more striking when it is noted that individuals who did not belong to the royal dynasties or the aristocracy like Tewodros and Yohannis had also become autocratic monarchs and ruled the country without much legitimacy crisis.

Despite these similarities, however, there are differences between the old and new autocracies to justify the conclusion that a political transformation had taken place. The differences relate not so much to what had happened until February 1977 but to the developments afterwards. As will be discussed in the following chapters, Mengistu eliminated the political organizations that had been opposed to, or had not sided with, him; purged their members from government and social institutions; formed under his personal direction a Leninist party; and subordinated the

government and social institutions as well as the whole of society under the control of the party. It was this deliberate emulation of a foreign, twentieth-century, totalitarian political model that came to distinguish the new autocracy from the old.



PART III

*Consolidation of power*  
*(February 1977–September 1987)*



## CHAPTER 8

### *The elimination of internal and external threats to Mengistu's power*

#### (A) 'REVOLUTIONARY ETHIOPIA OR DEATH'

Like most dictators, Mengistu was not only head of the government but also head of state and as such personified the state. As of 1977, therefore, it became increasingly difficult to distinguish between the threats directed against him and those directed against the state. By and large it can perhaps be stated that whereas the internal opposition was a threat against Mengistu's position as a leader, the external invasion can be taken as a threat both to him as a leader and to the state.

When Mengistu assumed absolutist powers in February 1977, the government was engulfed by internal and external threats with the result that Ethiopia looked as though it was on the point of dismemberment. In the urban centres, Mengistu's coalition was locked into an assassination and counter-assassination match with the EPRP. In the north-west, EDU had captured the border towns of Metema and Setit-Humera, and was poised to capture the provincial capital of Gondar. In the north, the Eritrean Liberation Front, the Eritrean People's Liberation Front, EDU and the Tigray People's Liberation Front had brought chunks of the Eritrean and Tigrain countryside under their control and had besieged the major towns in those provinces. In the east, the Afar Liberation Front had been destroying military convoys and garrisons and periodically cutting the road leading to the only port of Assab which was still under government control. In the south and south-east, the Western Somalia Liberation Front and the Somali Abdo had stepped up guerrilla activities and were attacking military garrisons and police stations, killing highland settlers in the region and cutting the country's only rail link with the sea, the railway that linked the capital city with Djibouti. The

road linking the Eritrean capital (Asmara) to the remaining Ethiopian port of Massawa having come under the threat of the Eritrean People's Liberation Front, the country had in effect become land-locked.

These developments brought Ethiopia into conflict with the neighbouring conservative states, notably the Sudan and Saudi Arabia, which were openly supporting such conservative Muslim as well as Christian insurgents in Ethiopia as the Eritrean Liberation Front, the Afar Liberation Front and EDU.<sup>1</sup> To add to its liturgy of problems, the government learnt, from its intelligence department, that its eastern neighbour (the Republic of Somalia) was not only promoting the insurgents of the Western Somalia Liberation Front and the Somali Abdo but was itself preparing to invade Ethiopia with a view to annexing the Ogaden region which had been under Ethiopian control since the turn of the century.<sup>2</sup>

Mengistu took a war-like stance against these threats in the aftermath of the coup on 3 February 1977. A communiqué issued in the name of the Derg on the following day pointed out that Ethiopian progressives (members of Mengistu's coalition) had been unable to take action against the counter-revolutionaries because of the dominance of the reactionaries and their supporters in the Derg; it then stated that the revolution's strategy would, from that day, be transformed from the defensive into the offensive.<sup>3</sup> In his address to a rally held on the same day, Mengistu condemned Teferi and his faction, EPRP, EDU, the Eritrean Liberation Front, the conservative states of the region and imperialism as enemies of the Ethiopian revolution.<sup>4</sup> In his address at another rally on 12 April, Mengistu again condemned the same forces and asked the Ethiopian people to rally around the banner of 'call of the motherland' and fight the enemies of the revolution.<sup>5</sup> On 17 April, he made a similar speech and smashed three bottles filled with blood (or something resembling it) to signify imperialism, feudalism and bureaucratic-imperialism under which all the enumerated enemies of the revolution were supposed to be subsumed.<sup>6</sup> *Revolutionary Ethiopia* (the publication of POMOA) put the same on a more theoretical plane: the main contradiction of the time was not between Ethiopia and external aggression (as Teferi's group would have it); nor between the national progressive and reactionary forces (as others would have it); but

between external and internal reactionaries, on one hand, and internal progressives, on the other (as Mao would have it).<sup>7</sup> Based on such rhetorical justifications, Mengistu, who now had brought all the resources of coercion under his control, declared war on all fronts and by the end of May 1978 had subdued all the internal opposition (and repelled external aggression) with the notable exception of the Eritrean and Tigrain separatist insurgents.

#### (B) THE ELIMINATION OF EDU

In July 1976 President Numeri of the Sudan accused Ethiopia of involvement in a coup against him and subsequently provided open support to EDU and Eritrean insurgents in contravention of the 1972 Addis Ababa Agreement in which the two states had committed themselves to bringing about peace by closing their frontiers to each other's insurgents. In December 1976 EDU, supported by Sudanese tanks and artillery, launched an offensive in the north-western and northern provinces of Gondar and Tigrai. On 13 January 1977, the border towns of Metema and Setit-Humera, in the province of Gondar, fell; from then on, EDU was poised to capture the provincial capital of Gondar and the region between the border and the capital town. By the spring, the soldiers in the area had abandoned their garrisons and joined EDU. The wing which, with the assistance of the Eritrean Liberation Front, had gone on the offensive in Tigrai did not enjoy as much success as the one which had gone into Gondar; it had to compete with two other movements which were active in the region, namely, EPRP and the Tigrai People's Liberation Front, and the territory was far removed from the Sudan where EDU had its bases.<sup>8</sup> The movement's operations in other regions like Wollo and Shoa were even less spectacular than in the first two provinces.

Despite the threat that was hovering in the south and south-east, Mengistu's government withdrew some of the brigades from there and sent them north to fight the EDU. As will be noted below, Ethio-Soviet relations had taken a dramatic turn for the better in the aftermath of Mengistu's February coup with the result that a sizeable number of tanks and armed personnel carriers were delivered to Ethiopia in March and April. These weapons were also deployed to the EDU fronts as of delivery. Thus was launched the government's counter-offensive in the spring of 1977; while

attacking Sudanese involvement in Ethiopian affairs ferociously, the mass media began to report successful operations against EDU forces almost every day. Before the summer was out, EDU forces had been driven out of Ethiopia and back into their Sudanese sanctuary. Though they were able to regroup and launch further offensives starting from the autumn,<sup>9</sup> EDU forces have never since been able to achieve as creditable a success in the battle field as they had done in the first half of 1977.

(C) THE RED TERROR (THE ELIMINATION OF EPRP)

The threats posed by EDU, the separatist insurgents and the Republic of Somalia were cases for the army, of which Mengistu had become commander-in-chief soon after his February coup; as such, he was finally in charge of the military operations against those forces. The case of EPRP which had engaged Mengistu's coalition in an urban armed struggle, on the other hand, required a different strategy: as noted earlier, for some time by this stage, Mengistu's coalition had been advocating 'the arming of the broad masses' and the declaration of 'revolutionary action' and 'the red terror' against what it called 'the white terror' of EPRP. The 4 February declaration that the revolution had been transformed from a defensive to an offensive position as of then meant, *inter alia*, the endorsement of these strategies against EPRP – strategies which were vigorously pursued by the government in the wake of Mengistu's *coup d'état*.

The peasant associations which came into existence in early 1975 were in December of the same year authorized to establish an additional organ (peasant defence squads) to be recruited from among 'the broad masses of peasants'. The urban dwellers' associations' equivalents of peasant defence squads – 'the revolution defence squads' – which were supposed to be composed of 'the broad masses of urban dwellers', were not established until late 1976. 'Revolution defence squads' were also established among workers of the various industries at about the same time as the urban dwellers' defence squads. All these types of squads were charged with the task of carrying out the duties of the police force at the local level; however, the role they played in political developments became more important than the role they played in fighting non-political crimes. The squads of the peasants'

associations had been envisaged as weapons in the struggle against the landed gentry whose land had been expropriated; later, however, they came in handy for the struggle against EPRP. The squads of the urban dwellers' associations and factory workers had been launched directly against the EPRP from the start. In the aftermath of Mengistu's coup these squads were one of the sections of 'the broad masses' that were armed to carry out the 'red terror' against the 'white terror' of EPRP.

Similarly armed against EPRP were the cadres of the political organizations that came under the orbit of Mengistu's coalition. After the establishment of POMOA in April 1976, the bulk of the cadres were subordinated to its branch offices which existed at the provincial, *Awraja* and district levels. As explained previously, POMOA was brought under the direct control of the Standing Committee of the Derg in December 1976, an administrative link which Mengistu retained after his February 1977 coup. Given the subservience of the Standing Committee, this meant that POMOA came under the direct control of Mengistu; the cadres and the defence squads, which were subordinated to POMOA for political guidance, were also finally accountable to Mengistu.

Further, there were the cadres which were drawn from the army primarily by the Workers' League and Revolutionary Flame. It is not clear whether these cadres were controlled by POMOA at all. It appears that some among them who were assigned by the two organizations to POMOA to discharge the latter's functions were probably controlled by it to some extent; it appears that the remaining received their orders from Mengistu and his henchman Sergeant Legese Asfaw who was head of the Derg's Military Political Affairs Department. This was certainly the case with what were called 'the military cadres'. As soldiers, all these types of cadres would have been armed and skilled in the use of firearms; in fact, they played a key role in the struggle against EPRP by leading assassination as well as search and seizure teams made up of the civilian cadres and the revolution defence squads.

Yet another resource for coercion was the highly trained and pampered military force which came under the Derg's Security Department headed previously by the fearsome Daniel Asfaw and after his death in the February coup by Getachew Shibeshi. This force became in charge of the palace's security instead of the old bodyguard of the King and later its role was expanded to include

the security of the capital city and most of the province of Shoa. More relevant was the fact that it became the ground for recruiting and training what looked like Mengistu's private armies which operated from the palace and haunted the cities by night. They were certainly the most ruthless and horrifying of the assassins of Mengistu's government used to eliminate chosen prominent individuals,<sup>10</sup> and to act as a back-up force for the revolution defence squads and cadres.

As explained in the previous section a new task incorporated in Proclamation 110 of 1977 and entrusted to the chairman of the Derg was that of 'taking measures against anti-people and counter-revolutionary elements'. Obviously, the means by which this task was to be discharged by the chairman (Mengistu) was the above described machinery of death. At the disposal of Mengistu were the following: the newly created people's militia which was under the vice-chairman of the Derg (Atnafu Abate) until his execution in November 1977 after which it came under the chairman directly; the police force; the greatly expanded intelligence department which came under the Derg's intelligence department headed by Teka Tulu; and the biggest army in black Africa of which the chairman was the commander-in-chief after his coup in February 1977.

The task of arming the revolution defence squads and possibly the civilian and military cadres was entrusted to Sergeant Legese Asfaw. In the meantime, a drive to disarm the civilian population was put into action. In traditional Ethiopia, the possession of weapons and the traffic in them was hardly regulated at all with the result that an estimated number of 9,000,000 pistols and rifles were kept in civilian hands; of these, 300,000 were kept by Addis Ababans alone.<sup>11</sup> Armed squads composed of soldiers, policemen, cadres and members of urban dwellers' associations and revolution defence squads conducted house-to-house searches in the capital city from 23 to 27 March and from 7 to 9 May. It was reported that during the first round of search and seizure, EPRP weapons, cars and field-glasses were captured but only partially.<sup>12</sup> These armed squads were licensed to take revolutionary measures against suspected EPRP members and sympathizers; however, there are many reports that this power was used by them against innocent civilians for personal gain and for settling old scores. Similar rounds of search and seizure and the excesses that

accompanied them were repeated in the urban centres up and down the country and even in some rural areas.

It has previously been noted that assassinations between EPRP and Mengistu's coalition had been played out in the streets and back yards of Addis Ababa since September 1976. The assassinations became more ferocious in the wake of Mengistu's coup and leaders of trade unions, urban dwellers' associations and student bodies started to be gunned down every day by EPRP sharpshooters in March and April.<sup>13</sup> In the meantime, EPRP and POMOA cadres were butchering each other in the provincial towns. The government's initiative of the time, nevertheless, had become less selective in its targets; on the contrary, it had made a definite choice to go for mass executions and for breaking the backbone of EPRP. This policy was reflected clearly in the mass executions of May.

Since 1974, May Day had become an occasion for the flexing of muscles of contending groups; they brought out as many of their supporters as possible to the rallies and made them shout their slogans and hoist their placards. The May Day rallies of 1975 and 1976 had resulted in the arrest of many and in the death of some EPRP supporters; the rallies of 1977 in Addis Ababa, on the other hand, led to the most horrifying carnage in the history of the country. An anti-government demonstration organized by EPRP to undermine the government's May Day rallies was launched on the evening of 29 April; well over 500 of the demonstrators were gunned down during the same evening while marching, running for cover or in the houses they had fled to for refuge. The massacre continued in the following days; according to the Secretary General of the Swedish Save the Children Fund, over 1,000 youths had been executed by 16 May and their bodies were left in the street and ravaged by hyenas at night. School children of eleven years of age and above were at the forefront of EPRP demonstrations. It is widely reported that hospitals often refused to treat the wounded on the grounds that they were reactionaries,<sup>14</sup> and charged anything up to 100 US dollars and 25 US dollars for the release of students' and workers' bodies, respectively, to cover the cost of bullets wasted in killing them.<sup>15</sup>

What was done to those who were detained under suspicion of being members or sympathizers of EPRP was no less horrifying than the street massacres. The number of detainees was too great

to be accommodated by the existing prisons and police stations; as a result, all the offices of the urban dwellers' associations, the palaces and military garrisons in the towns up and down the country were turned into detention centres. The victims of the mass arrests and those picked up in the streets and their homes were taken to these centres and subjected to some of the most inhuman forms of torture of a cruelty unprecedented in the history of the country. One typical form of torture was soaking the feet of the detainees in boiling water for a time and then suspending them upside-down and beating the soles of their feet until the skin gave way to blood and the raw flesh and finally to the bare bones. Without doubt, many died during the ordeal, others many years later as a result of complications they developed afterwards, yet others became crippled for life, and the remaining became paranoid, unable to trust anyone. It is only the exceptions from among the generation aged between fifteen and about forty at that time who have not gone through imprisonment and some kind of torture.

One of the purposes of the exercise was to force the detainees to come up with the names of three EPRP members; it appears that an individual was allowed to know only three fellow EPRP members with whom he was to work. Other crude ways of establishing affiliation to EPRP included the publishing and broadcasting of government telephone numbers which individuals could call anonymously and accuse others of belonging to EPRP; and the holding of mass meetings in which those present would be pressurized into self-incriminations and mutual accusations. Needless to say, these methods were open to abuse; EPRP members victimized members of Mengistu's coalition deliberately exposing them as belonging to their own organization; others victimized their enemies for similar considerations; and yet others did so because of the torture. It is obvious that many innocent individuals were victimized in this manner; though terror is a negation of due process of law, it nevertheless was meant to achieve a goal through the generation of fear.

Thus screened, the presumed members of EPRP were herded into trucks, taken to various parts of the cities very early in the morning and executed with a volley of shots, their cries and wails being overheard by the residents of the locality. Then, their skulls smashed open with gun butts, their brains and blood scattered all

around and slogans pinned to their bodies, the corpses would be left lying on strategic street corners till morning for passersby to see; sometimes, corpses were also displayed on television. With this morbid ritual over, the bodies were then collected and buried in mass graves on the outskirts of the cities. Judging by the public display of the 'red' terror, it was obviously intended to force the urban populations into submission and into exposing EPRP members. Both EPRP and Mengistu's coalition were proud of the fact they were in the business of perpetrating terror against each other; however, they both claimed their own form of terror was 'red' and that of the other side was 'white'.<sup>16</sup>

EPRP's backbone was not broken by the terror of the first half of 1977 but it was beginning to crack under the weight. In fact, even when EPRP adopted its policy of urban armed struggle in the summer of 1977, there had been some among the members who had been opposed to the idea and who had apparently gone as far as betraying some of their comrades to the government. Further, the fact that the policy resulted in the slaughter of so many children alienated other members of the organization; this is often cited as one of the reasons why EPRP's presumed leader<sup>17</sup> (Birhane Meskel Reda) led a break-away faction in the summer of 1977. The circumstances of his arrest by the government are not clear; however, he finally ended in prison where he was made to write a long report/confession of a few hundred pages about the EPRP and was then executed. Further, the government had been able to piece together all the information that it extracted out of the mass of detainees through its torture.

Then the government launched its second round of 'the red terror' in November 1977, directed this time not only against EPRP but also against AESM which had fallen out with the government several months earlier. The excesses of the second round of terror were as horrific as the first; again, mass arrests and executions particularly of the youth were to haunt the cities. Nevertheless, one of the differences between the two rounds of terror was the fact that, by the end of 1977, the government had accumulated better information about the leaders and structure of EPRP and was, therefore, more systematic in its prosecution of the second round of terror. In March 1978, it declared that EPRP had been wiped out completely.

What was left of EPRP after that were its rural bases in Tigray and

Gondar provinces. The armed wing of EPRP (the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party) was not much of a fighting force; it had as a result lost its credibility among the peasants who lived near the bases. To make matters worse, EPRP's most important base which was situated in Tigray (Assimba) was attacked and destroyed by the Tigray People's Liberation Front in May 1978. It is said that the reason for this was the fact that the Front wanted EPRP out of its territorial preserve of Tigray; it appears, nonetheless, that there were some other underlying frictions between the two organizations as well as differences they both had with the Eritrean People's Liberation Front. EPRP seems to have incurred the disfavour of its patron (the Eritrean People's Liberation Front) by calling itself a 'party' and by referring to the Front as one of its mass organizations.

Be that as it may, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Army in Assimba had no choice but to flee into Eritrea and into the hands of the Eritrean People's Liberation Front which accompanied members of the Army to the EPRP bases in Gondar. There, several plenary meetings were held in the subsequent years in order to examine the failure of the urban armed struggle and to come up with alternative strategies for the future. However, the meetings only led to recriminations particularly between the leaders and the rank and file; the former were accused of having been dictatorial, of misleading the rank and file about the progress of the urban armed struggle, and of generally leading the organization into disaster.<sup>18</sup> With the exception of a relatively insignificant guerrilla unit which continued to operate from one of its Gondar bases (Chilga) and another which continued to operate in the northern part of the same province under the Tigray People's Liberation Front (the Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement), EPRP cannot be said to have survived the government's onslaught of 1977 and early 1978.

(D) THE REPULSION OF SOMALIA'S AGGRESSION. 'EVERYTHING  
TO THE WAR FRONT'

The threat posed to Mengistu's powers, as well as to the integrity of the country, by the Western Somalia Liberation Front and the Somalia Abdo insurgents, and the invasion of Ethiopia by their supporter (the Republic of Somalia) was much more dangerous

than the threats posed by EDU and EPRP. Obviously, these internal and external threats, coupled with his policy of using force and violence to subdue internal opposition and repel external aggression, made him extremely dependent on military aid from foreign powers. He was able to surmount the threats, especially that posed by Somalia's coalition, by abandoning Ethiopia's traditional allies (the Western powers, particularly the US) and by forging closer ties with the socialist countries, notably the Soviet Union, which provided him with massive amounts of the required weapons.

Despite the Derg's pro-socialist rhetoric in the early years of its existence and despite the training of hundreds of cadres in the socialist countries during the same period, no real progress was made in the strengthening of relations with communist states until after the adoption of scientific socialism in April 1976 and, particularly, until after Mengistu's seizure of power in February 1977. As noted previously, an important delegation, led by Captain Moges Wolde-Michael, was dispatched to Moscow in early July 1976 to explain the adoption by the Derg of scientific socialism and to seek economic and military assistance.<sup>19</sup> One of the spin-offs of this visit appears to have been a secret Ethio-Soviet arms deal in December 1976 in accordance with which some 130 tanks and armed personnel carriers were delivered in March and April 1977, i.e. after Mengistu's seizure of power. The weapons were immediately deployed to the northern fronts to be used mostly against EDU.<sup>20</sup>

Mengistu's portrayal as the most left-wing politician of the Derg members (drawn by the adherents of his coalition especially by AESM) had promoted his stature not only among the supporters of the coalition but also among the diplomats from the socialist countries. This, coupled with his radical posturing on all matters considered by the Derg and the moderate position of those that fell by the wayside, appears to have led the socialist countries to conclude that he was their man. They were the first to congratulate him on his coup against Teferi and his group on 3 February 1977; when national journalists arrived on the scene, the Soviet ambassador was already there, leading them to speculate later that he may well have been present at the time of the shoot-out. From then on, there is no doubt that diplomats from the socialist countries had direct access to Mengistu's office and that they were helping him adopt decisions on certain important international

and other questions, unbeknown to the Department of Foreign Affairs.

In the meantime Ethiopia's relations with her traditional supplier of arms (the US) were deteriorating. Earlier, William Schauffle (Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs under President Ford's administration) had told Congress that the US should continue its support for Ethiopia at its time of difficulty, particularly because such a policy would contribute to the stability of that second most populous African state; because it would assist black African states in maintaining their territorial integrity; because it would save the US from criticism by its friends in Africa and elsewhere; and because the US should not be seen to be distancing itself from Ethiopia's brand of socialism.<sup>21</sup> Further, in the summer of 1976, Ethiopia had received her last delivery of F5ES from the US. Despite these positive overtures, the Derg's anti-US rhetoric continued to be increasingly hostile; its human rights record was getting worse; and its measures against pro-West individuals steadily more violent. In the first four months of 1977, the relations between the two states rock-bottomed.

In January, Mr Carter became the President of the US with his human rights offensive and his idea of cultivating friendly relations with Third World radical states. Apparently, within a few weeks of taking office, he was reading voluminous studies on the Horn of Africa in the hope of challenging the Soviet Union's initiative in the region and thus leaving his personal mark on the events of the area.<sup>22</sup> However, Mr Carter was to preside over the worst period of US-Ethiopian relations.

On 26 February, Washington announced that Ethiopia, along with Uruguay and Argentina, would receive reduced aid from the US because of human-rights violations. On the same day, T. Seelye (Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs) was explaining to Ethiopian officials in Addis Ababa that no funds would be made available for the supply of military equipment on a grant basis after the end of the 1977 US fiscal year, and that the US was willing to improve relations only if the Ethiopian government respected the human rights of its citizens and if it restrained public condemnation of the US. Apparently, President Ford's budget proposal prepared in his last days of office had made no provision to grant military assistance to Ethiopia for the following fiscal year. Soon after T. Seelye's visit the US Embassy notified the

Ethiopian government that the US was ready to begin negotiations concerning the closure of its communications facilities in Kagnew, Eritrea, scheduled for 30 September 1977. The Kagnew installation had been rendered obsolete by advances in satellite technology and the US had begun phasing it out in 1971 so much so, that by 1974 the personnel there had been reduced from 2,000 to a few dozen.<sup>23</sup>

Mengistu's response was swift and dramatic. Between 23 and 30 April, he ordered the closure of the Kagnew communications facilities, the US consulate in Asmara (Eritrea), the US Information Service offices, the US medical research centre (NAMRU), and expelled, with forty-eight hours' notice, three Western journalists, and terminated the 1953 Mutual Defence Assistance Agreement between the two countries. If Mengistu had been unduly violent towards Ethiopian citizens and hostile in his rhetoric towards the US, the Carter administration had mistimed its public censure of Mengistu's government. Mengistu had just begun savouring the pomp and circumstance as a leader of a country rubbing shoulders with world statesmen; under the circumstances, it is more likely than not that the US act of depriving him of weapons at a time when his country most needed them would have been taken as a disapproval of his ascent to power.

Legally, the power to decide on international questions like the one under consideration was entrusted to the Congress, the Central Committee and the Standing Committee of the Derg,<sup>24</sup> the chairman's powers being limited to 'granting audience to foreign guests and diplomats' and to 'supervising the implementation of international agreements'.<sup>25</sup> As argued earlier, the first two of these Derg organs could not have been involved in the decision to downgrade relations with the US, as they had been dispersed after February 1977 and as they at any rate did not hold any meetings in March and April of that year. Further, for reasons already explained, the involvement of the Standing Committee could only have been limited to being informed, if at all, of a decision already adopted and acted upon.

In fact, according to the then Minister of Foreign Affairs (Dawit Wolde-Giorgis), Mengistu told the officials of that Ministry to leave the matter to him and personally decided to downgrade Ethio-American relations. No doubt, before making the decision,

he would have consulted certain individuals like Birihanu Baye (head of the Derg's Foreign Affairs Department), Lij Michael Imiru (political adviser of the chairman) and whoever else he chose to confide in. Perhaps more important than these would have been the diplomats from the socialist countries (particularly the Soviet and Cuban ambassadors) who, after February, were conferring with Mengistu privately every other day and for hours at a stretch.<sup>26</sup> It is pretty unlikely that Mengistu would have risked offending the US without a promise or guarantee, during those encounters with the diplomats, of an alternative source of weapons. After having downgraded Ethio-American relations at the end of April, Mengistu went to Moscow in the early part of the next month and concluded agreements on friendly relations and on economic, social and cultural co-operation, in addition to securing an arms pledge estimated to have been worth between 350 and 450 million dollars.<sup>27</sup>

The final shift of alliances was determined by the conflict between Ethiopia and Somalia. The bone of contention between chairman Mengistu and President Said Bare of Somalia was the territory of the Ogaden, which the latter claimed on the basis that it was inhabited by people ethnically the same as those in the Republic of Somalia, and which the former claimed on the basis that the territory had been under Ethiopian control since the turn of the twentieth century. On 14 and 15 April 1977 Fidel Castro went to Addis Ababa and discussed with Mengistu the possibility of creating a confederation made up of Ethiopia, the Republics of Somalia and South Yemen, in the hope of thwarting the impending crisis over the question of the Ogaden. In subsequent meetings held between Mengistu and Bare in Aden (South Yemen) and between officials of the two countries in Moscow, East Berlin and Havana, Ethiopia is reported to have expressed interest in the proposal while Somalia rejected it out of hand. In July, Moscow came up with an alternative proposal; an Ethiopian delegation in Moscow was asked to consider ceding the territory of the Ogaden to the Republic of Somalia since the unification of all Somali people was a fundamental tenet of the state of the Somali Republic.<sup>28</sup> Mengistu rejected the proposal on the ground that the dispute between the two countries related to border and not territorial questions. He was as intransigent on the alternative suggestion as Bare on the proposal of confederation.<sup>29</sup>

In the middle of May (i.e. immediately after Mengistu's visit to the Soviet Union), Bare denounced Moscow's involvement in Ethiopia and warned that, if it was not stopped, relations between the two countries would suffer. Subsequently, his ambition to acquire the territory of the Ogaden was fuelled by Ethiopia's internal divisions and weakness and by his conviction that the conservative states of the Middle East and the West would provide him with the weapons he would require to wage war, in exchange for his shift of alliance from the East to the West. US, British and French promises made in mid July to provide him with defensive weapons were withdrawn soon afterwards, apparently when it was realized that he had sent his regular forces to fight in Ethiopia.<sup>30</sup> This left Bare to the generosity of his benefactors in the Middle East, who in any case were not allowed by the US to transfer weapons to him, and to the wrath of the socialist countries and of Ethiopia.

While the full-scale war that broke out between the two countries was claimed by Ethiopia to have been launched on 23 July, Somalia insisted that it was being fought between Ethiopian forces, on the one hand, and the forces of the Western Somalia Liberation Front and the Somali Abdo, on the other. The fact was, nonetheless, that within two months the regular forces of the Republic of Somalia had penetrated some 700 kilometres deep into Ethiopian territory and were on the point of capturing the provincial capital of Harar and the neighbouring air force base town of Dire-Dawa. The Ethiopian army was no match for that of Somalia: it was divided between supporters of one political group or another; some of its units were refusing to fight on the ideological grounds that two oppressed peoples should not wage war on each other; it was badly armed; and it was extremely stretched, fighting as it was on many fronts. The humiliation led to an upsurge of Ethiopian nationalism among citizens especially those not committed to the political groups. Mengistu, who since May had been raising a militia hundreds of thousands strong and mobilizing the population into raising money, preparing food and providing logistical support to the army and militia at the war front, rose to the occasion and, with the Patriarch of the Orthodox Church on his side, started addressing rallies and championing the cause of nationalism under highly emotive banners like 'call of the motherland' and 'everything to the war front'.<sup>31</sup> By contrast,

sections of the civilian left were, at the time, prevaricating about the impropriety or otherwise of two oppressed peoples fighting one another; they insisted that the war was not between the masses of the two states but between their leaders.

The war made the arms race between Mengistu and Bare much fiercer than ever before. Feeling betrayed by the West because of its withdrawal of the promised military assistance, Bare went to Moscow in July to try to patch up relations; however, he was cold-shouldered and returned disappointed; from then on, his rhetoric became increasingly hostile towards Moscow. Similarly, Mengistu made a timid effort to make it up to the US; in the middle of September, he called in the US chargé d'affaires and asked for spare parts for the F5Es delivered a year earlier and for weapons; needless to say, the US response was negative. Mengistu's positive overtures to the US were the result of his disappointment with the Soviet Union's procrastinations regarding the delivery of weapons promised during his May visit to Moscow. On 18 September, he gave a press conference in which he condemned the socialist countries for continuing to arm Somalia which he said was tantamount to complicity with 'the reactionary regime of Bare'.

Unable to effect a cease-fire either through direct mediation or indirectly through other socialist countries, African states and the OAU, and being on the verge of losing the friendship of both Ethiopia and Somalia, the Soviet Union finally made its choice. It started delivering weapons to Ethiopia as of the end of September; and on 19 October the Soviet ambassador to Ethiopia issued a statement announcing the formal cessation of arms deliveries to Somalia. This was the final straw; a wave of outrage swept across Somalia; on 13 November, Bare did to the Soviet Union and Cuba what Mengistu had done to the US during the previous April, only in a more dramatic and humiliating fashion. He severed diplomatic relations with both countries, expelled all their military personnel, and closed down Soviet naval and airplane facilities in Somalia. Western journalists were invited to witness the unruly and humiliating manner in which the expulsions were carried out.<sup>32</sup>

These developments finally opened the way for closer relations between Ethiopia and the socialist countries. Starting from the middle of December, the Soviet arsenal was wide open and

massive quantities of weapons began to be air-lifted to Ethiopia. Also, thousands of Cuban and hundreds of South Yemeni troops began to arrive, no doubt because they were more familiar with Soviet weapons and also because they were better trained than their Ethiopian counterparts. Senior Soviet officers who had been expelled from the Republic of Somalia planned the counter-offensive which was finally launched in the middle of February 1978. Within weeks, the invading troops were in disarray; those who survived the joint onslaught of the Ethiopian army and of the Ethiopian superior air force, Cuban and South Yemeni troops, fled across the arid region of the Ogaden back to Somalia. On 19 March, Bare announced that his troops had withdrawn from Ethiopia. The West's preoccupation as of then became the question of whether the victorious forces would invade Somalia and keep it under the orbit of Soviet influence.

Bare's military adventures cost him the friendship of the socialist countries (which had been carefully nurtured since he took power in 1969) without necessarily winning him the friendship of the West and without securing the long-sought-after territory of the Ogaden. To Mengistu, on the other hand, they created an occasion to win the friendship of the socialist countries, to rub shoulders with world statesmen like Castro, Honecker and Brezhnev, and to be seen as the man who delivered his country from the humiliation of external aggression. No doubt, all this amounted to a tremendous boost to his prestige and to his claim to power; in addition it gave him access to massive resources of coercion with which he was to impose his will upon his own country.

In justification of Mengistu's executions of fellow Derg members and his seizure of power, Raul Valdes Vivo (the then head of the Foreign Relations Department of the Cuban Communist Party Central Committee) asserted, in a book he wrote at the time, that there was documentary evidence to show that Teferi Bante was working with the CIA to overthrow the Derg and that Aman was counter-revolutionary and that they were both rightly eliminated.<sup>33</sup> He goes on to add that Mengistu sided with the oppressed people of Ethiopia because he had suffered racism in the US when he was there for training and because he knew of the Vietnam revolution, the black movement, and of the student movement.<sup>34</sup> Judging by Mengistu's subsequent behaviour, it

appears that all this 'eulogy' coupled with the welcoming embrace he received from the socialist countries had gone to his head by 1978. However, it was not so much his prior commitment to any ideology, as suggested by Valdes Vivo, that cemented the relations between Ethiopia and the socialist countries. It was, rather, his readiness to echo the rhetoric of the civilian left and act on it for reasons of personal aggrandizement, the willingness of the socialist countries to embrace him despite his comparatively inferior academic and professional credentials, Ethiopia's strategic significance in the region, the size of its population (the second biggest in black Africa), and the presence in Addis Ababa of the headquarters of a number of international organizations.

#### CONCLUSION

The Ethiopian politics of the first four years after 1974 were characterized by an excessive use of force and violence. Almost the first to fall prey to it were the senior military officers of the *ancien régime*. According to René Lefort, for example, out of the sixty or so generals of Haile Selassie's government, only five remained on the active list quite early on. Also by 1978 out of the first graduates from the Harar Military Academy (who were junior officers) only three remained on the active list;<sup>35</sup> by all accounts, graduates of the academically inferior Holeta Military Academy (which Mengistu attended) appear to have survived the violence of the time better. The rest were purged, exiled or deliberately placed at the war front to be used as fodder to enemy fire-power. Similarly victimized were the high dignitaries of the *ancien régime* and the country-gentry, especially those who resisted the Derg's nationalization of rural land and those who put up resistance to Derg rule on account of their loyalty to Haile Selassie's government or its local officials.

Nevertheless, the use of force and violence was not limited to the above whom the civilian left would have referred to as 'the reactionary classes' but also raised its ugly head with much more gruesome morbidity against the advocates of change and violence themselves. For about a year and a half, starting from September 1976, adherents of EPRP were made victims of mass arrests, tortures and executions primarily in the urban centres of the country. The number of those killed on both sides is estimated to

be as many as 32,000.<sup>36</sup> Also, as will be explained in the following chapter, adherents of the other leftist organizations which had rallied behind Mengistu in his struggle against the other prominent members of the Derg and against the EPRP were similarly detained, tortured and mercilessly eliminated between the summers of 1977 and 1979.

Needless to say, force and violence are doubled-edged weapons; in fact, the number of those killed while fighting to prop up the Derg and to defend the integrity of the country far exceeds the number lost by the opposition especially when those who fell while fighting the secessionist insurgents are taken into consideration. According to one reliable estimate, the Ethiopian army lost 90,000 soldiers between 1975 and 1983 on the Eritrean front alone. The number of Eritrean insurgents lost during the same period is estimated to be 9,000.<sup>37</sup>

Obviously, the maintenance of the Derg's power was predicated on the use of force and violence more than anything else. Since its inception, its radicalism in this as well as other questions was fuelled by some among it (notably Mengistu) whose initial courtship with Marxism–Leninism and with the violence it endorses was propelled by the ambition to be seen as having unravelled the mysteries of a communist revolution and by the desire to out-shine fellow Derg members. The civilian left had made the communist revolution the only popular course of action that the country could pursue. Some writers have in fact tended to go further than this and hold that Mengistu was personally responsible for all the major decisions and excesses of the government, in that he executed them behind the back of the Derg.<sup>38</sup> This fails to give due regard to the demand for the measures from sections of the civilian left.

However, the suggestion that Mengistu had always been at the centre of the Derg's major decisions is not without its justifications. He became the first vice-chairman of the Derg from its inception probably because of his widely acknowledged qualities as a leader. By all accounts he was, in the early stages, humility incarnate in private dealings and committee meetings during which he preferred to err on the side of listening rather than expressing his views; in assemblies, he was a compelling demagogue who roused emotion by appealing to nationalist-populist sentiments and grand ideals; he was untrusting, quick to

avenge himself and to reward loyalty; and he had a great feel for publicity.

No less important to his prominence in the Derg was his popularity with NCOs and privates. He himself started his military career as a boy scout in the army and from then on he inched his way up the ladder to become a private soldier when he came of age, an NCO, a second lieutenant in 1959 and a major by 1974. Whatever he may have lacked by way of academic education – the Holeta Military Academy which he attended offered no academic subjects whatever – he appears to have more than compensated for by his feel for the sentiments and aspirations of NCOs and soldiers. It was people like Sergeant Legese Asfaw (a Derg member from the Third Division like Mengistu himself) who mobilized such low-ranking fellow-Derg members and had Mengistu elected to the first vice-chairmanship of that body in June 1974. Further, the active sections of the NCOs and privates in the army at large, with whom Mengistu was popular, constituted his most important power base in the country; and from early on, they held the army firmly behind him and provided him with an access to the main resource of coercion. There were others in the Derg who had a similar career to that of Mengistu; however, they did not necessarily have Mengistu's other qualities such as those mentioned in the previous paragraph.

As the Derg's first vice-chairman, he was head of certain key positions which made him tower over the other members. He was head of the Derg's secretariat and as such had influence on, and easy access to, information about the activities of the Derg and the implementation of its decisions. Also, he was head of overall political matters and as such was at the centre of all political policy-making decisions of the Derg. As noted earlier, it was this position that enabled him to exploit the differences among the civilian left and bring one wing of it under the orbit of his influence.

More relevant was the fact that Mengistu was head of overall security matters. This meant that in the early months of the Derg's existence, he chaired what was called the Planning and Operations Subcommittee of the Derg which, with the help of the unit committees discussed earlier, was responsible for arresting the dignitaries of the *ancien régime* which took place in the summer of 1974.<sup>39</sup> In the subsequent reorganizations of the Derg, the

Planning and Operations Subcommittee appears to have been rechristened as the 'Derg's Security Subcommittee' and put in charge of a highly trained core of soldiers, NCOs and officers which took over the functions of the old bodyguard of the King after it was disbanded towards the end of 1974. It is difficult to determine the size of the force that comes under the Derg's Security Subcommittee; however, the fact that the bodyguard was one of the four divisions of the Ethiopian army and the fact that after a few years of the Derg's existence the force under the Derg's Security Subcommittee took charge of the security of the capital city and most of the Shoan Province suggests that it was sizeable. No doubt, like the other subcommittees, the Derg's Security Subcommittee was replaced by one-man management.

Lt Col Daniel Asfaw, a contemporary of Mengistu's at the Holeta Military Academy, was a member of the Planning and Operations Subcommittee and later became head of the Derg's Security Department until 3 February 1977 when he was gunned down in the palace coup, after which he was replaced by Major Getachew Shibeshi. It appears that Mengistu, in collusion with Daniel Asfaw, had been using the force under the Derg's Security Department as a private army and harassing and executing those who threatened his position; it was Daniel Asfaw and his subordinates who arrested and executed Aman, Sisay, Teferi and their associates and the sixty officials of the *ancien régime*. Like the King's bodyguard, the Derg's Security Department was in charge of the security of the palace; unlike it, however, it was in addition the breeding ground for assassination squads that haunted the cities up and down the country before and after Mengistu's ascent to absolutist power in February 1977.

It was these positions (head of the secretariat, overall head of political affairs and overall head of the Security Subcommittee of the Derg) that Mengistu lost as a result of Teferi's coup against him in December 1976, and it was these powers that he regained as of February 1977, and more. As of then, he became, *inter alia*, chairman of the Derg, commander-in-chief of the armed forces, chairman of the Defence and Security Council, defender of the peace and order of the broad masses and the integrity of the country, and responsible for taking measures against 'anti-people and counter-revolutionary elements'. These positions brought the resources of state and people's coercion under his control. As

indicated in the last section, the use of force and violence showed a dramatic increase after Mengistu's ascent to absolutism; it must be concluded, therefore, that his 'successful' political career was dependent on his readiness to resort to the use of force and violence rather than on his other merits of leadership.

From the perspective of the historical comparative, the use of force and violence by a dictator appears to be the natural progression from the anarchy that follows a revolutionary uprising. From a different perspective, the reliance on the use of force and violence implies the absence of legitimacy on the part of the government. Whatever the merits or the contending hypotheses, they both go to explain why Mengistu had to totalitarianize and militarize the whole of society. He had organized the civilian population into mass organizations, armed them, and, as noted in the last section, used them as instruments to subdue the opposition. These, coupled with the building up of the security forces (including the biggest army in black Africa, the newly created people's militia, the police force and a greatly expanded separate department of intelligence), transformed the country into one mass force of coercion. Haile Selassie before him managed to rule Ethiopia and hold it together with a minimum of force and violence.

## CHAPTER 9

### *The formation of the Workers' Party of Ethiopia*

Ethiopia is one of the few African countries that survived without being colonized by the Western powers. This fact, more than any other perhaps, kept her oblivious of Western political processes, notably the process concerned with political parties. An exception to this was Eritrea, which after having been under Italian colonial administration for about fifty years, came under British administration from 1941 to 1952 as an enemy-occupied territory. In the 1940s a number of political organizations sprang up around the question of the disposal of the territory. It is arguable whether those political organizations were 'parties', since they did not have a programme on questions other than the disposal of Eritrea; at any rate, with the federation of Eritrea with Ethiopia in 1952 by a decision of the UN General Assembly, the political organizations withered and died.

The last constitution of Haile Selassie's government, which was issued in 1955, provided that 'every Ethiopian subject has the right to engage in any occupation and, to that end, to form or join associations in accordance with the law'.<sup>1</sup> This was the only provision of the constitution that could arguably be interpreted to allow the right to form political organizations. Nevertheless, it strongly implies that the formation of an association has to be related to occupation, and hence, excludes the formation of political organizations. In reality too, there was never any public demand to form political organizations, and the general assumption was that the legal right to do so did not exist.

Interestingly enough, Ethiopia had a bicameral parliament during Haile Selassie's time. The Chamber of Deputies (the lower house) was composed of elected members. A candidate to the Chamber of Deputies presented to his constituency not the programme of a party, but his own. Similarly, once he was elected,

he voted on proposed legislations (initiated by the King, the cabinet or a certain number of MPs) not along party lines but in accordance with his persuasion, his interests and those of his constituency.

As noted previously, the first attempt towards the formation of parties came with the establishment of political organizations in student circles abroad, starting from the early 1970s. Perhaps spurred on by adherents of these organizations and similar other ones in the country, the activists of the early 1974 uprising demanded the right to form political parties for the first time. Even then there were some in the other sections of the urban population who argued against the idea because, according to them, the experience of Africa had shown that parties were a source of division along ethnic and other lines without necessarily achieving anything obvious.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, in response to the dominant demand, Endalkachew's draft constitution provided that 'all Ethiopians have the right to establish or be members of any association, including political parties, provided that its religious, racial or any other purposes are not detrimental to the integrity of the nation'.<sup>3</sup>

With its seizure of power in September 1974, the Derg abandoned Endalkachew's draft constitution and, with it, the provision which would have served as the basis for the development of a multi-party system. In December of the same year, the Derg adopted its first and major economic and political programme (Ethiopian Socialism) in which it was argued that if the desired objective was to bring about fundamental economic and political changes (and not to give freedom to individuals to go their own way), it was necessary to have '... a national party which would bring together all progressive forces into a united front and which is capable of attracting and accommodating the entire people of the country'.<sup>4</sup>

In spite of the Derg's advocacy of a single mass party system, a number of predominantly leftist political organizations surfaced in the course of 1975 and 1976. The Derg fell under the sway of these leftist organizations and again revised its policy towards formation of parties. In April 1976, it adopted the National Democratic Revolutionary Programme of Ethiopia (NDRPE), which envisaged the establishment of a Workers' Party through the formation of a joint front among the progressive political

organizations (organizations which were anti-feudal, anti-imperialist and anti-bureaucratic-capitalist) as well as among the democratic organizations which were willing to work under the umbrella of the joint front. The question of whether the organizations that would join the front would lose or retain their identity after the formation of the party is not addressed; subject to this proviso, the programme could be said to endorse a multi-party system to be developed among the 'exploited' and 'progressive' classes.

The policy of the NDRP differed from that of Ethiopian Socialism in two respects. First, according to Ethiopian Socialism, all Ethiopians had the right to organize and become members of a party, whereas according to the NDRP only progressives could do so. Secondly, the former envisaged the establishment of a single-party system whereas the latter envisaged the formation of a number of parties, though it appears that, at the end of the day, one party (the Workers' Party) was presumably expected to emerge. Essentially, the difference was between a mass party and a class party.

This chapter is concerned with an explanation of the processes of the establishment of a party in Ethiopia – processes that culminated in the establishment of the 'Workers' Party of Ethiopia' in 1984. It came about not through the formation of progressive and democratic organizations and their merger (as envisaged by the NDRP), but as the result of the recruitment to membership of individuals that Mengistu considered worthy on account of their loyalty to him. Since only one party was allowed, and since the highly personalized process of forming it denied any role to the pre-existing political organizations, the latter were eliminated.

#### THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE JOINT FRONT OF THE ETHIOPIAN MARXIST-LENINIST ORGANIZATIONS

It was to be presumed that, in the wake of Mengistu's successful coup on 3 February 1977, his coalition would march forward with renewed vigour. On 26 February, partisans of his coalition (AESM, the Ethiopian Oppressed People's Revolutionary Struggle, the Workers' League, the Ethiopian Marxist-Leninist Revolutionary Organization, and Revolutionary Flame) issued a joint

communiqué announcing the establishment of a Joint Front of Ethiopian Marxist-Leninist Organizations among themselves. According to the communiqué, the main function of the Joint Front was to provide its member organizations with a platform on which they would struggle jointly in order to bring about the formation of the Workers' Party of Ethiopia.<sup>5</sup>

In March, the Joint Front came up with a 'guide line' in which the member organizations declared that they had agreed on the main questions concerning the revolution; on resolving outstanding questions on the platform of the Joint Front; and on a strategy to bring together progressives to struggle jointly. In the following month, the Front adopted 'a joint programme of action' in which the members assessed the political and security situation in the country; characterized the exploiting classes and the political organizations which did not join them as enemies of the revolution; and called upon the people to support the Joint Front in its struggle against the enemies that were attacking the country on three fronts. In May, the Front adopted its programme or constitution which was similar to the programmes of its members discussed earlier. Finally, it launched its paper called *Voice of Unity* in August 1977.<sup>6</sup>

The Joint Front was a separate organization from its members. The highest organ within it was the Central Committee made up of three representatives from each of the member organizations.<sup>7</sup> Its functions included: making policies of the organization; deciding on the nature of relations between the Front and other organizations; giving directives to its subordinate committees; attempting to create the situation in which the Front would be transformed into a merger; and admitting and dismissing members.<sup>8</sup> The Central Committee was directed to hold fortnightly meetings in order to discharge its tasks.<sup>9</sup> Also, the Central Committee had an Executive Committee which would oversee the implementation of its decisions; the Executive Committee was made up of a chairman, a secretary, a treasurer and other members of the Central Committee.<sup>10</sup> Further, there were no less than nine joint subcommittees in the areas of propaganda and agitation, the people's army, people's organizational affairs, discipline, nationalities, foreign affairs, economy, education, and intelligence and defence. Finally, there were two additional committees intended to provide common services to the other

committees; they were a Studies and Planning Committee and the Joint Front Activities Management Committee.<sup>11</sup>

Perhaps, the nature of the relationship between the Joint Front and the member organizations is worthy of note. On the one hand, the latter were authorized to keep their organizational independence from the Front; to adopt their own decisions; to agitate their positions among the people; to expand their individual organizations; and even to withdraw from the Front without posing danger to its existence.<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, however, they were allowed to do these things only in accordance with the provisions of the Front's Constitution;<sup>13</sup> they had to discharge the tasks of the Front; and they had to implement the decisions of the Front.<sup>14</sup> This apparent contradiction between independence and subservience would be resolved if it is viewed from the perspective that the establishment of the Joint Front is one step in the process of forming the Workers' Party of Ethiopia through the gradual merger of the member organizations. In the words of the February joint communiqué of the Front: 'After having examined the history of the revolutionary struggle of many countries and the circumstances of Ethiopia, the five organizations have agreed that the most scientific and proven of the methods of forming a Workers' Party is through the bringing together of the forces of the different Marxist groups in order to conduct a true ideological struggle on tactical and strategic questions and to merge into one organization.'<sup>15</sup> From this perspective, the degree of subservience of the member organizations to the Joint Front is the measure of their merger and of the approach of the formation of the Party.

However, the merger of the Joint Front was for the indefinite future; in the meantime, it was directed to concentrate its attention on the implementation of the objectives of the NDRPE other than the formation of the Party. These included: strengthening relations with other Marxist groups; helping to establish and co-ordinate nationalities' movements, mass organizations and other anti-imperialist, anti-feudal, and anti-bureaucratic political organizations, and bring them within the orbit of a broad joint front;<sup>16</sup> eliminating the internal enemies (EPRP, EDU and the Eritrean secessionists); circulating Marxist-Leninist literature among the people; training cadres at home and abroad and deploying them among the people; and struggling for

the recognition of democratic rights for the oppressed people, for the politicization, organization and arming of the masses, for the politicization of the army and militia and for the recognition of the culture of the various nationalities.<sup>17</sup>

From this point of view, the differences, if any, between the Joint Front and POMOA, which was retained after the establishment of the former, are not clear. They were similar in that both were managed by the leaders of the member organizations of Mengistu's coalition in that their mandates (the promotion of the objectives of the NDRPE as indicated in the previous paragraph) overlapped. On the other hand, they were different in that the Joint Front was, theoretically at least, a voluntary association of organizations which depended for its income on the contribution of its members; whereas POMOA, as indicated previously, was a fully fledged government agency with a budget from the treasury. Perhaps a more important difference between the two was one of emphasis: the Joint Front was primarily concerned with the formation of the Party; whereas POMOA was primarily concerned with the politicization and organization of the masses of the people.

Be that as it may, the establishment of the Joint Front of the Ethiopian Marxist-Leninist Organizations did not lead to the formation of the Workers' Party of Ethiopia through the merger of its members, nor in any other way. On the contrary, each one of them dropped out of the Front one by one in the subsequent two and a half years; the departure from the Front of each one of them was then followed by their liquidation; this finally opened the way for Mengistu to reconstruct the Party personally all over again. As will be argued in the following sections, such a state of affairs was brought about by the basic contradiction which revolved around the question of power and which beset the Joint Front almost from its inception.

THE LIQUIDATION OF AESM AND EOPRS; 'THE UNITY OF THE  
JOINT FRONT OF THE ETHIOPIAN MARXIST-LENINIST  
ORGANIZATIONS SHALL FLOURISH'

*The liquidation of AESM*

In the wake of his successful coup on 3 February 1977, Mengistu

occupied himself with strengthening the army and raising a militia to defend the country and his government from internal and external threats, redefining Ethiopia's foreign policy and her alliances, negotiating economic and military aid from the socialist countries, and generally manning the government single handedly. As explained in the previous chapter, the few people he consulted on these matters were drawn from the bureaucracy including the Derg and the diplomatic community of the socialist countries. This trend left the political organizations, which were partisans of Mengistu's coalition, out in the cold. Whereas before February they had a role to play in government activities, like drumming up support among their followers for Mengistu's faction in the Derg, they were, after February, limited to campaigning against EDU and EPRP and engaging the latter in an assassination match. This seemed to be the role that Mengistu had intended for them; the dominant slogan of the time ('let the unity of the Joint Front flourish') meant uniting against the opposition as well as strengthening the Front.

In mid May, the most dominant of the members of the Joint Front (AESM) announced that it had held a national congress about that time and examined the political developments obtaining and had adopted its position on them. Judging by the contents of the report, the concern of AESM was no longer EPRP as had been the case previously, but the government itself. The report declared that AESM's relations with the Derg (Mengistu) would continue to be based on the principle of 'critical support'. Further, the report welcomed the support of the socialist countries but warned that foreign aid must not be allowed to compromise the honour and independence of Ethiopia and her resolve to be self-reliant and that believing that it was possible to make a success of the revolution on the strength of foreign aid was not only deceiving oneself but also losing national independence. Even more alarming was the charge of the report that anti-revolutionary bureaucrats were eliminating AESM members along with those of the EPRP; and that AESM was resolved to struggle against the bureaucracy (a term used to encompass the functionaries of the state apparatus, including Derg members).<sup>18</sup>

The national congress of AESM did not limit itself to pointing out its dissatisfactions with the unfolding developments but also adopted strategies intended to improve its posture. The same

report stated that AESM was resolved to struggle for the formation of a Marxist–Leninist party through the merger of the Joint Front members, for the formation of a People’s Revolutionary Vanguard among mass organizations and for the establishment of a People’s Revolutionary Army. AESM, it continued, would struggle for the bringing of the vanguard of the mass organizations and the People’s Army under the leadership of the Joint Front and/or the Party. Furthermore, the report pointed out that AESM was to intensify its struggle for the recognition of democratic rights not under the slogan of ‘democratic rights to the oppressed quickly’, as before, but under ‘democratic rights to the oppressed now’. It argued that the declaration of democratic rights had been promised by the NDRPE as a matter of urgency; that Teferi’s group, which had been obstructing its declaration, had been removed; and that the declaration of rights was important for the following reasons: to enable the member organizations of the Joint Front to mobilize the people; to struggle for the politicization, organization, and arming of the masses of the people; to discuss the differences among the members of the Front publicly rather than basing their relations on rumour, suspicion, backbiting, and defamation as had been the case until then.<sup>19</sup>

The main thrust of AESM’s strategy was to place itself as the dominant group within the Party to be established and to bring state power under its control. It had already built itself a substantial following in the mass organizations, particularly in the urban dwellers’ associations, and was easily the most prominent organization of the members of the Joint Front. For example, so many pro-AESM slogans such as ‘AESM is our Party’ and ‘AESM has armed us’ were displayed at the 1977 May Day rallies that AESM was at pains to deny their validity in case they induced anger and jealousy on the part of the government and the other members of the Joint Front.<sup>20</sup> If, in addition to this, democratic rights were granted, as urged by AESM, and it was as a result able to agitate among the people freely, AESM would be in a position to swell its ranks and would accordingly have a greater representation in the party to be. According to its other strategy, the mass organizations and the army were to come under the leadership of the party – a party which would be dominated by AESM and which would give Mengistu and his organization (Revolutionary Flame), as well as the other members of the Front, a subservient position within it.

In spite of its bold posturing, AESM was, as of May, very much on the defensive. In June, it charged that malicious slanders were being circulated against it and expressed concern that, once such slanders were popularized, the stigma they would leave in the minds of the people would be difficult to remove, as had happened in the case of the erroneous characterization of EPRP as an 'anarchist' and 'Trotskyite' organization.<sup>21</sup> In July, it came up with no less than ten slanders, such as that the AESM was the organization of feudal lords, of arrogance, of narrow nationalists, and of the Oromos, and attributed them to bureaucrats who sought to effect a feud between it and the Derg.<sup>22</sup>

In effect, AESM's protestations were appeals to Mengistu to continue to collaborate with it; however, its appeals were obviously falling on deaf ears. It has already been noted that Proclamation 108 of December 1976 had stripped Mengistu's coalition of any role in political activities by transferring the control of POMOA from the Supreme Organizing Committee (chaired by Mengistu) to various organs of the Derg, particularly the Standing Committee. The control of POMOA by the Standing Committee was retained by Proclamation 110 of February 1977, which was issued in order to amend the December Proclamation. On 14 July, two further Proclamations were enacted to amend the Proclamation that had been issued to establish POMOA: the first reaffirmed the continued administration of POMOA by the Standing Committee,<sup>23</sup> and the second brought the Yekatit '66 Political School, which had been run by POMOA till then, under the same Committee of the Derg.<sup>24</sup> Thus, at a time when AESM was struggling to dominate the Joint Front and the Party to be established and to bring the mass organizations and the army under the Front/Party, Mengistu was divesting the Joint Front of any role in the running of POMOA and the Political School and, therefore, of any role in the agitation to politicize, organize and arm the masses of the people.

If AESM had any doubts that its troubles were caused only by reactionary bureaucrats, it was clear to it by now that, reactionary or not, Mengistu was not on its side either. On 28 July, it announced that it had decided to withdraw some of its members from the official forums and had placed them underground for a number of reasons including the following: Marxist-Leninist organizations must implement the right of self-determination of

nationalities immediately, and not recognize it only in principle, as the Joint Front had done;<sup>25</sup> democratic rights were not recognized; instead of dealing with material issues, the Joint Front was bogged down with defaming AESM and with drawing up programmes that would never be implemented; AESM's proposals to the Derg and to the Joint Front had not been acted upon simply because they had emanated from that organization; the Derg's failure to arm the broad masses in the east had opened the way for the attack on the revolution and the country by reactionary classes and the Republic of Somalia; since March, the arming of urban dwellers' associations had slackened exposing AESM supporters to further assassinations; the feudo-bourgeois bureaucracy on which the Derg had been relying for advice was eliminating AESM leaders, especially in the provinces.<sup>26</sup> In essence, the thrust of AESM's charges was that counter-revolution had set in and that Mengistu was a party to it.

It appears that AESM was fully aware of the risks involved in deciding to go underground. At the time, it called upon the Derg and especially the left wing within it (Mengistu) not to take hasty and emotional measures against AESM's members and supporters because of the decision to go underground and pointed out that, otherwise, what happened to the Communists of the Sudan and Chile would repeat itself in Ethiopia.<sup>27</sup> The fact that AESM went underground in spite of its knowledge of the risks involved in so doing lends support to the probability that the organization was in a desperate situation and to the sincerity of its allegations that malicious slanders were being circulated against it and that its members were being eliminated.

Be that as it may, soon after AESM's 'fleeing' (as the official version would have it), a government order was apparently issued to its agents of coercion not to arrest but to take 'revolutionary measures' against the organization's leaders and members on sight. A 19 November circular written in the name of the Derg to the diplomatic community of the socialist countries put the same, thus: ' . . . workers and peasants hunted down and rounded up those who fled the revolutionary camp and handed them over to the government.'<sup>28</sup>

Within months of AESM's 'fleeing the revolutionary camp', hundreds of 'its leaders and members' were executed in their houses and offices or on the streets and in woods in the vicinity of

towns as they were trying 'to go underground' and others were arrested and tortured. With the declaration of the second round of 'red terror' in November, ostensibly directed against EPRP, and the resulting intensification of the street gun-fights, the divisions along which the 'civil war' was fought became enormously distorted; there is no doubt, however, that AESM members were also the victims of the second round of the terror, if not its intended targets. The ideological mentor of Mengistu and leader of AESM (Haile Fida) was arrested with several of his close associates some 40 kilometres to the north of Addis Ababa, tortured and summarily executed while in prison some two years later, i.e. after the whole thing had burnt out. Despite AESM's insistence throughout its political career that it was an underground organization, its liquidation was an easy matter since its leaders and members were well known to the government; it had lost its clandestinity when it adopted what it called 'the principle of critical support' in February 1975 and started working closely with the Derg.

The circular to the diplomatic community of the socialist countries, which was issued along with the declaration of the second round of the red terror, denied the validity of AESM's accusations against the government and counter-charged that AESM was itself an arrogant, opportunistic, and pseudo-progressive *petit-bourgeois* organization. More serious charges made by the circular included: AESM had openly opposed Ethiopia's closer relations with the socialist countries, especially with Cuba and the Soviet Union; it had attempted to disband the militia which was being trained to fight against Somalia's aggression; it had supported Somalia's naked aggression by arguing that it was a war of liberation; and it had committed the most cowardly and inexcusable crime against the revolution by abandoning the revolutionary camp at a time when the country was encircled by enemies.<sup>29</sup> As AESM predicted, some of the charges against it, e.g. that AESM was arrogant and Oromo-centric and had wrongly timed going underground, have since been widely believed by the public though the surviving members of the organization still vehemently deny the truth of the charges.

Obviously, AESM's withdrawal of its members from the official forums and going underground meant abandoning the Joint Front of the Ethiopian Marxist-Leninist Organizations as well as

other legal platforms. The Joint Front acknowledged this fact in April 1978 by claiming to have dismissed the organization from membership as of that month. It justified its action on similar accusations as those made by the government against AESM.<sup>30</sup> Apparently, the reason for the delay of the Front was prompted by the fear of the government that publicity of the rupture might provoke AESM's supporters into an insurrectionary uprising.

One of the points emphasized by the April meeting of the Joint Front was the question of democratic rights. It argued that AESM's slogan of 'democratic rights to the oppressed without limitation now' was contrary to the Marxist principle that real rights could only be guaranteed after power had passed from the exploiting classes to the broad masses; that such power could pass to the broad masses only after the Marxist-Leninist party was established; and that AESM's slogan must, therefore, be replaced by 'democratic rights to the oppressed through struggle'.<sup>31</sup> The so-called AESM slogan, which was being echoed throughout the country by members of the Joint Front and Mengistu himself, was thus dropped as of then. Whatever the merit of the theoretical argument made in support of the new slogan, the decision was a very important one. The term 'democratic rights' was wide enough to embrace individual rights like freedom of speech and conscience as well as group rights like the right to organize associations and parties and the right to self-determination of cultural units. These rights were at the centre of the 1974 popular uprising and of the demands of EPRP and AESM from then; as such, it would seem appropriate that the Derg should have met them in some positive manner. However, the Joint Front's allegedly Marxian argument for the rejection of democratic rights provided a rhetorical basis for the Derg's pre-existing policy on those rights and for the removal of the question from its agenda indefinitely.

*The liquidation of the Ethiopian Oppressed People's Revolutionary  
Struggle*

The troubles of the Ethiopian Oppressed People's Revolutionary Struggle with the other members of the Joint Front and the government appear to have begun at the same time as those of AESM. Both organizations espoused similar positions on the

questions of the time as pointed out in the last section; it is not surprising, therefore, that, after AESM's demise, the Ethiopian Oppressed People's Revolutionary Struggle resisted pressure from the other members of the Front and the government to condemn AESM as a 'right roader'. Also important was the refusal of the Ethiopian Oppressed People's Revolutionary Struggle to encourage the second round of red terror which was declared in November 1977, and which was probably directed against not only the EPRP but also AESM. Quite apart from refusing to endorse the red terror in the meetings of the Joint Front, it went further and soon afterwards issued a lengthy critique agreeing with many of the points made by AESM earlier, condemning the way the red terror was conducted and demanding that those who had eliminated their own enemies or made personal gains by taking advantage of their powers under the red terror be brought to justice.

Having officially confronted the Joint Front and the government thus, the leaders of the Ethiopian Oppressed People's Revolutionary Struggle began disappearing from the legal forums like the Joint Front as of January 1978. In June, the Joint Front acknowledged what was in effect the withdrawal of the organization from the Front by claiming to have suspended it until such a time as it had met the Front's criteria of membership.<sup>32</sup> Later, the Revolutionary Flame's paper justified the 'suspension' of the organization from membership on the following grounds: the organization had failed to condemn AESM; on the contrary, it had advocated 'democratic rights quickly' which was similar to AESM's position of 'democratic rights now'; it had done this to get a shortcut to power; its cadres were not conscious enough; it had contacts with EPRP and the Oromo Liberation Front; it had promoted narrow nationalism; and it had supported reactionary Somalia's invasion of socialist Ethiopia.<sup>33</sup>

The fate of the leaders of the Ethiopian Oppressed People's Revolutionary Struggle was similar to that of the leaders of AESM. A number left for the countryside and some among them who managed to survive, perhaps joined the Oromo Liberation Front. The leader of the organization (Baro Tomsa) was found dead in the countryside under mysterious circumstances. Those who were arrested are still (1989) languishing in a high security detention centre in Addis Ababa without trial and without sentence; close

observers of the Ethiopian political scene wonder why the government found it necessary to incarcerate them for much longer than it did the leaders of other political organizations.

THE ELIMINATION OF THE WORKERS' LEAGUE; 'THE WORKERS'  
PARTY SHALL BE ESTABLISHED THROUGH THE MERGER OF  
ORGANIZATIONS'

With the elimination of EPRP and AESM, which were the most important of the leftist organizations, as well as of the Ethiopian Oppressed People's Revolutionary Struggle, the veterans of the student movement were effectively removed from the political scene in Ethiopia. The only remaining offshoot of the Ethiopian student movement (the Ethiopian Marxist-Leninist Revolutionary Organization) was too small to make much difference; its role was to be limited to siding with one or other of the remaining members of the Joint Front. This left the Workers' League and Revolutionary Flame which grew by leaps and bounds as the others declined. The bulk of the rank and file members of the first three groups that survived the executions, imprisonment and torture that ensued after the falling out of their organizations with the Derg, flocked willy-nilly to the Workers' League and Revolutionary Flame and swelled their ranks. Those who shifted their allegiances were young recruits who probably for the most part were introduced to Marxism-Leninism in the post-1974 period. The core of the membership of both the Workers' League and Revolutionary Flame was, however, predominantly drawn from the army, starting from the inception of the organizations. Interestingly enough, the great majority of these civilian and military members of both groups were given their political education in the country by the veterans of the Ethiopian Students' Movement. A section were also trained abroad; a Derg paper stated that by September 1976, a total number of 313 individuals had received a month's to a year's training in the East European countries<sup>34</sup> with many more to follow suit subsequently. By the end of 1977, therefore, the era of the veterans of the Ethiopian student movement had given way to the era of what can be called 'instant communists'.

At the time of the elimination of Teferi Bante's group in February 1977, the Workers' League had lost its founder (Dr

Senaye Likke) and its other prominent leader (Colonel Daniel Asfaw) who was chief of the Derg's security. It is widely believed that the death of the two was more important for Mengistu's rise to power than the elimination of his colleagues in the Derg since they and their organization were well entrenched in the army and in the central government and, hence, in a position to oust him from his position at will. However, despite the loss of two of its most prominent leaders, the Workers' League continued to thrive under the direction of a Colonel Shitaye (who was by all accounts as strong-willed as his predecessors) and became the second most powerful organization after AESM.

By 1978, however, Revolutionary Flame had also become a power to contend with and was in fact on the way to prevailing over the Workers' League. In the first place, it was able to attract, more effectively than the Workers' League, the defectors from the organizations that had been eliminated. Secondly, it was engaged, during the same period, in a massive recruitment drive among the military and civilian bureaucracy, including the highest officials. The reason for the successes of Revolutionary Flame was the fact that it was led by Mengistu and his close associates in the government and the fact that as a result it could induce fear or favour within the public.

Despite the underlying rivalries, the Workers' League, Revolutionary Flame and the Ethiopian Marxist-Leninist Revolutionary Organization seemed prepared to spearhead the formation of a workers' party for Ethiopia. This was clearly reflected in an April issue of the Front's paper (*Voice of Unity*) which criticized the Front's cadres for their lack of political consciousness and for their attempt to replace the supreme power of the people by the supreme power of an organization and by individual dictatorship, which, according to the paper, was worse. Lenin was quoted as having said that anyone who weakens the iron discipline of the workers' party even slightly is a supporter of the *bourgeoisie*.<sup>35</sup> The paper explained further that the weakness of the Joint Front was the result of the fact that the member organizations had too much independence from the Front and that, therefore, the relationship between the two must be based on the principle of democratic-centralism.<sup>36</sup>

In June, the member organizations of the Joint Front issued a revised version of their original joint communiqué and action

programme to serve as the basis of what they called 'the transitional period' (the transition from the collaboration of the organizations to their merger). The joint communiqué stated that they had agreed, *inter alia*, to create the workers' party through the merger of the three existing member organizations of the Joint Front and other truly Marxist-Leninist groups that might emerge in the future; to draw up the bylaws governing the structure of the Joint Front during its transitional period and the structure, programme and constitution of the party to be established; and to make the necessary effort to enable the cadres of the Joint Front to conduct strong ideological and political agitation within the army and the militia in order to make the latter two accept the leadership of the Front as well as convert them into a people's revolutionary army.<sup>37</sup> The programme of action also declared that the three organizations had arrived at a joint position on the above points as well as others. It stated, for example, that they had agreed to strengthen the collaboration among themselves and to explore all means by which the collaboration would be transformed into a merger as soon as possible; and to make a joint effort to increase the quality and quantity of cadres and to establish a paper in which political questions would be analysed for the benefit of the cadres. According to it, the reason for the speeding up of the merger of the organizations was the fact that AESM and the Ethiopian Oppressed People's Revolutionary Struggle had dropped out of the revolutionary camp and the fact that a new historical juncture had been reached.<sup>38</sup>

Certain aspects of these joint positions had undesirable implications for the government and for the member organizations of the Joint Front, which plunged the latter into another crisis soon after the agreements were drawn. Obviously, what was being advocated by the Joint Front then was the same as what AESM had advocated a year earlier. The Front was arguing that the relationship between it and its members must be subjected to the discipline of democratic-centralism leading to a speedy establishment of the party through the merger of the member organizations; that such a party must be under the control of the supreme power of the broad masses and must never fall under the sway of individual dictatorship; and that the cadres, the army, and the militia must come under its and the party's leadership. This was a drive to bring the government under the central leadership of the

Joint Front and the party, and a gibe against Mengistu and his ascent to the heights of autocratic rule.

This was a time when Mengistu was celebrating his victories against the invading forces of Somalia and against EDU, EPRP and Eritrean insurgents. The challenge posed by the Joint Front was another obstacle in his assertion of personal power. Nevertheless, he was now preoccupied with the war-torn economy: the effects of the devastation of the war had to be remedied and the national economy mobilized. With this in mind, he travelled all over the socialist countries in search of aid, and in the summer of 1978 put in place the planning machinery under his personal control. Those in the Joint Front who thought that such important matters should be carried out under the guidance of the Party and that, therefore, the establishment of the latter should be given priority over the launching of a planned economy felt belittled; it was obvious that Mengistu meant to run the economy without the Party; the Derg had also adopted the nationalization measures of 1975 without the Party.

Another source of difficulty was the fact that the member organizations had not clearly defined the process by which the merger was to be created. Indeed, they had agreed to carry it out on the basis of the principle of democratic-centralism (which is in any case a very elusive concept) and to draw up the bylaws which would govern the structure of the merger; however, they had not come to an understanding of whether each member organization was to be given an equal quota of representation in the merger, whether it was going to be determined in relation to the size of membership or whether it was going to be determined in relation to the 'quality' (basically meaning academic background) of the members. Each of the organizations continued to advocate the alternative that would most favour its emergence as the dominant group in the party to be established. One of the effects of this was, nonetheless, to intensify the rivalry between the organizations to increase their membership in case that should give them an edge in the party to be formed.

It has been noted above that the Joint Front's paper had charged that some of the cadres were promoting individual dictatorship; it appears that the charge was directed against members of Revolutionary Flame since their organization was the handmaiden of Mengistu. However, though the bulk of

Revolutionary Flame's membership may have been faithful to him, it appears there was a section within it which was committed to party rather than individual dictatorship. Conversely, there were also sections within all of the leftist organizations which took the reverse position, betraying their own groups in order to buy his friendship.

It was in this confused state of affairs that the elimination of the Workers' League's members started in the summer of 1978. The cleavage along which the armed struggle was fought is often seen as between the Workers' League and Revolutionary Flame; by and large, this is correct; however, the point overlooks the other important sections of the state apparatus which were even more effective in urban guerrilla warfare than the army itself. Notable in this regard were the Derg's security force and sections of the Intelligence Department.

The final show-down between the Workers' League, on the one hand, and the Joint Front and the government, on the other, came when the former apparently plotted to overthrow Mengistu in the middle of September 1978. The plotters were betrayed by some among them and were rounded up and eliminated on the day when the coup was supposed to have taken place. In January of the following year, Revolutionary Flame's paper criticized the Workers' League's 'crimes' against the revolution as follows: it had advocated the reinstatement of 'the red terror' against EPRP, AESM and the reactionaries within the military bureaucracy with the intention of eliminating the true progressives; it had tried to dominate the Joint Front by increasing the number of its members in the organization at the expense of the other groups, and it had infiltrated its members into Revolutionary Flame with the intention of being represented in the Joint Front and in the merger through both organizations.<sup>39</sup>

Interestingly enough, members of the Revolutionary Flame were being arrested at the same time as the Workers' League was being eliminated. According to Pliny the Middle Aged, well over a hundred of the military cadres were imprisoned between August and October 1978. Apparently, the reason for this was the split within Revolutionary Flame concerning the question of whether the military cadres should continue to come under the control of the Military Political Affairs Department of the Derg, headed by Mengistu's henchman (Sergeant Legese Asfaw), or whether they

should come under POMOA.<sup>40</sup> No doubt, those that were arrested were advocates not only of transferring the military cadres to the control of POMOA but also of party dictatorship (as opposed to individual dictatorship) and presumably were also the ones who were accused of having been planted by the Workers' League in Revolutionary Flame.

Be that as it may, the Joint Front of Ethiopian Marxist–Leninist Organizations was declared by its members to have survived these events of 1978 and the Workers' League to have continued to be a member. The only thing that was reported to have changed was the replacement of the 'reactionary leaders' of the latter by new ones which meant that the ones who had betrayed the September coup had become its leaders. Colonel Shitaye was replaced by Shoan-Dagn Belete. As will be noted in the next section, however, neither the Joint Front nor the Workers' League really survived the forces of centralization and personalization of organizations.

THE ELIMINATION OF THE JOINT FRONT OF THE ETHIOPIAN  
MARXIST–LENINIST ORGANIZATIONS AND OF EMLRO; 'THE  
WORKERS' PARTY SHALL BE ESTABLISHED THROUGH THE  
MERGER OF COMMUNIST INDIVIDUALS'

Towards the beginning of February 1979, the Joint Front's paper announced that its members had agreed that:

1. they would not recruit new members henceforth;
2. they would form the Party, not through the merger of organizations, but through the merger of sincere communist individuals who were versed in Marxism–Leninism;
3. starting from its eruption, the revolution had a centre, the Derg was that centre, and the Derg was revolutionary;
4. in order to form the Party, it was necessary to establish a centre made up, firstly, of individuals who were members of the three organizations of the Joint Front and who were known for their revolutionary merit and, secondly, of individuals who were not members of those organizations but who, nevertheless, met the same requirements;
5. the centre would create the structure of the Party by recruiting members in accordance with revolutionary criteria and by giving priority to members of the Joint Front's organizations; and,

6. as the Party grew by receiving the necessary co-operation from the organizations, the latter would wither and die.<sup>41</sup>

The points of this agreement constitute a substantial departure from the past; their import will be dealt with in this subsection and in the following one.

It was *Revolutionary Flame* which first suggested the idea of forming the Party through the 'merger' of individuals as opposed to the merger of organizations. In a January 1979 article called 'A Proposal of Revolutionary Flame Concerning the Formation of the Workers' Party', it had argued that the effort made by member organizations of the Joint Front till then had not led to the formation of the Party because they had not pursued the correct Marxist-Leninist theory on merger; that, instead of agitating for the acceptance by communist individuals of the fundamental principles of Marxism-Leninism and for the adoption by them of a common strategy to bring about one leadership, they had been fighting for the proliferation of organizations in the mistaken belief that they would come together through struggle with the result that different and fragmented leaderships had emerged. Further, the article had explained that the main principles that would bring about the merger of communist individuals were: the acceptance of Marxism-Leninism as the main instrument of struggle; the analysis, on the basis of this ideology, of the level of development, history and nature of the society concerned; the adoption of common positions on the destruction of the old order and on building the new one, especially on the construction of a communist society.<sup>42</sup> Similarly, the February agreement argued that the attempt to form the Party through the merger of organizations had led Marxists to concentrate on form rather than content, to rivalry among them and to factionalism. It noted that in the 1905 congress of Russian parties, twenty-six of them were represented but, due to Lenin's determined leadership and due to the struggle of other committed Marxists, only one party emerged at the end; that in 1929, there were three parties in Vietnam but a year later, there was only one.<sup>43</sup>

These were the rhetorical justifications for the shift away from what was being called 'merger of organizations' to 'merger of individuals'. It must be noted that the collaboration of the member organizations of the Joint Front had come about at a time when each of them was afraid of being ousted from its position by

powerful contenders for power, notably the members of the officers' junta (other than members of Mengistu's faction) and EPRP. By 1979, nevertheless, not only these contenders for power but also all the forces of internal and external aggression that had emerged later had been subdued by Mengistu; with this, the external threat that had held the members of the Joint Front together had been removed and only the threat from within remained. If the Leninist Party (which can be defined as the core of society and the major source of all authority) was to be formed through the merger of the organizations, it meant that all the individual members of those organizations would become members of the Party; under this scenario, the big organizations not only would dominate the rank and file membership but would also be in a position to elect their prominent members as leaders of the Party. This appears to be at the heart of the decision to abolish the Joint Front of the Ethiopian Marxist-Leninist Organizations and replace it with a 'centre', the task of which was declared to be to bring about the formation of the Workers' Party not through the merger of organizations but through the 'merger' of individuals.

Closely related to the abolition of the Joint Front was the demise of its remaining members especially of the Ethiopian Marxist-Leninist Revolutionary Organization. In the first place, the organizations were directed by the agreement to refrain from recruiting new members but instead concentrate on purging the reactionaries who had infiltrated their ranks. The pre-existing free rein on recruitment of members, which perhaps had allowed the infiltration of the organizations by 'reactionaries', was best explained by a February directive of Revolutionary Flame to its members concerning the agreement under consideration. It said that normally an individual becomes a member of a communist party only when two or more members nominate him as a candidate; only when, on account of his conviction that he is revolutionary and able and willing to struggle, the candidate applies to the party to become a member; and only when he passes a special examination after having been studying Marxist-Leninist literature for at least a year from his nomination as a candidate. In the Ethiopian context, however (the directive continued), instead of individuals approaching organizations, it was the latter which had an abundant number of membership forms, had been going to the individuals and forcing or begging them to

become members; only in exceptional cases did they recruit them voluntarily.<sup>44</sup> There is no doubt that the decision to prohibit the organizations from indulging in further recruitment of members removed the pressure that had been brought to bear on the public to join one group or another starting from well before the onset of the 'red terror' (early 1977); it was greeted with a sense of relief. In this scenario, the prohibition marked the end of multiple sovereignty to which the public was subjected for so long and the beginning of the final assertion of authority by the Leviathan to protect society from its members who by 'nature are quarrelsome, brutish and selfish'.

Secondly, not only were the organizations prohibited from engaging in further recruitment of members but they were themselves allowed to exist only until the Party was established at which juncture they were to start withering away and dying. Though it can be argued that none of them survived the agreement under consideration, it is enough to give the example of the Ethiopian Marxist-Leninist Revolutionary Organization here.

At the beginning of 1978, the leader of that Organization (Ayed Mohamed) was gunned down in the Aboirre District of Addis Ababa presumably by EPRP. It is said that in the following days all the higher *kebeles* of the capital city (some twenty-five of them) were made to contribute ten prisoners each for retaliatory executions. Be that as it may, Ayed was replaced by the articulate, but rather trusting, Tesfaye Mekonon, who led the organization for the rest of its political career. By all accounts, it was the weakest of the political organizations mentioned so far; in 1978 and 1979, its role was limited to supporting Revolutionary Flame in the latter's drive to prevail over the Workers' League in the Joint Front and in POMOA.

However, the Ethiopian Marxist-Leninist Revolutionary Organization fell out with Revolutionary Flame in the aftermath of the February 1979 agreement. Apparently, the difference between the two revolved around the question of representation on the centre which was supposed to constitute or establish the Workers' Party. The agreement did provide that the first group of individuals who were to constitute the centre would come primarily from among the members of the organizations of the Joint Front; it did not, however, provide for the size and method of representation. The Ethiopian Marxist-Leninist Revolutionary

Organization insisted that each of the organizations should be accorded an equal quota of representation on the centre; Revolutionary Flame, on the other hand, sought admission to be based on the criteria of contribution to the revolution and degree of Marxist–Leninist consciousness. If Mengistu was the one who was to decide on Revolutionary Flame's criteria, as was the case later, it is obvious that he would use his discretionary powers in favour of his own organization. Further, if the criteria of 'contribution to the revolution' included the number of executions perpetrated against 'reactionaries', as it did, then the members of the Ethiopian Marxist–Leninist Revolutionary Organization stood little chance of competing with Revolutionary Flame. Be that as it may, the former's reluctance to yield on its position was used as an excuse to round up its leaders in June 1979 and put them behind bars. It appears to be an 'excuse' because, as will be noted in the following section, the process of launching Mengistu as the sole centre who would form the Party must have been under way at about that time. At any rate, the leader of the Organization, Tesfaye Mekonon, was released from prison some years later; interestingly enough, he is the only leader of all the leftist organizations (with the exception of Mengistu) who has survived to tell the tale.

THE DISSOLUTION OF REVOLUTIONARY FLAME; 'FORWARD WITH THE SOLE LEADERSHIP OF COMRADE MENGISTU HAILE-MARIAM'

The February 1979 Agreement of the members of the Joint Front provided that the Front was to be dissolved and replaced by what it called 'the Centre'. Whereas the first was intended to bring about the formation of the Workers' Party of Ethiopia through the merger of its member organizations, the second was said to achieve the same through the 'merger' of committed Marxist–Leninist individuals. The Agreement further provided that the Centre would be made up, firstly, of individuals who were members of the remaining three organizations of the Joint Front known for their revolutionary merits and, secondly, of individuals who were not members of those organizations but were, nonetheless, meritorious Marxist–Leninists.<sup>45</sup> What should happen after the Centre was constituted in this way was clear: the Centre made up of the first group of individuals would recruit other committed

Marxist–Leninists and grow into the Party. What was left obscure by the Agreement, however, was whether the member organizations to the Agreement would appoint their representatives to the Centre or whether an individual or group of individuals would screen who were committed Marxist–Leninists and appoint them to become the first members of the Centre. As it transpired, Mengistu became the sole Centre.

Sergeant (later Captain) Legese Asfaw (member of the Standing Committee and head of the Military Political Affairs Department of the Derg) convened a seminar of the military commissars and cadres in the Military Aviation headquarters (Addis Ababa) from 11 to 18 August 1979 and had them adopt a twenty-four-point resolution concerning mainly the question of the Centre. The relevant part of the resolution stated: ‘. . . since it is our leader (the revolutionary and determined Comrade Mengistu Haile-Mariam) who, as the centre, led the revolution from 28 June 1974, to the present hour and minute; even now, since the existence of our revolution is identified with the formation of the Workers’ Party through our revolutionary leader as the centre; since there is no alternative to the fact that in the future Comrade Mengistu Haile-Mariam must be the Centre for our Workers’ Party; we give our word of honour in the name of the seminar participants that we are prepared to make the necessary sacrifices required of us by our revolution and our revolutionary leader’. The resolution further stated that the revolution reached the stage it did then not because of miracles nor of lack of enemies which had posed danger to it but ‘because it had on its side the mature, determined and revolutionary leadership of Mengistu Haile-Mariam’. In an apparent reference to the members of the leftist political organizations including those that became members of the Joint Front, the resolution said ‘we know that the clever *petit-bourgeoisie* who had been hovering to usurp the power of the broad masses would not support, would even oppose, the establishment of the Centre because they know that it is the only instrument by which power would be captured by the workers; we will struggle with the true communists to purge and destroy these anti-Centre and anti-people elements and those like them who may surface in the future’.<sup>46</sup>

Mengistu attended the last day of the seminar from 9 am to 7 pm and, in addition to listening to a welcome speech from Sergeant

Legese Asfaw, gave the participants 'a deep explanation and evaluation of different questions regarding revolutions'. It was at the conclusion of the meeting on that day that the twenty-four-point resolution was adopted and read by a representative of the seminar participants in the presence of Mengistu.<sup>47</sup> In the evening of the same day, Mengistu gave a palace dinner to the participants of the seminar in honour of the adoption of the resolution. In his address to the participants on the occasion, he said: 'The success of the revolution is not due to my wisdom and effort [as the speaker had emphasized] but due to the uprising of the oppressed people and the selfless sacrifices of the army; the credit must go to the army. However, I would like to assure and reassure my readiness to sacrifice everything that is expected from an individual and a fighter.' Then, one of the representatives of the seminar participants read yet another eulogy on the theme of how history had entrusted the leadership of the revolution to Mengistu as of June 1974, i.e. after, according to the speaker, the demise of Haile Selassie's 'period of the man-eater'. Finally, Mengistu was given a present on behalf of the commissars and cadres.<sup>48</sup>

As of the next day, the urban dwellers' associations went into full swing mobilizing the city-dwellers into rallies in support of the resolution and messages of congratulations from the various government departments began to pour in. Also, the mass media, rally placards, banners on buildings, street arches, posters in offices, and resolutions of meetings of mass organizations, political study groups and the like, all began echoing the slogan; 'forward with the sole leadership of Comrade Mengistu Haile-Mariam'.<sup>49</sup>

This is a perfect instance of what came to be known as 'organizational operation' (the process by which an inner circle makes a decision and has it adopted by a brow-beaten meeting). In all probability, the twenty-four-point resolution and the speeches made eulogizing Mengistu would have in the first place been written by him with the assistance of someone considered literate in the official language (Amharic). Then, some of the would-be participants of the seminar would be appointed to steer the meeting into adopting the resolution and the speeches. Some of them would sit among the audience and advocate and second the right proposals and nominate those to be elected as members of drafting committees and the like; the others would act as the

members of the presidium (committee) which would chair and lead the meeting. In such proceedings, the presidium has the choice of either producing the resolution and speeches as though they were its own proposals to be adopted by the assembly or it could have a resolution and speech-drafting committee elected by the assembly to do the job for it. Normally, the participants closely watch the more influential individuals among them (those appointed to steer the meeting) and figure out what is expected of them; such decisions are always adopted unanimously. Finally, Mengistu comes and listens to the eulogies and resolutions of the meeting that he has himself written in the first place. No doubt, the idea of the whole exercise is to give the autocratically made decisions some kind of democratic complexion.

However, this style of Mengistu's government, which appeared manipulative of the commissars and cadres, need not detract from the fact that they were an important political force in their own right; they had been and continued to be a potent power base for the leader they happened to support. The origin of the institution of the commissars and cadres can be traced back to the popular uprising of 1974. It has been noted previously that the activists within the military and police units of the time were, in the summer of that year, transformed into what were called Unit Committees so that they could serve as a bridge between the Derg and the security forces and that, towards the end of the same year, they were disbanded because of their opposition to Derg rule. Starting from 1975, the bulk of the ex-Unit Committee members were sent to the socialist countries for political training and, on their return, were assigned to the various military and police units as political cadres. With the reorganization of the Derg in December 1976, a Politicization of the Army and Police Commission was set up under the Central Committee of the Derg in order to administer the military commissars and cadres separately from the other cadres.<sup>50</sup> It was this Commission that Sergeant Legese Asfaw was chosen to head in February 1977. According to him, only six out of the twenty-eight founder members of the Commission were still with them at the 1979 seminar, suggesting that not many of the original military and police commissars and cadres survived the excesses of the previous years.<sup>51</sup>

The interesting question is why Mengistu fell back on the military commissars and cadres to appoint him as the Centre

which would form the Party subsequently. One alternative open to him would have been his own political organization (Revolutionary Flame) of which the komisar and cadres were members. Since the other organizations which were members of the Joint Front had been purged, they could not have been used for the purpose; on the other hand, however, the congress, the central committee or the politburo of Revolutionary Flame could have been called upon to endorse the appointment of Mengistu as the Centre. The explanation appears to have been that, like the other member organizations of the Joint Front, Revolutionary Flame had also incurred the disfavour of Mengistu by insisting on Party, as opposed to individual, dictatorship. This appears to have been at the basis of the demand by the members of the Workers' League and Revolutionary Flame to have the administration of the military komisar and cadres transferred from the Military Political Affairs Department (the successor of the Politicization of the Army and Police Commission) to the Joint Front. As indicated in the last section but one, the demand (which was in effect to remove the commissars and cadres from being used as an instrument of personal rule by Mengistu) did not succeed; on the contrary, it led to the rounding up of those who made the demand in the autumn of 1978.

A further instance of the decline of Revolutionary Flame was the provision of the February 1979 Agreement of the member organizations of the Joint Front which stated that the Derg had been the centre of the revolution from its eruption in 1974. In practice, this meant that whereas before the agreement the Derg members were made subordinate to the cadres of the Joint Front and POMOA and received instructions from them, they were now rehabilitated and made superior to the cadres receiving instructions from the central government directly. In fact, the provision of the agreement affected mainly the cadres of Revolutionary Flame since the other organizations had for all practical purposes fallen by the wayside. If in effect, Revolutionary Flame had thus not been dissolved at the time of the February agreement, Mengistu's appointment in August as the seed that would germinate and grow into the party could have been the final blow to the only organization in existence. From then on, the members of Revolutionary Flame could become members of the Workers' Party of Ethiopia on the strength of their loyalty to

Mengistu and not on the strength of their membership of Revolutionary Flame, though as long-time supporters of Mengistu and as being known to him more closely than the others, they were probably given priority in the recruitment pecking order.

A more credible alternative to Revolutionary Flame's endorsement of Mengistu's appointment as the Centre would have been the Derg itself. As already noted, the February agreement between the member organizations of the Joint Front had declared that the Derg was the Centre of the revolution from its eruption. In fact, this provision seemed to suggest that the agreement had intended the Derg to replace the Joint Front and become the Centre which would recruit the committed Marxist-Leninists and grow into the Party. Moreover, according to the 'Constitution' of the Derg, the task of 'issuing directives on the establishment of parties . . .' was entrusted to its Congress.<sup>52</sup> Obviously, this would have made the Derg a more appropriate body to authorize Mengistu to become the Centre that would grow into the Workers' Party. Nevertheless, Mengistu did not wish to use the Derg as the Centre nor to seek its endorsement of his emergence as the sole Centre of the Workers' Party.

Thus, by 1979, it is possible to talk of the emergence of three categories of cadres in terms of their importance and relation to the central government. The first of these were those cadres drawn from both the civilian and military sections of the population who had been serving the cause of the 'revolution' as members of the five political organizations of the Joint Front, and who had defected to Mengistu's side as their individual organizations were liquidated. The second were the Derg members who had stayed on the side of Mengistu till 1979 and who had been serving the cause of the revolution as 'senior cadres' (as the December 1976 directive which defined their functions characterized them). The third were the military commissars and cadres who were mostly drawn from among the NCOs and who had been serving the cause of revolution as political activists within the various military and police units. Of these, the third category had emerged as the group whose support was most sought after in that they moved among the army and police force, especially among the NCOs and privates, and held the security forces firmly behind the leader they supported. It appears that it was a recognition of this fact that induced Teferi's group to organize and administer

them independently from the other cadres under a separate Commission, and that induced Mengistu not only to maintain their independent administration by bringing them under his direct control through the instrumentality of his henchman (Sergeant Legese Asfaw) but also to champion the cause of the NCOs (from which the komisar and cadres were drawn) throughout his political career.

THE COMMISSION FOR THE ORGANIZATION OF THE  
ETHIOPIAN WORKERS' PARTY; 'THE MISSION OF COPWE  
SHALL TRIUMPH'

The Commission for the Organization of the Ethiopian Workers' Party (COPWE), which was established by Proclamation 174 of December 1979, was the culmination of the struggle between what were the 'pro-Derg' political organizations and the central government in the context of the Provisional Office for Mass Organizational Affairs (POMOA) and of the Joint Front of Ethiopian Marxist-Leninist Organizations (JFEMLO). Article 18 of the Proclamation provided that the sources of income of COPWE were to consist of the contributions of its members and 'other sources'. The reference to 'other sources' obviously meant government sources since the Commission appropriated the best government buildings in the country and fleets of government cars for its services. Further, being duly established by a Proclamation of the Derg, it would certainly be the case that a budgetary allocation from the treasury would have been at its disposal. Thus, like JFEMLO, the Commission had the character of being a voluntary association of individuals dependent for its activities on the contribution of its members; moreover, like POMOA, it had the character of being a government agency created by a Proclamation and funded by the treasury.

Furthermore, the Commission inherited the tasks of organizing a 'strong party of the working people based on the teachings of Marxism-Leninism' from JFEMLO and of disseminating Marxism-Leninism among organizations and the masses from POMOA. Sub-article 1 of Article 6 of the Proclamation then broke down these functions of the Commission into fifteen items and in its sub-article 2 entrusted them to the chairman (Mengistu Haile-Mariam) by stating: 'The chairman of COPWE who shall have all

the powers and duties of COPWE as enumerated in Sub-article 1 of this Article shall implement or cause the implementation of the same.' There exists here a parallel between the nature of the trinity, on the one hand, and that of Mengistu and COPWE, on the other; the difference between the two lies in that in the case of the former, it is three in one, whereas in the case of the latter, it is two in one. Interestingly enough, Article 4 provided that the Commission was accountable to the Derg; however, if the arguments of chapter 6 above are granted, Mengistu and the Derg were also one and the same. Housed in an extension of the Grand Palace in which Mengistu, like the monarchs before him, resided, the head office of COPWE became the centre of authority from where all ultimate government and Party power flowed.

It took COPWE four years (until September 1984) to recruit its members, construct its organs, rechristen itself 'the Workers' Party of Ethiopia' and dub its chairman 'the General Secretary of WPE' and its Executive Committee 'the politburo of WPE'. In other words, there was no real difference between COPWE and WPE; the members and organs of the Commission were the members and organs of the Party; what took place in September 1984 was a characteristically wasteful fanfare to mark the rechristening of the organization.

Beyond stating that lower organs<sup>53</sup> of the Commission could nominate candidates to higher organs<sup>54</sup> and beyond stating that the chairman would issue the recruitment rules for members and candidates, the Proclamation is not helpful in explaining how members were to be recruited. It is common knowledge, however, that, for the duration of the Commission, the chairman personally interviewed candidates and signed their membership cards though individuals recruited as of then do not seem to have met the chairman. The number of members of either the Commission or the Party has never been made public. A report of the Central Statistical Office of 1987 put the composition of the membership as follows: workers 37.8 per cent, farmers 32.3 per cent, civil servants 20 per cent, and others 9.9 per cent.<sup>55</sup> The proportion of workers and farmers appears to have been exaggerated beyond bounds mainly because of the felt need to make WPE sound like a Leninist party. In fact, as its name indicates, the mandate of COPWE was to organize the party of the 'working people of Ethiopia' which was understood to mean a party based

on that section of the population which lived off its own sweat and which in effect would exclude those who lived on the labour of others. When the party was established in 1984, however, it was declared to be not the 'party of the working people of Ethiopia' but 'the Workers' Party of Ethiopia'. Obviously, the idea behind this was the desire to confer a vanguard role on the industrial workers and to subsume under their vanguardship the other progressive classes like the peasants and other sections of the population who had, as the jargon of the time had it, 'betrayed' their class and accepted Marxism-Leninism as their ideology. Be that as it may, the same report of the Central Statistical Office put the figure of the working class for 1985 at 271,233 in the then total population of about 45 million.<sup>56</sup> If the figure for the industrial work force looks small, it is not for lack of emphasis; in fact, even that figure appears to have been multiplied by at least a factor of two.

The General Assembly, which represents the membership of the Party by such quotas as the chairman deems appropriate, meets under the leadership of the chairman as often as is specified by internal regulations of the Commission or when the chairman convenes it.<sup>57</sup> Though it is authorized to make recommendations regarding 'domestic and foreign policy', approve internal regulations and programmes, comment and make recommendations on 'important matters' concerning the Commission when referred to it by the chairman,<sup>58</sup> the General Assembly has met too infrequently to make any difference on any of these questions. At any rate, even when it met, it has never gone beyond listening to the reports of the chairman and expressing its approval of them through standing ovations.

The other organ of the Commission-Party is the Central Committee, the members of which the chairman was authorized to 'select, assign, transfer, suspend or dismiss . . .'.<sup>59</sup> Certain individuals, like members of the Derg, were selected to become members of the Central Committee of COPWE almost from the inception of that Commission; however, it was not until later that the full membership of the Committee was made public. At the time, it was reported in the official daily (*Addis Zemen*) that the members numbered 136 and the alternate members 64. Thus, the total number of members and alternate members of that organ was 200, a figure which included the members and alternate

members of the politburo who were also members of the Central Committee. Of these, a quarter to a half were drawn from the army and the rest from the upper civilian bureaucracy. Further, women were represented on the Central Committee by one member and three alternate members.<sup>60</sup> Though the Proclamation provides for a long list of functions that the Central Committee has to carry out in accordance with the directives of the chairman,<sup>61</sup> its role has been limited to meeting a few times a year and, like the General Assembly, expressing its approval of the chairman's reports through a standing ovation.

Yet another organ was the Executive Committee or politburo, the members of which were again to be selected, assigned, transferred, suspended or dismissed by the chairman.<sup>62</sup> Upon the establishment of the Commission, seven members of the Derg's Standing Committee were selected to become members of the Executive Committee of COPWE and on the establishment of WPE, the same individuals, in addition to four civilian members and six alternate members, became members of the politburo. The Executive Committee was given a number of relatively unimportant functions by the Proclamation. Nevertheless, since, as noted earlier, all the powers of COPWE were entrusted to the chairman, the Executive Committee could only act as an assistant to the chairman in his exercise of powers. In fact, the relationship between the chairman and the Executive Committee was exactly the same as the relationship between him and the Standing Committee of the Derg (as discussed in chapter 6 above); the only difference now was that, since the Executive Committee had taken the place of the Standing Committee as of the establishment of COPWE, both governmental and Party powers were concentrated in the latter body and (if the arguments of chapter 6 are granted) those powers were concentrated in the chairman.

Around the time of the formation of COPWE, members of the armed forces and the police who became party functionaries, including members of the Executive Committee-politburo were declared to be civilians and were in effect referred to only as 'comrades'. When the Party was established in September 1984, the members and the alternate members of the politburo were the following comrades: Mengistu Haile-Mariam (General Secretary), Fikre Selassie Wog-Deres, Fisiha Desta, General Tesfaye Gebre-Kidan (Minister of Defence), Birihanu Baye, Addis Tedla, Legese

Asfaw, Hailu Yemenu, Amanuel Wolde-Michael, Alemu Abebe, Shimelis Mazengya, Teka Tulu, Fisiha Sidelil, Shoan-Dagn Belete, Tesfaye Dinka, Tesfaye Wolde-Selassie and Kassa Gebrae.

In addition to the General Assembly, the Central Committee and the politburo, the Commission-Party had what the Proclamation called Regional Committees at the provincial, *Awraja* and *wereda* levels and at the level of each organization.<sup>63</sup> These were branch offices of the Party's Central Committee (secretariat at the national level) which was headed by the General Secretary and which also had committees as described above and departments for different spheres of activities like departments for Organizational Affairs, Military Political Affairs, Propaganda, Economics and Foreign Affairs. Some of these departments were duplicated in the regional committees. Unlike members of the organs of the Party, most of whom were employed in the government departments, those assigned in the regional committees were full-time Party functionaries.

By the early 1980s, the administrative relationship between the lower and upper organs of the government and mass organizations was declared to be governed by the Leninist principle of 'democratic-centralism' but this was not so for the relationships between the regional committees of the Party. Instead, it was provided that the Central Committee would prescribe the directives governing 'the chain of command, the procedure of submitting reports and similar activities'.<sup>64</sup> Further, the law does not give the regional committees any powers of decision-making; it only allows them to agitate among Party members and the masses of the people, nominate candidates to higher organs, resolutely struggle against factionalism, implement correctly and without delay decisions of superior organs, and hold meetings in order to 'discuss' and submit 'recommendations' to superior organs.<sup>65</sup> Moreover, it is a common complaint of the Party functionaries that they have no decision-making powers, that their recommendations are never acted on, and that they have no way of finding out the real reasons behind policies adopted by the central body concerning such important matters as villagization, resettlement and the civil wars, an omission which greatly handicaps their agitational work among the people. The regional committees and their functionaries are, more than anything else, a means of reporting to the central authority about 'factionalists

and other anti-people' tendencies among themselves;<sup>66</sup> and about similar tendencies in government and non-government organizations. Similarly, the regional committees are a machinery through which all the members of the Party discharge their responsibility of resolutely 'exposing anti-revolution and anti-unity' activities.<sup>67</sup> Thus, the individual Party member submits a daily report to the basic organization or to the *wereda* secretariat concerning whatever 'anti-revolution and anti-unity' activities he comes across in his work place, residence or anywhere else he thinks it exists.

Further, there is the relationship between the Commission-Party, on the one hand, and the government and non-government organizations on the other. In this regard, the Proclamation provided that 'any natural or juridical person, government office, government or mass organization shall have the duty to co-operate with COPWE in all its activities to implement the purposes of this Proclamation'.<sup>68</sup> This gave rise to a tremendous amount of confusion among the regional committees and government departments regarding their respective jurisdictions. This was so no less among the ministries and the Addis Ababa Regional Committee of the Party which was given the status of a provincial regional office.<sup>69</sup> The ministers felt that, being in charge of spheres of activities at the national level, they should come under the Central Committee and not under the Provincial Committee. Further, though they had the duty to co-operate with the party and the latter had the right of giving them 'directives' the question of delimiting the boundaries between 'decisions' and 'directives' was not always an easy one to ask. In fact, the resulting confusion was used by Party functionaries to accuse those of the government officials they did not like of being 'anti-revolutionary' and to victimize them. After a number of years of confusion, its continued decline was arrested by absorbing all the officials into Party membership. Nevertheless, a government official would ignore a Party directive (acknowledged as such by the central authorities) at his own peril.

The non-government organizations which also had the duty to co-operate with COPWE were what came to be known as the mass organizations including the Peasant Association, Urban Dwellers' Association, the Revolutionary Ethiopian Women's Association, the Revolutionary Ethiopian Youth Association, the All Ethiopian

Trade Unions, and the professional associations like those of the doctors, nurses and teachers. The most important of these were the first two which, since their establishment in 1975, were expanded organizationally to embrace the entire population except the nomads and those under guerrilla control. For example, it was reported that in 1985, there were 20,367 basic peasant associations embracing 5,681,033 heads of families as members and that in 1986, there were 1,258 basic urban dwellers' associations embracing all of the urban population as members.<sup>70</sup>

The basic organizations of the Revolutionary Ethiopian Women's Association and the Revolutionary Ethiopian Youth Association were subordinated to the basic Peasants' and Urban Dwellers' Associations and, hence, brought under the leadership of the latter two mass organizations. In addition, they were subordinated to their own higher bodies which were established at the *wereda*, *Awraja* provincial and national levels. The All Ethiopian Trade Unions and the professional associations, on the other hand, were established independently from the Peasants' and Urban Dwellers' Associations. This has meant that almost every citizen belonged to one mass organization or another, and often he belonged to more than one organization at the same time. A young lady between the ages of eighteen and thirty, for instance, would automatically be a member of either the Peasants' Association or Urban Dwellers' Association (depending on whether she lived in the countryside or an urban area), and of the Revolutionary Youth Association; further, she could be a member of the All Ethiopian Trade Unions, the nurses'-doctors' associations and of the Party.

Though (as explained in chapter 4) the Peasants' Associations and Urban Dwellers' Associations had extensive powers over social and economic matters at the time of their formation in 1975, and this was further expanded by law later, it was their political functions that survived the eventful years following their establishment in 1975. An outstanding example of their political function was the role they played in harassing, detaining and eliminating members of the various political organizations during the red terror. Since then, the Urban Dwellers' Associations lost their control over house rents and with it their ability to promote social and economic activities in their localities like building communal toilets, communal water-taps, small roads, kindergartens and

poultry rearing. This left them with the tasks, when asked to do so by the Centre, of mobilizing the population, hunting the youth for military service, pressurizing the population into conformity through the threat of withdrawing shopping rations and through refusing to write references without which many organizations including the Immigration Office were prohibited from providing their services, and co-ordinating contributions for the war effort or the drought-affected people.

The Peasants' Associations have been even more important than the Urban Dwellers' Associations in the implementation of policies of the government and of the Party. Apart from the fact that they wield the same powers over their members as do the Urban Dwellers' Associations over theirs, they have in addition been involved in grand national projects of the government-party. For example, they have been instrumental in allocating and collecting from their members grain quotas to be sold to the government at below market prices (the so-called quota system), in mobilizing hundreds and thousands of peasants in the drought-affected areas of the north for settlement in southern regions hundreds of miles away from their homesteads (so-called resettlement), and in herding millions of peasants into villages from their pre-existing scattered hamlets (so-called villagization).

#### CONCLUSION

Having had himself declared the 'sole leader' by the military cadres, Mengistu then became COPWE and personally constructed the WPE by recruiting members and by appointing some among them as members and functionaries of higher organs of the Party. Then, the government and non-government organizations were subordinate to the Party, generally speaking, for two purposes: to help the central authority control society and to help in the implementation of its policies. As chairman of the Derg, Mengistu Haile-Mariam was the absolute head of government; in addition, as General Secretary of the Party, he became head of WPE after the establishment of the latter. Whichever hat he decided to wear at any given time, Mengistu emerged the absolute central authority whose policies (adopted by the politburo willy-nilly) were implemented by the totality of the body politic and on whose behalf society was controlled.

Often, observers of the Ethiopian political scene talk of the mobilization of the lower class and its incorporation into the political life of the country for the first time ever without much reference as to whether the mass of the people are incorporated into democratic government and party processes or whether they are incorporated into a totalitarian system. There is no doubt that either of those contingencies would constitute a radical departure from the past; nonetheless, it appears appropriate to query whether the incorporation was a democratic or a dictatorial one since there is a qualitative difference between the two. Viewed from the perspective of the participation of the newly created party and mass organizations in the implementation of policies, it could be argued that the new order allows the masses a degree of democratic participation in the political life of the country. This argument is in itself very weak in that an animal which is trained to perform certain activities through the use of sticks and carrots cannot be claimed to have had its consciousness taken into account by its master. Moreover, the participation of the masses in controlling themselves can only be taken as evidence of the emergence of totalitarianism.

At any rate, a Leninist party is not known for its democratic disposition towards the masses of the people. However, it is interesting to ask whether there are various degrees of democratic traditions within the Leninist ruling parties themselves; whether, for example, there was a degree of vitality and free debate within the Communist Party of the Soviet Union even at the time of Stalin which enabled it to evolve a whole set of new ideas concerned with social engineering (five-year plans, new forms of social and economic organizations, a new legal system) and to constantly revise them with a view to making innovations. This does not appear to have been the case in Ethiopia. Given the elimination of all political organizations (including those which seemed willing to co-operate with the Centre), the highly personalized nature of the construction of the government and Party machinery, and given Mengistu's ability and will to bulldoze his wishes through the politburo, the Central Committee and the General Assembly, it would seem logical to conclude that no degree of pluralism (even when that pluralism was within the accepted bounds of Marxism-Leninism in practice) has been possible in Ethiopia. Except in its military-like command structure the new political order

distinguished itself by a withered party, government and mass organizational machinery copied from a foreign model. When, after February 1977 and especially after the summer of 1979, Mengistu as much as developed a fever, the whole of Ethiopia was seized with a spasmodic convulsion of sneezes, a convulsion which evaporated into oblivion within a month or two only to be stirred thereafter by another round of fever, cold and sneezes for a month or two only to completely forget it and turn its attention towards a new policy in the next round of fever, cold and sneezes.

*The formalization of power through the 1987 constitution: 'organizational operation' in action*

THE DRAFTING AND ADOPTION OF THE CONSTITUTION

The second congress of COPWE, which founded WPE, met between 5 and 9 September 1984, and adopted the central report of COPWE and the Programme of the Party both of which were submitted to it by the chairman of COPWE (Mengistu Haile-Mariam). Those documents, which duplicated each other, laid down the main features of the would-be constitution of PDRE for the first time. The most striking aspects of those documents included the following:

1. In the endeavour to usher in the new political order, the primary task is to establish PDRE under the leadership of WPE. The task of the government of PDRE will be to consummate the ongoing NDR and proceed with the construction of socialism. The broad masses have enjoyed democratic rights in peace by abolishing the anti-development monarchy.
2. The structure and operation of PDRE shall be in accordance with the Marxist–Leninist principles of government structures and operations. Thus, the characteristic features of the republic will be proletarian internationalism, democratic-centralism, socialist legality, and active participation of the people.
3. The structure of the government of PDRE shall be unitary and be based on the realities of the country's economy and shall take into account the locality of the nationalities. The organization of state power from the lowest to the national levels shall be filled by individuals elected by the people. In the construction and operation of the republic, WPE shall give special emphasis to guaranteeing that the sovereignty of the working class is progressively ensured in the organization of state power and that the participation of the nationalities in them exists.

4. Since the eruption of the revolution, there is not a single time when the revolutionary government has not considered the rights of nationalities. In addition to clearly incorporating the Leninist principle of self-determination in the NDRP, it is clearly stated that, in the realities of our country, its implementation is regional autonomy. The desire to secede from socialist Ethiopia is a desire to join imperialism and the reactionary camp; there is no third alternative to it.<sup>1</sup>

Despite a flurry of activities in the subsequent three years concerning the establishment of government, Party and other committees to draft the constitution and despite the discussion of the draft by various bodies and by the people, the above directives of the Party were not allowed to be changed.

The congress of the Party passed a resolution to the effect that its members and organs were directed to implement the above directives. Nevertheless, more immediately charged with the task of implementing the directives than these were a section of WPE's central secretariat called the Department of Nationalities' Affairs and a government agency called the Institute of Nationalities. The establishment of the Department of Nationalities was announced at the second congress of COPWE (September 1984). Though the establishment of the Institute of Nationalities appears to have preceded this, it was not fully operational until 1985.<sup>2</sup>

The Department of Nationalities was filled with cadres and Party functionaries. Shoan-Dagn Belete, a health officer, a one-time prominent member of the Workers' League and currently an alternate member of the politburo, was appointed as its head. The Institute of Nationalities was filled with individuals mostly from the Addis Ababa University, chosen, it seems, not for their experience and knowledge of the country or their ideological commitments, but for holding PhD degrees in their fields of study. Yayeh-Yirad Kitaw, a medical doctor and a quiet man not known for any commitment to radical politics, was appointed as its head.

The tasks of the Department of Nationalities involved supervising, on behalf of the Party, the activities of the people, government agencies, Party organs and committees concerned with the drafting and adoption of the constitution of PDRE as well as the election of members of regional and national assemblies.<sup>3</sup> Broadly speaking, the tasks of the institute consisted of drafting the constitution of PDRE after having carried out the necessary

research into the national composition of the country, the administrative divisions of the regions and comparative constitutional law of the socialist countries. The intellectuals assembled for the purpose travelled extensively to the socialist countries and to different parts of Ethiopia in order to discharge their responsibilities. They were organized into committees including a Constitution Drafting Committee.<sup>4</sup>

Normally, this Committee drafted sections of the constitution first and then submitted them for review by a higher body of the Institute composed of representatives of the various committees, by the Department of Nationalities and finally by Mengistu. Superior recommendations and decisions were always returned in the form of proposals but if they were resisted by members of the Drafting Committee, then the latter would be told that it was 'superior order', a phrase very widely and effectively used by members of the Party to browbeat independent-minded individuals and bar further discussion on the matter in hand. In this way, Mengistu is said to have rejected the drafts submitted to him many times and ordered their redrawing again and again. It is banded about that he did this at least nine times.

In reality, the important decisions regarding the contents of the constitution were made by Mengistu closely assisted by Comrades Shoan-Dagn and Yayeh-Yirad. The three appear to have constituted an inner circle right from the start. The two co-ordinated the activities of their respective departments and were given audience by Mengistu to make reports and take back decisions from him for implementation by their subordinates. At a later stage, several other members of the two Departments won the confidence of Mengistu and were made privy to the consultations of the inner circle. When the work of the constitution and the establishment of the national assembly was completed, the mouths of these individuals were sealed with appointments to high government positions. It is probable that Mengistu would, unbeknown to the heads of the two departments and their subordinates, have been consulting some of the most trusted of his associates outside the two departments but there is no knowing who these might have been and whether foreign advisers were involved. The Central Committee and the politburo were not involved in the drafting process until it was all over.

The next important development was the establishment, in

early 1986, of a Constitution Drafting Commission under the Central Committee of WPE. The Commission had 343 members, allegedly made up of representatives of WPE, the government, mass organizations, trade unions, religious organizations, and individuals recognized for their professional and other services to the people.<sup>5</sup> The members were not elected by the organizations they represented nor by the people but hand-picked by Mengistu who was authorized to do so by the Proclamation which established the Commission.<sup>6</sup>

As its name and specific mandate suggests, one of the Commission's main functions was the drafting of the constitution.<sup>7</sup> As mentioned earlier, however, such a draft was already prepared by the Institute of Nationalities. A report of the Commission to the CC tries to resolve this apparent contradiction by stating that the establishment of the Department of Nationalities and the Institute of Nationalities as well as their subsequent study of the old constitution, the programmes and economic plans of the Party, and the visit of their members to various parts of the country and to eight socialist states has enabled the Commission to convert their *nidf* of the constitution into a *reqiq* of the same.<sup>8</sup> Those Amharic terms can, perhaps, be rendered as 'plan' and 'draft', respectively, but the distinction between them at least in the present context is too blurred to make any sense.

The real explanation for this contradiction arising from the establishment of the two drafting organizations appears to be the desire of the central authorities to give to the process of the adoption of the constitution some kind of democratic complexion. This is the desire to show that the constitution was drafted not by a government department (the Institute of Nationalities) or the Party (the Department of Nationalities' Affairs) but by representatives of the people (the Constitution Drafting Commission). This thinking dominates the remaining stages in the process of the adoption of the constitution.

In 1986, the Constitution Drafting Commission held three congresses: the first was on 21 February, the second between 4 and 7 May, and the third between 2 and 6 September. During the first general assembly meeting, members of the Commission probably elected Mengistu as their chairman. They also elected members of their Executive Committee all of whom were high-powered Party functionaries. In addition, they elected members of seven other committees including those of the Constitution Draft Preparation

Committee after they were nominated to it by the Executive Committee.

According to the Commission's report to the CC, the Draft Preparation Committee raised no less than 250 questions concerning 75 per cent of the provisions of the 'plan of the constitution' and made amendments concerning 25 per cent of the provisions and submitted it to the second congress. After a deliberation of four days in groups of six, the second congress is said to have converted the 'plan' into draft 01 of the constitution of PDRE.<sup>9</sup> The importance of these amendments, if they took place to that extent ever, must be taken with a pinch of salt; the meetings of the Commission are known to be only a formality.

In April 1986, the Commission's draft constitution was submitted to the fourth regular plenum of the CC which, after a deliberation of a few days, managed to amend only the provisions concerning the powers of the vice-president. According to the existing arrangement, the vice-president of the republic was authorized to act on behalf of the president when the latter was absent. Members of the CC made the objection that, during such presidential absence, the vice-president would be in a position to take measures contrary to the directives of the president and spoil his programmes or even topple him from power altogether. In making these points, members of the CC were trying to render the office inept in case a candidate who was against them individually should be elected. At the time, it was widely believed that either Fikre Selassie Wog-Deres or Fisiha Desta would be chosen as the vice-president. Above all, however, the CC members were demonstrating their allegiance to Mengistu (who, everyone knew, was going to be the president) by speaking in favour of removing any strong office which might compete with, challenge or threaten his position. The result was a few unimportant references in the constitution merely indicating the existence of the office of the vice-president.<sup>10</sup>

The function of the Commission, other than drafting the constitution, was setting up Discussion Co-ordinating Committees at various levels.<sup>11</sup> One of the committees established by the fourth congress of the Drafting Commission was the Discussant and Opinion Receiving and Co-ordinating Committee. It was reported to the fourth plenum of the CC that this committee had already established some 25,000 Discussion Co-ordinating Committees in

*kebele* and other forums in order to facilitate the participation of the people in the discussion of draft 01 of the constitution.<sup>12</sup> Most of the members of the Commission and its committees were full-time employees elsewhere and as such could not have had the time nor the information required to organize the Discussion Co-ordinating Committees. The truth of the matter was that the committees were organized by the secretariate of the Party, especially by the Department of Nationalities. The Discussion Co-ordinating Committees were structured alongside the Party hierarchy from the centre to the basic units and their members were drawn from among Party functionaries and leaders of the mass organizations.

Following the fourth plenum of the CC, two successive weekends were devoted to a discussion of the constitution by mass gatherings of the people at *kebeles*. Several days before these meetings, copies of draft 01 of the constitution were distributed through the *kebeles* to groups of individuals so that the latter could prepare themselves for the discussions. Though the idea was that each group would come together and discuss the provisions of the draft, it appears that in most cases they simply circulated the document among themselves within the remaining few days before the mass meetings.

Presided over by the Discussion Co-ordinating Committees, the general assembly meetings were then held and run for very long hours taking the whole day and interrupted only by a short break for lunch. Despite that, the proceedings were very lively since the members of the co-ordinating committees did their best to encourage the people to participate in the discussions. Throughout the proceedings, the members of the co-ordinating committees were busy recording the contributions made by the people. It was these contributions (after their partial incorporation in September by the Constitution Drafting Commission) which were said to have converted draft 01 into draft 03. It is not clear whether there ever was a draft 02 and whether, if there was, it was a product of the fourth CC plenum.

No less important than the discussions of the popular gatherings was the fact that the draft constitution was submitted to the people to approve through a referendum. The question was certainly framed very broadly. Basically, it boiled down to whether, for any reason, one approved or rejected the constitution in total.

There was no reason to suspect that the people were in any way pressured to exercise their voting right one way or the other; the ballot boxes were placed in sufficiently secluded places to enable the people to cast their votes secretly. Further, respectful but, unfortunately, rather old members of the local communities were invited to witness the counting of the votes at the *kebele* level. Once the ballot boxes were collected by the central authorities, however, the witnesses had no participation in collating the aggregate votes at the national level.

To sum up, the party secretariate (especially Mengistu and the Department of Nationalities' Affairs) was responsible for co-ordinating the activities of the Institute of Nationalities, the Constitution Drafting Commission and the Discussion Co-ordinating Committees. It mapped out the strategy by which these organizations were to be established and carry out their functions and drafted their programmes and speeches for them. The Institute of Nationalities provided the technical knowhow required for the drafting of the constitution. The Commission, which was a representative body of institutions and the people, was a mere instrument of the Party's desire to be seen to be practising democracy. The Discussion Co-ordinating Committees, composed of members of the Party and mass organizations, were responsible for steering the mass discussions of the draft constitution.

By all accounts, the proceedings of the Constitution Drafting Commission, which did not last for more than twelve days altogether, were formal. On the other hand, the discussions which took place at the *kebeles* were quite lively and more so at some of them than at others. Nevertheless, it must be noted that they were not completely free; they operated within at least two constraints. The first of these was the resolution of the second congress of COPWE which was quoted extensively at the beginning of the present chapter and which outlined the main features of the constitution to be observed by all. To take an example, it was a requirement of that resolution that the constitution should usher in a republic (PDRE) and not a monarchy. However much an Ethiopian may wish the reinstatement of monarchy and however much he might espouse that in private, he would never air such an opinion in the mass gatherings convened to consider the constitution. The Proclamation which established COPWE had made actions considered to be against the wishes of that

organization a serious offence punishable by rigorous imprisonment of many years or death. That Proclamation was rescinded at the time of the formation of WPE but the legal status of WPE and punishments for violations against its interests have not been made public. At any rate, the suspected can still be victimized at his place of work or at the hands of the *kebele* officials and the secret services.

The second constraint within which the discussions took place was what has come to be known as 'organizational operation'. The Party, through the instrumentality of the Discussion Co-ordinating Committees which presided over the meetings, and members of the Party planted among the audience, reminded those assembled of authority, intimidated them and steered the discussions towards the adoption of the Party's directives. Thirteen years of the revolution had established a *modus vivendi* between the people and the Party/state authorities. Everyone knew what was and was not allowed and everyone acquiesced in toeing the official line. Under these circumstances, the discussions could only, and did, dwell on the non-political and on the trivial: grappling with the idea of what a constitution is all about, nuances, language, the rights of illegitimate children etc.

#### THE FORMATION OF THE NATIONAL SHENGO

A National Shengo Election Commission was established on 6 April 1987.<sup>13</sup> It accomplished its tasks by holding three meetings between its establishment and June of the same year. During its first session, it elected its leaders including its chairman (Comrade Worku Ferede) a one-time prominent member of AESM and currently a member of the CC of WPE. During the second, it approved the candidate members of the Shengo and, during the third, it approved the election of the Shengo members as having been conducted in accordance with the electoral laws.<sup>14</sup> The Election Commission appears to have been accountable both to the Derg and to the Party since its findings were submitted to them both: in June<sup>15</sup> and in September,<sup>16</sup> respectively. The Commission's functions were purely formal.

Under the pre-revolution legal order, any Ethiopian who could deposit about 250 US dollars could put himself up as a parliamentary candidate. However, the constitution of PDRE and the

Proclamation which established the Election Commission stated in no uncertain terms that a Shengo candidate could only be nominated by organs of the Party, mass organizations and sections of the army.<sup>17</sup> This was a surprise to individuals who sought to nominate themselves as candidates. Apparently, the question was raised in a number of *kebele* meetings when the draft constitution was being discussed by the people a year earlier. The explanation of this policy is, perhaps, the need to give the Party, which is declared by the constitution to be the leading force of the state and the whole of society,<sup>18</sup> an effective means of controlling the elections and influencing the country towards the desired end.

The process of nomination and election of the Shengo members was accomplished in May and June 1987. Flanked by representatives of the youth and women's associations, members of the Party held the first general assembly meetings in each *kebele* and read out the names of three nominees handed down from the centre. Then, they invited members of the audience to make comments on the candidates. Negative comments were never forthcoming but popular candidates were indicated through favourable comments and loud applause. On average, a constituency was made up of three *kebeles* so that, at the end of the first round of assembly meetings, each constituency had nine nominees. Out of these, six were dropped by the central authorities before the second round of meetings which were held at the constituency level. It was at these meetings that the remaining nominees made presentation speeches giving a sketch of their life history and contributions to the revolution.

A curious development that took place after the second general assembly led to the dropping or coerced resignation of further nominees from among the remaining three candidates particularly in the constituencies of the capital city. The central authorities were apparently shaken by a rumour that the people were going to embarrass or undermine the Party by casting their votes against its members. Despite the assurances of the Party cadres that they could and would guarantee the election of the desired candidates (through, no doubt, 'organizational operation'), it was decided by the central authorities not to take any risks. The unwanted nominees were called to the local Party secretariates and told to resign. According to the official daily, 12 per cent of the constituencies at the national level had only 1

candidate, 7 per cent 2 candidates, and the remaining 81 per cent 3 candidates each.<sup>19</sup> The corresponding figures for the capital city were 69 per cent, 11 per cent and 20 per cent.<sup>20</sup>

This desperate move could have been explained by the unestablished rumour that the central authorities were toying with the idea of involving foreign witnesses in the counting of votes. However, since that did not take place and since the ballot box has always been a preserve of the Party, the incident can only be explained by lack of confidence on the part of the authorities. The waves of resignations were set off at Mengistu's own constituency. At the time of the second round of general assembly meetings, Mengistu's contestants had declared that their contributions to the revolution could in no way match his and had, consequently, resigned to give way to his emergence as the sole candidate in the constituency.

On polling day (14 April 1987), the people discovered not only that they had a varying number of candidates to choose from depending on the constituency in which they lived but also that the candidates were not necessarily residents of the constituencies in which they stood for election. The politburo and CC members of WPE had to be elected as members of the Shengo. Since a lot of them lived in Addis Ababa, there were not enough constituencies to go round. Consequently, they were assigned to stand for election in the various constituencies in the capital as well as the provinces. Mostly, each one of them was assigned to a particular constituency on the strength that he had once worked or lived or originated from there.

It was reported that the number of constituencies in which the elections took place was 813 out of a total of 835<sup>21</sup> and that the total number of registered electors was 15,673,418 out of whom 13,383,887 did actually cast their votes.<sup>22</sup> The admission that no elections were held in twenty-two constituencies is perhaps meant to explain the extent of territories under the control of insurgents opposed to the central government. Also, the turn-out appears to have been very high by any standards. This is not surprising, however, since the people tended to acquiesce with the wishes of the authorities.

The next flurry of activities concerning the establishment of the Shengo came in the early part of the following September. On the third of that month, Mengistu convened the CC of WPE and

submitted a lengthy report on the history of the Derg, the process of the adoption of the constitution of PDRE and on the election of Shengo members.<sup>23</sup> Since in September 1984 the congress of the Party had authorized the latter to be in charge of supervising the process of the establishment of PDRE and since, under the constitution, the Party was the leading force of the society,<sup>24</sup> the CC had, on behalf of the Party, to be seen to be giving its blessing to the election of Shengo members and to the convocation of the Shengo itself.

The first session of the Shengo lasted for four days, from 9 to 12 September 1987. It was attended by African heads of state and governments, by Party and government officials from the socialist countries and by hand-picked Ethiopian observers. Most of the proceedings were televised and broadcast live. During the meetings of the last two days, supposedly held on behalf of the Shengo, Mengistu, who was just 'elected' President of the PDRE, sat back smugly and sponged the eulogy that poured out from representatives of the army, mass organizations, and foreign delegations while Comrades Fikre Selassie Wog-Deres and Fisiha Desta took turns to invite the speakers to express their messages of support. The proceedings of the first two days were, however, chaired by Mengistu ostensibly on behalf of the Derg. It is, perhaps, beneficial to describe briefly the proceedings of the first two days since they throw light on the regime's notion of parliamentary democracy and since they indicate how subsequent parliamentary sessions are likely to be conducted. It may be stated from the onset that the proceedings were run in accordance with what has come to be known as 'organizational operation', namely, making a decision by the Party in advance and processing it through a representative body in order to give it a democratic complexion.

At 9.05 am, Comrade Fisiha called the Shengo to a meeting by a mere invitation of Mengistu to assume the chairmanship on behalf of the Derg. The latter started off by asking the Shengo to approve the already prepared and distributed programme and agenda of the meeting. First, he invited speakers in support of or against the motion but there was no reaction from the Shengo members on this as on any subsequent questions. In any case, the chairman did not pause to give them a chance to speak; instead, he immediately proceeded to ask them to vote by a show of hands.

On this as on all subsequent questions, the chairman asked in quick succession for votes in favour or against the motion and for abstentions followed by an immediate banging of the podium and a declaration that the matter had been adopted. No attempt was made to count the votes cast; in any case, none of the Shengo members failed to support the proposed motions throughout the proceedings. There may be a precedent for this lack of active participation on the part of the deputies in the parliaments of the socialist countries but it has certainly no parallel in the West or in the Shengos of Ethiopia's feudal past including that of Haile Selassie.

Following the adoption of the programme and agenda, the chairman declared that the meeting was going to be led by a presidium of ten men and proceeded to introduce them by reading out their names. While all of these were politburo or CC members, only about three of them were Derg members as well. In effect, though the first half of the Shengo proceedings was said to have been conducted on behalf of the Derg, it is more accurate to say that it was conducted by, and on behalf of, the Party which had authorized itself through the resolution of its 1984 congress to be in charge of the drafting and implementation of the constitution. This is also, arguably, the case for the second half of the session which was supposed to have been held by and on behalf of the Shengo itself.

Next, the chairman announced that the Shengo would form a commission to establish whether the election of the Shengo members had been properly carried out. He then read the names of twenty-five Party functionaries who were to constitute the membership of the Commission; he did not invite members of the Shengo to nominate the candidates. Immediately following this, there was a coffee break for exactly an hour and five minutes. When the Shengo was convened again, the impression given was that during the break, the Commission had carried out its tasks and had come up with a speech lasting half an hour. It was an elegant speech pregnant with facts and figures dealing, as it was, with the processes of the election of the deputies. It was delivered by the chairman of the Commission, Yayeh-Yirad Kitaw. Then, Mengistu asked the Shengo members to approve the findings of the Commission, in other words, to approve the propriety of their own election, by a show of hands. Finally, they took an oath of

allegiance to the Republic and its laws by repeating together, after Mengistu, a few brief statements to that effect.

All this was accomplished between 9.05 am and 11.20 am with an hour's coffee break to boot. From then to 7.30 pm, Mengistu delivered a marathon speech on behalf of the Derg; the monotony was interrupted only by two hours of lunch and one hour of coffee breaks. The speech dealt with absolutely everything to do with Ethiopia: its history, the exploitative nature of the old order, the achievements of the revolution etc.<sup>25</sup> After his speech, Mengistu declared that two commissions were to be established by the Shengo and read the names of the candidates. He then invited comments from members of the Shengo but none was forthcoming; the commissions were then approved by a show of hands in the usual cursory fashion. The first commission, led by Comrade Legese Asfaw and composed of nineteen members, was in charge of the election from among the deputies to membership of the central organs of state power. The second, led by Comrade Birihanu Baye, was in charge of studying draft legislations to be submitted to the Shengo. Then, Mengistu closed the first day's Shengo session by announcing that the foreign guests and observers would not attend the meeting of the following day.

The time between 9 am and 3.15 pm of the next day (10 September) was taken up with the work of the last two commissions. The morning session was closed not only to observers and foreign guests but also to the mass media: the press, radio and television. It was taken up with the work of Comrade Legese's commission, namely, the election (from among the deputies) of the members of the organs of state power. These included: the President and Vice-President of the Republic, members of the Council of State, members of the Council of Ministers, judges of the Supreme Court, the Procurator General, Chairman of the National Working People's Control Committee and the Auditor General.<sup>26</sup> No doubt, during the meeting of Legese's commission, he would have put forward a list of the names of those who would become members of the organs of state power and the other members of the commission would have approved the candidates sheepishly and unanimously. Again, during the morning session of the Shengo, he would have repeated the performance to the same end. The results were not made public until the afternoon session which was again open to the foreign guests, the observers

and to the mass media. Starting from 2.15 pm, Legese took fifteen minutes to read out the names of those elected. Legese Asfaw is the man who had Mengistu 'elected' as the Chairman of COPWE by the military cadres in 1980 and, hence, as the General Secretary of WPE.

There were no real surprises, least of all the 'election' of Mengistu as the president of the Republic of Ethiopia. All Ethiopians including the politically uninitiated as well as the foreign press had been predicting well before 10 September 1987 that this was going to be the outcome. Further, thousands of children had, for months, been practising how to write 'President Mengistu' with cards to be displayed at the mass rallies on Revolution Day (13 September 1987). In fact, a most striking feature of the new regime's style of rule is how, as in the present case of pretended democratic elections, the mass media goes on about things that are obviously untrue to the whole world, an effort often pursued vigorously and at the cost of substantial national resources. Be that as it may, whether Fikre Selassie Wog-Deres or Fisiha Desta were going to fill the post of the vice-presidency had for a long time been a matter of intense speculation among the public. As it happened, that toothless office went to Fisiha and the prime-ministerial position to Fikre Selassie.

Then came the turn of Birihanu's commission which supposedly had drafted some three admittedly short proclamations since its establishment on the previous night. Birihanu told the Shengo that his commission had accepted the constitution without discussion since it had been approved through a referendum, that Ethiopia First would be incorporated in all future legislations, and that the constitution itself and the proclamation enforcing it would come into force on 12 and 13 September, respectively. Mengistu submitted, for approval by the Shengo, the three proclamations of Birihanu's Commission which were concerned with the enforcement of the constitution, a national anthem and an emblem of PDRE.<sup>27</sup> The process of approving the proclamations including the playing of the anthem took only half an hour to accomplish. As soon as the Shengo approved the constitution enforcing proclamation by a show of hands, Mengistu declared that the people had as of that moment 'grasped power'.

It has been argued previously that as of the end of 1974, the collective power of the Derg had passed from it to an officers'

junta within it and that as of February 1977, Mengistu had emerged as the unchallenged autocrat of Ethiopia. Starting from the end of 1974, more and more of the Derg members had been assigned to positions outside the head-offices of the Derg and of the Party. The only way in which the Derg survived as a body was in its annual meetings held every June to commemorate the establishment of the Derg in 1974. The last of such meetings was held in June 1987 when they were informed about the election of Shengo members.

Interestingly enough, Mengistu convened them again on 3 September 1987, and with tears in his eyes, made an extremely emotive speech especially about the early days of the Derg, and told them that the time had come to hand over power to the people. A lot of them felt sentimental about the past and did not like the idea of being disbanded altogether. Be that as it may, at the time of the proceedings of the first Shengo meeting, the seventy-three or so surviving members of the Derg sat behind Mengistu and watched the proceedings with as much bewilderment as the deputies and observers. According to Mengistu, it was when he declared on 10 September that 'the people had as of that moment grasped power' that the Derg handed power to those empowered to exercise it by the constitution. Arguably, it is, perhaps, more accurate to say, at least from the legal perspective, that such a transformation took place when the constitution itself and the Proclamation enforcing it came into force on 12 and 13 September.

Thirteen years is by any standards too long a time to wait before the adoption of a non-provisional government especially since there was a great deal of demand for it particularly in the early years, since the Derg had been promising it over and over again and since, when it came, the conversion did not involve much change in personnel. Up to the time of the emergence of Mengistu as an absolute ruler in February 1977, the main reason for the delay appears to have been the fear that the Derg would be swamped by the dominance of the other political organizations should a non-provisional government come into being. After that, on the other hand, the main reason appears to have been the consideration that, since in other socialist countries the formation of the Party precedes the establishment of the government and even the outbreak of the revolution, the formation of a non-provisional government had to be postponed until such time as a

Party was established and adopted a constitution. None of these arguments adequately explain the delay. President Kaunda of Zambia's enigmatic statement, made on the occasion of the first Shengo meeting, is as good an explanation as any. Addressing Mengistu, he said: 'Mr President, I have always been wondering why you did not declare the republic soon after the outbreak of the revolution; now, I understand.'

The transformation into a non-provisional government is of formal significance. The more fundamental question raised by the adoption of the constitution is what is implied by the statement that the people have 'grasped' power. This is meant to suggest that power has, from that time on, been transferred from the Derg to the Shengo and through the latter to the people that are represented by it. It has been argued in previous chapters that it was in fact Mengistu who was ruling the country on behalf of the Derg which means that the real question is whether power has, through the instrumentality of the Shengo, been transferred from him to the people. Whether this is so or not depends on whether the constitution does indeed give effective powers to the Shengo, whether the Shengo is truly accountable to the people, and whether, in fact, a constitutional government has been created by the constitution. If the proceedings of the first Shengo are anything to go by, the prospect for a positive answer to these queries is not promising. The following sections will make a further attempt at a brief discussion of these questions.

#### THE STRUCTURE OF THE STATE

As indicated at the beginning of the present chapter, COPWE/WPE had, in 1984, directed that the constitution of PDRE should be drawn in accordance with Marxist-Leninist theory. In the following three years, WPE saw to it that the directive was implemented effectively in the sense that the constitution of PDRE was modelled on those of the socialist countries. Nonetheless, there is no denying that some of the constitution's features are a product of Addis Ababa thinking. Most probably, the unitary nature of the state structure is a result of this thinking while the notion of elected Shengos could be traced to the constitutions of the USSR and the office of the president to the constitutions of most of the latter day socialist countries.

The 1987 constitution of PDRE provided for the division of the country into administrative areas and autonomous regions and left the determination of their size to be governed through bylaws.<sup>28</sup> As it transpired, the administrative areas were to be composed of 60,000 to 100,000 people each and, hence, bigger than the lowest administrative units of *weredas* under the old order. The size of the regional administrative units was anything between the old *Awrajas* and provinces both of which were replaced by the first. These administrative areas were to be run by a three-tier administrative structure established at the basic or local, at the regional and at the national or central levels.<sup>29</sup> Autonomous regions were established only for some five regions: Eritrea, Tigrai, Afar, Issa and Ogaden. Some of these like Eritrea had local and regional administrative units under them while those like the Ogaden had only one administrative link between the local people and the central authorities.<sup>30</sup>

Socialist constitutional jargon refers to the state structures established at the different levels of the administrative areas and autonomous regions as 'organizations of state power'. According to the Ethiopian constitution, the most important of these organs are the Shengos established at the national, regional and local levels the main functions of which are envisaged to be formulating policies and establishing the other organs of state power through election.<sup>31</sup> Shengos are the equivalents of soviets in the USSR. At the national or central level, the other organs of state power are: the Council of State, the President of the Republic, the Council of Ministers, the Supreme Court, the Procuracy, the Working People National Control Committee and the Office of the Auditor General. The lower organs of state power are subordinate to the higher ones and to the Shengos that establish them through election, a case of double subordination.

Shengo members are elected by the people directly whereas the members of the other organs of state power are elected by them indirectly.<sup>32</sup> On the face of it, this is a radical departure from the past in that under the old order, the officials at each level of the administrative hierarchy were directly appointed by the centre. In terms of democracy, it is also an improvement on the Western practice of the appointment of judges by the centre. However, whether this is an improvement on Ethiopia's past and Western practice or not depends on whether the people do, indeed, have

effective rights to elect their representatives without undue interference from the centre. The previous sections of this chapter have argued that they do not.

The constitution directs that the relationship of the organs of state power must be governed by the principle of democratic-centralism.<sup>33</sup> This principle, which has been used widely in the socialist states to try and strike a balance between centralism and democracy (between central direction and local initiative), has not been able to moderate excessive centralism and its political manifestation (absolute dictatorship). As the previous chapters have amply demonstrated, the Ethiopian regime had also found that the enforcement of the principle had not placed any restraint on its absolute exercise of power. In any case, the emphasis of the constitution is very much on the subordination and accountability of the lower links to the superior ones.<sup>34</sup> The regime's obsession with power to control everything was not going to be prevented from continuing to stifle the democratic 'aspirations' of the people by the constitution's mere commitment to this high-sounding principle.

On the face of it, the reference to certain regions as 'autonomous' suggests that these are more independent from the centre than administrative regions and that they have more power over local affairs than administrative areas do. However, the constitution treats both alike. It gives them the same powers and then states that bylaws, which are consistent with those constitutional powers, will be issued providing for further details concerning the powers of the autonomous regions.<sup>35</sup> This leads to the erroneous implication that bylaws consistent with the constitution cannot be issued concerning the powers of administrative areas. Be that as it may, the arrangement can be seen as a dynamic one in that the powers of the autonomous regions can be revised periodically as appropriate. On the other hand, however, the fact that their rights are not entrenched in the constitution can be blamed for leaving the matter to the whims of the legislators.

The constitutions of the socialist states base their administrative divisions on the principles of the economic integrity and the national composition of the constituent units concerned. On this point, the position of the 1987 constitution does not lend itself to such an explanation. There are no obvious economic factors that justify the administrative map as it has been redrawn.

Admittedly, it is rather difficult in the case of Ethiopia to bring each linguistic group under separate administration on account of the geographical overlap among them. However, this is no justification for failing to implement the principle where it is possible. Instead, the various ethnic groups, especially the big ones like the Oromo and the Amhara, have been divided into smaller local and regional administrative areas than under the old order. In the case of the autonomous regions of Eritrea and Tigray, at least the biggest linguistic group (the Tigrinya speakers) has been split down the middle. Also, a number of other linguistic groups have been allowed to continue to come under the administration of the Eritrean Autonomous Region. The linguistic group of Somalis comes under the administration of the Issa and the Ogaden autonomous regions. The one exception to all this is the Autonomous Region of Afar where the administrative unit and the national composition may be said to be coextensive.

The basis for the redrawing of the administrative map appears to be more political than economic or cultural. In the case of the administrative areas, it appears that the regime sought to prevent the rise of local nationalism among each of the linguistic groups by breaking up the pre-existing relatively sizeable units and administering them separately. One thing common to all of the autonomous regions is the fact that they had over the years put up armed resistance against the regime. It is more likely than not that the latter conceded the more independent sounding status of (autonomy) to those regions in order to appease them.

The socialist states with diverse nationalities within them have, at least on paper, tended to recognize a substantial degree of autonomy from central control for their administrative units and, in the case of the USSR, even accorded to its constituent republics the right to secede. Conversely, Ethiopia's constitution stipulated that PDRE is a 'unitary state' composed of administrative areas and autonomous regions.<sup>36</sup> While the constitution's espousal of a unitary state cannot be accused of hypocrisy, it is still guilty of failing to acknowledge that Ethiopia is a multi-linguistic society, that there had been long-standing regionalist secessionist wars in the country and that an attempt to resolve the problems along a federal or a confederal line might be worth pursuing. The regime's adherence to territorial integrity, as understood by it, continued to stand in the way of accommodating the proponents

of local nationalism and territorial revision on the basis of decentralization and devolution of power. The only concession of the regime on this point is the commitment that the powers and duties of the autonomous regions will be further delimited through bylaws which probably indicates that it is willing to accommodate the interests of those regions through negotiations and further legislations.

THE ABOLITION OF PARLIAMENT IS UPHELD BY THE  
CONSTITUTION

Consistent with the spirit of absolute democracy, the 1987 constitution starts off by stating that: 'In the People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia power belongs to the working people.' In recognition of the difficulties of a large number of people running the affairs of state together, it then stipulates, like most other constitutions do, that the people exercise their power in one of three ways: through referenda; through the local and national Shengos which they establish by the election of the members of those organs; and/or through other organs of state established by the Shengos.<sup>37</sup> It is, obviously, not possible to run the affairs of state through referenda; the exercise of power through such means is, to say the least, very much the exception rather than the rule. This leaves the organs of state power to which the people have delegated the exercise of their power and on which they must be dependent for it almost exclusively.

The first and, from the wording of the constitution, the most important organ is the equivalent of parliament, namely, the National Shengo. The constitution declares it the supreme organ of state power in PDRE<sup>38</sup> and allows it wide powers including ' . . . the power to decide on any national issue'.<sup>39</sup> However, what the constitution gives with one hand, it takes away with the other. In other words, it obstructs the Shengo from exercising its extensive powers leading one to conclude that the Shengo is as good as non-existent.

The main means employed to obstruct the operation of the National Shengo is the stipulation that it must hold its regular meeting only once a year.<sup>40</sup> If the practice of the socialist countries and the 1987 Shengo meeting described in a previous section are anything to go by, these annual regular sessions last only for

several days in the year. Obviously, such a brief flurry of activities will not enable the Shengo to discharge its extensive powers in any meaningful way.

A provision closely related to this states that Shengo members shall continue to hold their regular employment.<sup>41</sup> By way of explaining the rationale behind the provision, the official commentary on the constitution advances two reasons. First, 'Since in socialist societies the culture of labour of the representatives of the people has to continue to strengthen, care must be taken not to obstruct this but, rather, for the deputies to harmonize, as much as possible, their regular and parliamentary tasks and not to make a regular employment out of their parliamentary functions.' Secondly, 'The deputy's regular presence at his place of employment and in his constituency will enable him to have close relations with the people that elected him and to carry out his mission as a representative.'<sup>42</sup>

These arguments do not hold water. The suggestion that deputies must be seen to uphold the culture of labour seems to exonerate from such a responsibility those who engage themselves in Shengo activities for much of the year like members of the Council of State and the President. Further, the stated need for deputies to attend to their regular employment and harmonize it with Shengo functions implies that the non-Shengo functions of the members of the Council of State and the President do not amount to valuable labour and can, therefore, be compromised in favour of their parliamentary functions. More to the point, while it is true that the usual presence of the deputy in his constituency and at his place of work would enable him to keep in touch with the electorate, it does not follow that it would enable him to carry out his 'mission as a representative' since his presence elsewhere means his absence from parliament and its activities. Moreover, it is not clear why Ethiopian deputies cannot manage adequate and effective consultations with the electorate over weekends and parliamentary recesses as do their counterparts in the West. In the final analysis, the granting of extensive powers to the deputies and then confining them to their regular employment, thereby depriving them of the means to take part in the cut and thrust of parliamentary proceedings, can only derive its validity, not from reason, but, for what it is worth, from the desire to ape the practice of the socialist countries.

A reading of the various provisions of the constitution concerning the National Shengo, the Council of State and the President suggests that the last two organs of state power are intended to act on behalf of the Shengo when it is not in session.<sup>43</sup> Had there been a specific provision to that effect, there would not have been any need for interpretation. Instead, the constitution accords various functions to the individual organs of state power, each having a mandate over the same function. Where the three organs are specifically authorized to discharge a particular function, the absence of the Shengo is immaterial since the other two can validly discharge the responsibility. If, on the other hand, there are functions which fall within the exclusive domain of the Shengo, then the question arises as to whether the other organs are entitled to discharge them or not. The official commentary indicates that there are at least three such functions: the power to decide on domestic and foreign policies, planning and budget.<sup>44</sup> A closer examination of the constitution shows that such exclusive powers of the Shengo do not amount to much.

For example, the constitution stipulates that the Shengo has power to decide on policies concerning internal and external affairs;<sup>45</sup> no such broad mandate on policy making is enjoyed by the Council of State and the President. Yet, the Council of State can make laws (special decrees)<sup>46</sup> which are equivalent to laws made by the Shengo (proclamations). It is difficult to imagine that such laws do not deal with policy questions at least in part. Further, in addition to the existing body of legislation on policy questions, the constitution devotes no less than four chapters (chapters 2-5) to economic, social, cultural, defence, security and foreign affairs. According to the constitution, it is the responsibility of the President to ensure the implementation of policies<sup>47</sup> and to make laws (Presidential laws) to enable him to carry out this responsibility.<sup>48</sup> Given the fact that extensive policies are already in existence, the fact that the Council of State and the President can make laws equivalent to that made by the Shengo, and the fact that the President can independently of the Shengo implement policies, the power of the latter to decide on policy matters appears to be of doubtful significance.

Further, the making of short- and long-term economic plans is mainly the function of the Council of Ministers which it carries out with the assistance of the relevant subordinate government

departments like the Central National Planning Committee, the Central Statistical Office and the departments of planning in each of the economic ministries. The constitution directs the Council of Ministers to prepare the plan and submit it to the following regular session of the Shengo for its approval.<sup>49</sup> The power of the National Shengo in this regard does not extend to formulating plans but, rather, is limited to one of approval.<sup>50</sup> The budgetary powers of the Shengo and the Council of Ministers are the same as their powers on economic plans; the latter prepare them and submit them for approval by the Shengo.<sup>51</sup> The power of the Shengo on these matters is nothing more than that of a rubber stamp in that they do not have the time, expertise nor the administrative substructure required to go into them effectively.

From the preceding, it appears that the power of the National Shengo over policy matters can be easily bypassed by the Council of State and the President and its power of approval of the budget and of the plan nominal. Conversely, the constitution places much more emphasis on the power of WPE's policy and plan formulation than it does on that of the Shengo. It is declared to be the leading force of the state and of the entire society and the planner of the country's development.<sup>52</sup> Consequently, if the two posts of a President of PDRE and General Secretary of the Party are vested in the same individual, which is the case in Ethiopia, then, what that individual lacks by way of policy-making power as a President, he makes good by virtue of the fact that he is the General Secretary of the Party.

Finally, it is in order to say a word on the extraordinary sessions of the Shengo. In addition to the annual regular sessions, extraordinary meetings of the Shengo can be held if asked for by the President of the Republic, the Council of State or a third of the Shengo members.<sup>53</sup> It may be easy for the President of the Republic and the Council of State to ask for such a meeting but not so for the Shengo members. The latter who live in different parts of the country would find it difficult to co-ordinate a third among them to get in touch with one another and ask for a meeting; the right to call a meeting of the Shengo belongs to the Council of State; and the President of the Republic chairs the meetings of the Shengo.<sup>54</sup>

Further, it does not appear that a legal requirement exists to convene an extraordinary meeting. Normally, such meetings are

held when compelling circumstances arise, circumstances which warrant the declaration of war, martial law, general mobilization and the like. The constitution states that when the Shengo is not in session, it is up to the Council of State to proclaim these emergency situations subject to its approval by the subsequent regular session of the Shengo.<sup>55</sup> Under these circumstances, it must be concluded that the Council of State and the President are under no legal obligation to hold an extraordinary session of the Shengo at all. The only time the President and the Council of State may call an extraordinary meeting of the Shengo is when they find it politically expedient to do so. In times of war or general mobilization, for instance, they may find it expedient to activate the representative institutions like the Shengo and the mass organizations and, with their help, deploy the people to the required end.

When this, coupled with the tendency of Shengo members to toe the official line, is taken into consideration, it is obvious that what the deputies are left with is the annual session when they listen to anything that is read to them, raise their hands unanimously in support of whatever motion is proposed to them and go home in peace. Whatever it is, the National Shengo is certainly not a democratically elected legislature with powers to make laws, curb the powers of the government and control the purse of the state even on a par with the Parliament under the preceding Ethiopian constitution which the Derg abolished in 1974. Under these circumstances, the conclusion is unavoidable that parliamentary government has not been reinstated by the 1987 constitution even to the pre-existing level and that the National Shengo is non-existent except on paper.

#### THE PRESIDENT AND THE OTHER CENTRAL ORGANS OF STATE POWER

According to the Constitutions of the USSR, the Supreme Soviet of the USSR (the equivalent of the Ethiopian National Shengo) used, until the last several years, to meet twice a year for several days at a time. At least since the first all-union constitution of 1936, it was one body 'the Presidium' (also referred to in some of the other socialist countries as 'the council of state') that was authorized to take over the functions of the Supreme Soviet in its

absence and act on its behalf. According to the 1977 USSR constitution, which retained the existing arrangement, the Presidium was made up of thirty-nine members elected by the Supreme Soviet from among its members.<sup>56</sup> The Presidium also acted as a collective head of state and was, for ceremonial purposes and the signing of treaties, represented by its chairman who is also known as the President of the USSR. By and large, this constitutional structure was also followed by the German Democratic Republic.

On the other hand, most of the other socialist countries created another office or organ of state power (the President of the Republic) which, in addition to the Council of State, was intended to replace parliament in its absence. The original draft of the Ethiopian constitution prepared by the Institute of Nationalities followed the soviet model but then the central authorities gave the instruction that some of the powers of the Council of State should be taken out from the relevant chapter and given to the President. When it complied, the Institute was told that it had not given enough powers to the President upon which it changed the draft yet again only to be told that it had this time given away too much. The arrangement in the final draft of the constitution was apparently arrived at after the fourth redrafting.

The principle, if any, on the basis of which the powers of the Shengo have been divided into the two offices is not clear. The official commentary of the constitution states that in the countries that maintain the two organs of state power, the tendency has been to give the legislative functions of the Shengo to the Council of State and the executive functions to the President. It then goes on to assert that when the reality of the Ethiopian situation and the experience of the previous revolutionary years are examined, the combination of collective and individual leadership offered by the two offices is useful for the transitional period (the period of transition to socialism).<sup>57</sup> Further, it has been mooted by people closely acquainted with the process of the drafting that those functions that can best be discharged by an individual are vested in the President and those that can best be discharged collectively have been vested in the Council of State.

These arguments do not appear to be borne out by a reading of the relevant provisions of the constitution; rather, they sound like apologies for the formalization of an autocratic dictatorship. Be that as it may, it will be argued below that all power is vested in the

person of the President and that the other organs of state power are nothing more than instruments with which he exercises his authority. The only proviso to this is that, on certain matters, he is in law, if not in substance, bound to consult the organs of state power, especially the National Shengo, the Council of State and the Council of Ministers.

It has been pointed out in the previous section that the internal and external national policies are provided for in the constitution and the various proclamations of the country and that the President, as the General Secretary of WPE, enjoys more policy-making powers than do the other organs of state. His policy-making power is further enhanced by the fact that he is the head of the government<sup>58</sup> which gives him leverage over the policy formulation functions of the Council of Ministers. Equally important is the specific stipulation of the constitution that it is the responsibility of the President to ensure the implementation of the internal and external policies of the country.<sup>59</sup> Arguably, it is to enable him to carry out these responsibilities that he is given specific powers by the constitution to act on his own or, in a number of relatively unimportant cases, in consultation with the other organs of state power.

It is not specifically stipulated that the President has to consult the National Shengo. However, in addition to being accountable to the Shengo, he has to submit reports on work progress to it.<sup>60</sup> On the face of it, this could have acted as a check on the powers of the President, particularly since the deputies can question organs of state power<sup>61</sup> and since the deputies are immune from prosecution for what they say in Shengo proceedings.<sup>62</sup> However, this could be true only if the deputies had a means of calling a session independently of the President as well as extending the session for as long as is necessary to debate the President's reports. As noted earlier, however, the deputies are rendered inept by the denial of the right to hold meetings and by fear of what could befall them behind the scenes should they step out of line.

Given the layout of the constitution, one would think that the Council of State, which is also accountable to the Shengo,<sup>63</sup> and the President of the Republic were independent organs of state power and that the first is more important than the second. Each one has a separate chapter providing for its mandate (chapters 10 and 11) and the provisions of the Council of State come before

those of the President preceded only by the provisions on the powers of the working people who are declared to be repositories of all power<sup>64</sup> and the National Shengo declared to be the supreme organ of state power authorized to decide on any national issue.<sup>65</sup> Nevertheless, the President is the chairman of the Council of State<sup>66</sup> and, hence, its most important member without whose will the Council would find it difficult, if not impossible, to hold a meeting at all. Moreover, the members of the Council are high Party and government officials who owe their appointments and the continued enjoyment of their positions to the President of the Republic and/or General Secretary of the Party. Thus, the President has a lot of leverage in the exercise of the functions that are accorded to the Council of State.

Further, for almost all of the powers granted to the Council of State, the President has the equivalent or more important mandate over the same. To take an example, it is the power of the National Shengo to issue 'proclamations'<sup>67</sup> and, when the Shengo is not in session, it is the power of the Council of State to issue the equivalent of proclamations in the form of 'special decrees' subject to their ratification by the next regular session of the Shengo.<sup>68</sup> The President's law-making power is more limited than those of the two bodies in that it relates only to matters necessary for the execution of the functions coming within the orbit of his mandate.<sup>69</sup> On the other hand, however, no law, whether it is passed by the Shengo or the Council, will see the light of day unless he affixes his signature to it.<sup>70</sup> Similarly, the Council of State has the power to ratify or rescind international treaties<sup>71</sup> whereas the President has the power to effect the conclusion of international treaties<sup>72</sup> perhaps meaning that he has the responsibility to ensure that the Council of Ministers negotiates treaties<sup>73</sup> and that the Council of State ratifies them in addition to the President himself signing them as head of state.<sup>74</sup>

Another example is the power to declare a state of emergency, general mobilization, martial law and war when compelling circumstances arise. These fall squarely within the scope of the Council of State's mandate.<sup>75</sup> Here again, the President can fall back on his chairmanship of the Council and his influence on the members of that body to have them find the existence of compelling circumstances which justify the declaration of war etc. Further, once this is done, the enforcement of the decision

falls within the boundaries of his exclusive responsibility of implementing national policies. In addition, as the Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces and chairman of the Council of Defence,<sup>76</sup> it is his responsibility to follow up the prosecution of a declared war, martial law or general mobilization.

A final example that, perhaps, needs to be mentioned is the relative jurisdiction of the Council of State and the President over the other central organs of state power and, through them, over the latter's subordinate links. When the National Shengo is not in session, the Council of Ministers, the Procuracy, the Supreme Court, the National Working People's Control Committee and the Auditor General are accountable to both the Council of State and the President. Thus far, the authority of the two organs over the others is comparable but not any further. For instance, while the Council of State is authorized merely to 'follow up' the discharge of their functions,<sup>77</sup> the President is authorized to 'ensure' the discharge by them of their functions.<sup>78</sup> Also, by contrast to the Council of State, the President has the means of guaranteeing the allegiance to him of the leaders of the organs of state power through, as will be noted below, his power of appointment.

The President's jurisdiction over the remaining central organs of state power, other than the Council of State, is in fact far wider than suggested above. In December 1976, a group of officers had moved the Derg to deprive Mengistu of his Derg positions and reduce him to the post of Prime Minister. In the following February, he led a successful coup against those responsible for his demotion and was, on that occasion, made Chairman of the Derg in addition to retaining his prime-ministerial position. The 1987 constitution does not appear to have deprived him of the post of Prime Minister either. It states that it is the responsibility of the President to ensure that the Council of Ministers carry out its functions in addition to convening it as he deems necessary.<sup>79</sup> The functions of what the constitution refers to as 'the Prime Minister', a post assigned to another individual, are, *inter alia*, convening the Council of Ministers, and leading and co-ordinating its activities as well as carrying out other functions assigned to him by the President.<sup>80</sup> Since the 'Prime Minister' convenes the Council of Ministers only when the President thinks that it is not necessary for him to do so and since, in general, the intention is to

make the 'Prime Minister' a close assistant to the President in matters concerning the functions of a prime minister, it is, perhaps, more correct to conclude that the President is also the Prime Minister of the Republic.

In addition to his jurisdiction over the Council of Ministers and, through the latter, over its subordinate administrative links, the President appears to have direct control over all departments concerned with military affairs. He is Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces<sup>81</sup> and chairman of the Defence Council.<sup>82</sup> Further, the Department of Military Affairs in the Party secretariate concerned with military cadres and propaganda within the armed forces is directly accountable to him as the General Secretary of the Party. Given these circumstances and his power to appoint and dismiss the Minister of Defence, the members of the Defence Council and senior officers, it is obvious that the military establishment is not under the control of the Council of Ministers, but that of the President.

In fact, the President's appointment power is one of the most effective means with which he can influence decisions of the central organs of state power. In the first place, it is he who nominates, for appointment by the National Shengo, the 'Prime Minister', members of the Council of Ministers, the President, Vice-Presidents and judges of the Supreme Court, the Procurator General, the Chairman of the National Working People's Control Committee and the Auditor General.<sup>83</sup> What is more, he can dismiss all these officials and appoint others in their place when the Shengo is not in session and/or when compelling circumstances arise.<sup>84</sup> In the absence of anyone designated to decide whether 'compelling circumstances' have arisen or not, the President is as qualified as anyone else to make a decision on the question according to his whim.

The President is authorized to dismiss and appoint the above officials through the instrumentality of the so-called 'special Presidential decree'. This is unashamedly an authorization of the President to rule by decree even if the said special Presidential decree has to be ratified by the inept national Shengo in its subsequent session. This is reminiscent of the decree rule typical of twentieth-century totalitarian dictatorships. It appears to be all the more so since the article providing for the special Presidential decree does not require the President to exercise his power under

it in accordance with the constitution whereas the article coming before it does so specifically.<sup>85</sup>

In addition to these, the President appoints the members of the Defence Council, high government officials and diplomatic representatives of the country.<sup>86</sup> While the President is likely to know the highest civilian and military officials personally, he can appoint and dismiss them as he will; for the lower ones, however, he will have to be dependent on the recommendation of their superiors. The appointment power has always been a preserve of the traditional Ethiopian monarchs with the help of which they bestowed favour to their loyal servants and punished recalcitrant ones. Under the previous 1955 constitution and the subsidiary laws, for example, King Haile Selassie reserved for himself the power to appoint and dismiss, *inter alia*, the officials occupying the four highest posts in each ministry. This was an aspect of his personal rule, his inability to decentralize power and accommodate the new elite for which he was heavily criticized and on which the revolution is partly justified. The 1987 constitution preserves the tradition in this regard, perhaps, at a more extensive level.

#### CONCLUSION

In general, the constitutions of the socialist countries base the distribution of power among the central organs of state on the principle of 'the unity of power': the division of labour between the executive, legislative and judiciary must be subordinated to the indivisible will of the people. As a result of this thinking, the functional and structural differentiation between those organs is rendered unclear. This, coupled with the emphasis placed on centralism rather than democracy within the administrative principle of 'democratic-centralism', has given rise to monolithic state structures in those countries. Since all these ideas have been imported by the 1987 constitution into Ethiopia wholesale, the attempt in the preceding paragraphs has been, not to distinguish between the different organs of state, so much as to see where, in the monolithic structure, power is united or concentrated most. It is the finding of those paragraphs that the President of the Republic is, according to the constitution, the most important repository of state power with title to exercise autocratic authority.

Lenin and Stalin enjoyed autocratic powers on account of the

fact that they were general secretaries of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. It was only after Khrushchev that the general secretaries of the USSR started adding, to their leadership of the Party, the offices of the prime minister and/or the President. None of the constitutions of the socialist countries, including that of Ethiopia, appoint the general secretaries of the parties ex-officio prime ministers and/or Presidents. In some of them, like in Ceauçescu's Roumania, however, they have so-called 'secret laws' conferring those offices on the general secretaries. There is no evidence to show whether such secret Party regulations exist in Ethiopia or not. At any rate, Mengistu has followed the general trend in the socialist countries and officially become the General Secretary of WPE, Prime Minister and President of PDRE.

On the other hand, according to Western constitutional theory in general, the distribution and exercise of power among the central organs or branches of the state is based on the principle of 'division of power'. An outstanding example of this is the US where the Supreme Court, Congress and the administration are set up independently from one another and act as watch-dogs against the excesses of each other's exercise of power through such means as judicial review, congressional questioning and impeachment proceedings. The 1955 revised constitution of Ethiopia, which the Derg abolished in 1974 and replaced with the 1987 constitution, was modelled on this theory. However, though parliament, the cabinet and the courts were to a given extent intended by the constitution to operate on the principle of 'checks and balances', the powers of those branches of state converge in the person of the King at the highest level. In other words, the principle of division of power made no difference when it came to the powers of the traditional autocrat.

The old and the new Ethiopian constitutions were not predicated on anything like a social contract. During his public speeches, the King was keen on pointing out that he had on his own volition given to the people the 1931 and 1955 constitutions. At the time, his critics used to refuse to give any merit to constitutions handed down from above. The 1987 constitution made no difference in this regard. The new regime emphasizes the extent to which it consulted the people through *kebele* general assembly discussions and through referenda in the process of the adoption of the constitution. However, this is only of rhetorical significance.

The truth of the matter was that the constitution was drawn exactly in accordance with the wishes of Mengistu and imposed on the people through the mechanics of 'organizational operation'. Ethiopia's experience shows that in the case of constitutions from above, the leaders do not appear to part with their powers sufficiently enough to make a difference to the status quo.

This raises the obvious question of why these leaders adopt constitutions at all. One explanation is the desire on their part to include an elaborate bill of rights in those constitutions and be seen to be progressive in the eyes of the world. In fact, the competition with the Eritrean federal constitution of 1952 which was drawn by the UN, and which had a more elaborate bill of rights than the 1931 Ethiopian constitution, was responsible for the revision of the latter in 1955. A second explanation for the adoption of constitutions is the wish of the leaders to give an appearance of ushering in a constitutional government. However, the effect of such constitutions has not been to curb the powers of the leaders but, rather, to serve as a means of formalizing the powers of the leaders, powers which were in existence prior to the adoption of the constitutions concerned. This means that the leaders owe nothing to the constitutions so adopted. Hence, while an examination of these constitutions may provide evidence of the formal sources of the powers of the leaders, it leaves unanswered the sociological question of the real sources of such powers.

It cannot seriously be maintained that Mengistu's powers emanate from the constitution nor from the fact that he is the leader of the Party. Despite the position of the 1987 constitution that all power belongs to the people and that the people can exercise it directly or through organs of state power which they establish through election, it declares the unelected WPE the planner of the country's development as well as the leading force of the state and the whole of society.<sup>87</sup> However, the Party has been exercising extensive authority since its inception as COPWE in 1971, a date which precedes the inauguration of the constitution by a number of years. As its leader from the inception of COPWE on, Mengistu had been wielding a great deal of authority, an authority which under the circumstances he cannot say is owed to the constitution. Similarly, his powers cannot be said to emanate from the fact that he is the leader of WPE since, unlike many party

leaders of the socialist countries, Mengistu became an absolute autocrat before WPE was established and before he became its Chairman/General Secretary.

Though Mengistu was, probably, the most prominent member of the Derg since 1974, it was on 3 February 1977 that he carried out a palace coup against his competitors in that body and asserted his absolutist powers for the first time. The secret of his successful ascent to the dazzling heights of autocratic power then, was not the constitution nor his leadership of the Party which were non-existent at the time, but, rather, a case of power flowing from the barrel of the gun. It is true that he has indulged in excessive reliance on violence in the subsequent years and that this, coupled with his poor educational and professional background, the pervasiveness of a blatantly false propaganda and general illegality of the regime which he personifies, have resulted in a monumental confidence crisis between the rulers and the ruled. Yet, it does not appear to be appropriate to conclude that an individual with the use and threat of force and violence managed to take power from society and monopolized it for himself.

Mengistu has been strongly identified with the post-1974 transformations and, as such, serves as a convenient focus for the analysis of the revolution. Nevertheless, there is something crude about reducing the destiny of a state to the whims of an individual and to force and violence perpetrated in the pursuit of power. For instance, there must be a reason why Mengistu believed that he could become the all-powerful ruler of the whole country if he captured the palace through a violent coup and why, afterwards, the society 'allowed' the new autocracy to succeed by paying deference to it as it had always done to the old. If autocracy has succeeded in the liberal states of Europe that fell under the sway of Fascism in the 1930s, there is more reason for it to succeed in Africa where domestic and international structural crisis have conspired to dictate the emergence everywhere of dictatorships of one sort or another in the post-independence years. In Ethiopia, there was, on one hand, her centuries-old political culture of autocratic rule which was well entrenched in the minds of the people. On the other hand, there was the autocratic rule of the socialist countries which the Ethiopian revolutionaries and the new regime were consciously emulating. Liberalism has never been the tenet of Ethiopia's past nor that of her revolution. To

that extent, the 'new' autocracy is not Mengistu's contribution to Ethiopia but a product of the underlying currents: culture, ideology, the international ecology and the extended intergroup rivalry that emerged in the wake of the post-revolution years.

Finally, it is, perhaps, in order to raise the question of whether the 'new' autocracy is a mere continuation of Ethiopia's political culture or some kind of departure from the past brought on by the revolution. To be sure, traditional autocracy was identified by Ethiopia's revolutionaries with reaction to be abolished and its socialist variant with progress to be emulated. Lenin, Stalin and Mao, just to mention a few, were the heroes of the Ethiopian radical intelligentsia. It is easy to see the 'new' autocracy, when it re-emerged in February 1977, as a mere continuation of Ethiopia's past. However, with its acquisition, in the subsequent decade, of a socialist constitution and a Leninist party capable of mobilizing the bulk of society, it has put on totalitarian garments to justify the conclusion that a different political system has come to exist. While the revolution has not brought about a liberal transformation, it can, nevertheless, be said to have replaced a medieval feudal autocracy by a twentieth-century totalitarian dictatorship.

## CHAPTER II

### *Conclusion*

This chapter is primarily concerned with examining the causes and outcomes of the revolution from the perspective of contemporary social science research. It begins with a section which summarizes the main findings of the previous chapters. The summary is followed by other sections intended to develop aspects of the causes and outcomes considered to be controversial and important in explaining the revolution.

#### (A) SUMMARY OF THE TRANSFORMATIONS

The collapse of the old-state was brought about by structural crisis induced by the centralization, modernization and territorial consolidation drive of the monarchy and by the post-war changes on the international scene. Centralization gave rise to the emergence of a highly centralized autocracy which made itself increasingly irrelevant to a democratizing society; modernization to a new elite which became increasingly vocal in its opposition to the obsolete monarchy; and territorial consolidation to a more diversified population which became more and more difficult to govern. The international dynamic further weakened the state by providing alternative political models to the new elite, weapons and diplomatic support to regionalist insurgents and by imposing economic relations inimical to development. While structural crisis is believed to have played the crucial role in weakening the old-state, it is, perhaps, complementary. Structural crisis can be seen as having prepared the ground for the 1974 action of the revolutionary social groups. The harassment of the old-state through strikes, demonstrations and petitions co-ordinated by the steering committees that sprang up in the corporate groups

in the course of the uprising of 1974 cannot be fully explained without resort to conscious action on the part of the partisans.

During the uprising, it was the organized social groups like the security forces, the students, teachers, civil servants and workers that were most active. When the old-state collapsed in September, however, it was some 106 junior officers, NCOs and privates who, after having formed a committee called 'Derg', took power in the name of the security forces. They did this to the exclusion of all the civilian corporate groups. Feeling left out in the cold, the groups, especially CELU, the students' unions and the teachers' associations, put up resistance to the Derg's monopoly of power in the subsequent years.

Starting from the summer of 1974, however, various political organizations came to the surface and assumed the leadership role of the opposition. Some of these like the left-wing EPRP and the right-wing EDU continued their opposition until they were crushed by the Derg starting from 1977. Similar organized resistance to Derg rule came from regionalist insurgents; EPRP and EDU formed *de facto* coalitions with the regionalist organizations in the course of their common struggle against the Derg. Some of the pan-Ethiopian organizations other than EPRP and EDU came to the side of the Derg from the time of their establishment and the remaining sided with it later. These, all of which were left wing, included AESM, the Workers' League, EOPRS, EMLRO and Revolutionary Flame. They formed a coalition with Mengistu's faction within the Derg which emerged victorious in February 1977 and monopolized power. The five political groups which had been working with the faction fell out with it between the summers of 1977 and 1979 leaving Mengistu Haile-Mariam and his close associates to construct the party and government structures on their own.

The chances were that left to its devices, in other words left without the challenge posed by the other political organizations, the Derg would not have gone beyond the achievement of a mere *coup d'état*. It is believed that it was the political organizations, which were dominated by members of the intermediate social strata, and the complex interplay between them that gave birth to the particular kinds of outcomes or transformations that followed in the wake of the collapse of the *ancien régime*.

One of the first and most fundamental transformations

achieved in the course of 1975 was the nationalization of business organizations, rural and urban land, and extra houses. The achievement of those transformations was a result of the concession made by the Derg to the demands of the civilian left. These reforms, coupled with the establishment of a central planning machinery in 1978, laid the foundation of a 'socialist' economic system in Ethiopia. It is believed that such an economic system was not more productive than the pre-capitalist order that prevailed prior to the revolution nor more than an economic system that might have been brought about by a middle-class revolution.

The second important transformation was the change in social structures introduced by the same legislations of 1975 which announced the nationalization measures. These had the effect of dispossessing the upper class of its assets in land, property and business organizations and of bringing about a great levelling-down of society. In addition, those legislations provided for the organization of the entire population into peasant associations and urban dwellers' associations which, as arenas of struggle between the political organizations in the ensuing years, became increasingly centralized, politicized and armed. In fact, the mobilization of the rural population and its incorporation into the new polity is one of the most striking achievements of the revolution. The most important effect, in the political sphere, of the mobilization and incorporation of the population was the laying down of the bases for the control of the whole of society by the party-state.

The third transformation relates to the adoption of a new ideology. In December 1974, the Derg issued 'Ethiopian Socialism' by way of meeting half way the clamour of the civilian left for the adoption of the Marxist-Leninist programmes. However, Ethiopian Socialism was rejected by the leftist political organizations on the ground that there is only one kind of socialism, namely Marxism-Leninism, and that, whatever else it might be, Ethiopian Socialism is not such an ideology. In the course of 1975, the Derg fell under the sway of the leftist political organizations with the result that, in April 1976, it adopted NDRPE as the official ideology of Ethiopia. The NDRP is the socio-economic and political programme that Soviet Marxists prescribe as the appropriate policy for pre-capitalist societies to pursue. Much of the

leftist literature questions the sincerity of the Derg in adopting the programme. The question of whether Derg members really believe in the ideology or not is in a way rather academic. Whatever the merits, the new ideology has in practice been important in influencing the nature of the reforms that were adopted by the new regime. It has brought into existence 'socialist' programmes like shift of alliances from the West to the East, central planning and a Leninist party.

The fourth transformation concerned the important change in the nature of the government itself. Despite the radical socio-economic and ideological reforms of 1975 and 1976, the conflict over power between the various civilian political organizations continued to intensify and to divide members of the Derg among sympathizers of one organization or another. Between July 1976 and February 1977, Mengistu, backed by a faction within the Derg and by the five leftist groups, carried out palace coups against other Derg factions and emerged as the unchallenged autocrat. In effect, this meant that power passed from monarchical autocratic control to a collective control by the Derg till the beginning of 1975 and then by an officers' junta within the Derg and finally reverted back to an autocratic control.

In this sense, the re-emergence of autocracy can be seen as a continuation of Ethiopia's political culture, and hence, not a transformation. However, the similarity between the two governments rests on the fact that they are both dictatorships. On the other hand, however, Mengistu's autocracy is more modern, more determined and stronger than its predecessor. This is so because it has mobilized the population into social institutions and laid an elaborate network of administrative, intelligence and party structures with the help of which it controls and guides society and pursues its policies more vigorously than ever before. The difference is between a paternalistic traditional aristocratic autocracy and a ruthless twentieth-century totalitarian autocracy.

The fifth transformation concerned the struggle against counter-revolutionary forces and shift of international alliances. By the time Mengistu assumed dictatorial powers in February 1977, Ethiopia had been engulfed by regionalist as well as domestic and international counter-revolutionary wars backed by the conservative states of the Middle East. Particularly important in this regard was the invasion of Ethiopia in July 1977 by the Republic of

Somalia which was an ally of the socialist countries. These created tremendous pressures on the new regime, forcing it to seek urgent international assistance. The fact that the Derg had adopted 'scientific socialism' as the official ideology and the emergence as victorious of Mengistu's faction which was believed to have been pro-Moscow, had brought about closer relations between Ethiopia and the socialist countries. One of the results of this was the delivery of a modest amount of tanks, armoured cars and other weapons in June 1977 with the help of which the regime was able to crush EDU forces in the summer of 1977 and curtail the activities of Eritrean insurgents. However, the relationship with the socialist countries was not consummated until the end of that year. Feeling aggrieved by the reluctance of the socialist countries to continue to supply her with weapons and by a suspicion that they were collaborating with Ethiopia and hoping to attract Western aid, Somalia unilaterally terminated diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union and Cuba in October thus opening the way for further collaboration between Ethiopia and the socialist countries.

Despite the fact that so much is made of the strategic importance of Ethiopia, the impact of the shift of alliances on the bi-polar security system is minimal if at all. On the other hand, the massive delivery of weapons received from the Soviet Union and the troops provided by Cuba were certainly important in enabling Ethiopia to achieve quick victories against the counter-revolutionary forces of EDU, ALF and the Republic of Somalia. Also, those victories were a tremendous boost to the new regime. Given the size of its population, however, it is likely that Ethiopia would in the long run have prevailed over those forces. Further, the shift of alliances was important in characterizing Ethiopia as one of the 'anti-imperialist' Third World states following the non-capitalist path of development with all that it implies to her economic relations with the West and East.

The sixth and final transformation was the creation of a Leninist party. Soon after his emergence as an all-powerful leader in February 1977, Mengistu launched the red terror against EPRP and managed to crush it before the year was out. Similarly, between the summers of 1977 and 1979, he crushed the five organizations that were working in close collaboration with him and his faction within the Derg. This effectively purged from government

and social institutions cadres and members of the political organizations including those of Mengistu's own creation (Revolutionary Flame). The liquidation of the members of the contending political organizations opened the way for their replacement in the government and mass organizations by cadres loyal to him and his close associates personally. In this way, the ground was prepared for Mengistu to personally interview and recruit members of the party, appoint the Central Committee and politburo members and launch WPE in 1984. As a Leninist party, the importance of WPE lay above all in serving as an instrument for controlling government and social institutions as well as society at large.

#### (B) THE EMERGENCE OF A REVOLUTIONARY CRISIS

The first three chapters above deal with the revolutionary situation in Ethiopia which led to a politico-military crisis in early 1974 opening the way for a protest movement of the urban population and culminating in the collapse of the *ancien régime* in September 1974. It is the central thesis of the first chapter that the emergence of the revolutionary crisis was, above all, the result of Ethiopia's absorption into the European political system which had been taking place over a long period of time. In other words, in response to European expansionism, the monarch pursued a reasonably successful programme of territorial consolidation, centralization and modernization from the late nineteenth century which gave birth to a new sovereign state, a highly centralized autocracy and a new elite. Starting from 1960, however, developments in the domestic and international scenes began rendering the absolutist monarchy obsolete.

First, there emerged regional movements in the Ogaden, Bale and Eritrea which were opposed to the central government on religious, linguistic and political grounds. These movements which were based among the predominantly Islamic communities of those regions were able to receive material and diplomatic support from the countries of the Middle East which sought to liberate their co-religionists from the Ethiopian Christian state. Juxtaposed against the Middle East was the African subsystem which lent its support to the Ethiopian state over the regional question but only on the diplomatic front. Further, the cold war

meant that while Ethiopia threw in her lot with the West to ward off Middle Eastern pressures on the regional question, at the same time she laid herself open to the hostility from the East. Thus Ethiopia's domestic problems over the regional question coupled with the emergence of the Middle East and Africa into the state-system and the emergence of the bi-polar security system in the post World War Two era not only posed a danger to the country's territorial integrity but also to the credibility of the state.

Secondly, from 1960 onwards, there emerged an increasingly militant opposition against the monarchy among the partisans of the modern sector. In December of that year, there was an abortive *coup d'état* which demystified the monarchy and subjected it to rational scrutiny and criticism in the subsequent years. The army which had put down the abortive coup, and which later bore the brunt of the onslaught of the regional insurgents, became restive and felt free to demand pay increases from the monarch as and when it wished. As the number of those in the modern sector grew in the 1960s as a result of an accelerated expansion of the bureaucracy and the industrial work force, and as the partisans became organized into students' unions, teachers' associations, trade unions and professional associations, they became increasingly politicized and militant.

Despite its numerical insignificance in relation to the size of the population, the political impact of the new elite (the military and civilian bureaucracies in particular) was substantial; this is not surprising, since it had taken over the military and administrative functions of the traditional elite with the result that the monarchy had become more dependent on it. Though the new elite was the product of the modernizing drive of the monarchy which it had, under European influence, been pursuing for a long time, the allegiance of that class was no longer to the traditional institutions of the country but to European ideologies and political processes. Moreover, the opposition at the centre and on the peripheries had a tendency to reinforce each other's sentiments against the monarchy: not only did the civilians and regional insurgents become ideologically closer to one another over time but also the army was pinned down by the insurgents in the arid and semi-arid regions adding to its grievances against the state.

Thirdly, two aspects of transnational economic transactions appear to be relevant to the popular uprising of 1974. The first is

the fact that Ethiopia's cyclical drought was made worse in the 1960s and 1970s by a population explosion brought on by the intervention of modern medicine (malaria control, antibiotics, health centres and the like) made available mainly through bilateral and multilateral arrangements. The impact of demographic factors on ecology (like forests and rainfall) is clear enough. This, coupled with the subsistence agrarian economy, gave rise to the food crises of 1973 and 1974 which greatly discredited the *ancien régime* in the eyes of its critics both at home and abroad.

The other aspect of the transnational economic transaction is the north-south divide. Despite the presumed specialization of the north in manufactures and of the south in commodities, it is obvious that the deteriorating terms of trade for the Third World countries have militated against the poor countries spearheading their development drive through exports. Ethiopia's ability to export agricultural products (the commodities of special interest to her) is barred by the mountains and lakes of temperate agricultural surpluses. Further, coffee, Ethiopia's main export earner, has, since the early 1960s, been subject to the regime of the International Coffee Agreement according to which she can export the commodity only in the amount of quota allocated to her. Her ability to vary the size of the quota is greatly restricted by competition with more important Third World producers of coffee. Consequently, the incentive to increase the production of the commodity with a view to exchanging it for weapons, luxury items or capital goods, as the case may be, is restricted.

As a result, like all Third World governments, the *ancien régime* may have been too constrained by these international factors to be able to do much about development; however, its critics would attribute any lack of development to its ineptitude. It is submitted that the broad spectrum of international economic transactions (and not the international capitalist system understood in the sense of foreign private capital) must go some way to explaining the frequency of revolutions in the Third World and also constitute one of the causal structural dimensions responsible for the emergence in Ethiopia of the revolutionary crisis of 1974.

Fourthly, the state which was operating in the twentieth century within the constraints of this domestic and international ecology was comparable to the reforming but at the same time decaying absolutist monarchies of Europe of past centuries. As discussed in

chapter 4, its policy of modernization had produced a tiny capitalist enclave in the industrial and agricultural sectors. Apart from the fact that the latter was dominated by foreign investors, the development of industries and commercial farms came rather late, in the early and late 1960s, respectively. A more important effect of the modernizing drive of the monarchy was the fact that it had destroyed its traditional base of authority (the aristocratic class of warriors) and replaced it by the *petite bourgeoisie* (civilian and military bureaucrats, white-collar workers, teachers and students) who became opposed to it. Like the traditional base which it destroyed, the monarchy belonged to a different age and was therefore unfit to govern a society in which participation of broader sections of the population in the political life of the country was becoming increasingly important. It surrounded itself by the residual aristocrats and cut itself off from society; it was extremely autocratic and refused to devolve power to the new elite; its style of administration (divide and rule) was divisive of the new elite and precluded the emergence of a credible alternative source of authority which would appeal to those in the modern sector.

To crown it all, the monarch (Haile Selassie) with so much power in his hands was, by 1974, too old and senile to exercise his authority in any meaningful way. By the same year, the monarchy was so discredited by all these trends that its benefactor (the US) had started demoting its relations with Ethiopia substantially in order to avoid being identified with the *ancien régime*. When the uprising came, the high dignitaries, who had lost the leadership of the monarch, were too divided among themselves to make a difference.

These perspectives of world-time, international structures, geopolitics, state and social structures may go a good deal of the way to explaining the decline and decay of the *ancien régime* but they do not directly deal with the question of why the urban population rose up in a spontaneous uprising in 1974 as discussed in chapter 2. When an old-state is in such a state of decay, all that is needed to light a revolt is a mere spark like the denial to the soldiers and NCOs of access to the water well of Negele which led to a mutiny and arrest of the officers there in January; the oil price increases that led to the demonstration of Addis Ababa taxi owners in February; the sector review that brought the teachers

out on strike in the same month; or the devastation of the hidden 1973-1974 drought, the discovery of which led to the protests of the students and intellectuals at the same time. Such sparks (like the student demonstrations and rallies) had been taking place for the previous decade. However, they did not light a big fire as did the sparks of 1974 mainly because they were contained by the police and military force of the state.

It is believed that on balance social order is not predicated on consent of the ruled that the latter can withdraw at will (as the liberal tradition would have it) so much as on coercion, an instrument which the *ancien régime* lost as a result of the structural crisis described in the previous paragraphs. In other words, the popular uprising of 1974 was possible not because those who took part in it were discontented with the old order but because the *ancien régime* was too weak to control even its cities.

The revolt of the urban population cannot be fully explained by reference to its relations with the state only, but also by its internal structures. In this regard, the fact that the members of the urban population lived in close proximity to one another, that they were organized into unions and associations of all descriptions and that they were, in addition, able to organize spontaneous steering committees in their places of work are all relevant. Chapter 2 gives emphasis to this ability of the urban population to organize and its ability therefore to prepare endless petitions and co-ordinate strikes, demonstrations and rallies and in this way harass the government. Perhaps, the absence of similar structures among the rural population goes to explain to a degree why they also did not rise up in revolt at the time of the popular uprising. By the same token, the superior organizational structure of the military and its access to the resources of the state goes to explain why it, as opposed to the other urban groups, was finally able to replace the *ancien régime*.

While it is proper to emphasize the structural approach, there is still the need to take into account the role of will. Strikes, demonstrations and rallies would have been unimaginable a few decades earlier; the environment for such actions was created only with increased industrialization and urbanization. Moreover, it is believed that such actions were guided by the will or belief systems of the actors, belief systems that grew with industrialization and urbanization and (as argued in chapter 1) belief systems directly

emulated from abroad. Particularly relevant in this regard was the educational system pursued by the country, the expatriate teachers, the library facilities, and the training of members of the military and civilian elite abroad. All these were effective channels through which Western ideas like Marxism were imported and propagated particularly among those who emerged out of the crisis of 1974 as the agents of the revolution. It appears that the international dynamic was relevant not only in influencing the actions of the state but also those of certain sections of the population even when the impact of the transnational on a given society takes place over the head of the state.

It is believed that the above international and domestic constraints and opportunities within which the old state and the new elite had to operate are relevant in explaining the emergence of the revolutionary crisis in Ethiopia but they are by no means the only approaches that have been applied to the question.

One of these is the classical Marxian class concept of society within a given state according to which the exploited lower classes revolt and overthrow the surplus appropriating upper classes. The official rhetoric is replete with this exposition of the old order and of the 1974 uprising; the rhetoric of the leftist political groups often slides into it.

However, as argued in chapter 2, the exploited peasantry did not take part in the uprising; the role of the industrial workers in the uprising was not any more militant than any of the other groups including the church and mosque clergy. Rather it was the army, teachers, students and the white-collar leaders of the trade unions who played a more active role than the other groups. In fact, it may be boldly stated that in the context of Ethiopia, to be a worker is not to be exploited so much as to be privileged: it is to have a regular income, however little, and to have access to health services and schools which were not, on the whole, available to the unemployed or to the peasants. However, privilege does not seem to be a guarantee against revolt since it is the more privileged (the *petite bourgeoisie*) who were more active in the uprising than any other sections of the population. Conversely, exploitation which characterized the Ethiopian society since time immemorial does not appear to be a recipe for revolt. There were certainly rivalries among the *petite bourgeoisie* at the time of the uprising – for example between the higher and lower employees of government

departments or between the junior and senior officers – but these cannot be sensibly equated with class divisions. At any rate, in the post-Lenin period, Marxist intellectuals have abandoned the phenomenon of intra-national class exploitation as a valid causal explanation of revolution.

Closely related to this is the theory of structuralist Marxism according to which transnational capital flows destabilize the existing social and political order and cause the overthrow of the old-state. As documented amply in previous chapters, this was the central rhetorical point of the left-wing political organizations including most notably EPRP and AESM as well as that of the regime as reflected by their common juxtaposing of classes into imperialism, feudalism and bureaucratic-capitalism, on one hand, and the workers and peasants on the other.<sup>1</sup> Of the serious authors on the Ethiopian revolution, Markakis and Nega Ayele were the first to offer a version of this theory. They argue that the alliance between the Ethiopian ruling class and international capital (an alliance forged by the former's encouragement of foreign investment) precluded the emergence of an indigenous middle class (and incidentally the possibility of a middle-class revolution). They explain that the state's intervention on behalf of capital in taking drastic measures against workers' restiveness made them militant; that the domination of the modern sector by foreign capital narrowed the social horizon of the educated *petite bourgeoisie* by barring its way from emerging as a middle class and reducing it to employee status; and that the control of large-scale trade blocked the emergence of the self-employed *petite bourgeoisie* (the lower mercantile class) into a middle class. This, they argue, was the reason why the *petite bourgeoisie* (including the students who prepared the ground for revolution by politicizing land reform and the exploitation of workers by the alliance of the ruling class with international capital) joined the workers and peasants in 1974.<sup>2</sup>

Similarly, the work of Halliday and Molyneux, which is much richer in the structures it considers, argues on this point that the main social impact of exogenous capital was on the state machinery itself, on the civil servants including the teachers and army officers who were most exposed to alternative ideas and political models. They maintain that this was because the civil servants and students came from an intermediate social stratum.<sup>3</sup>

These authors were right in choosing the *petite bourgeoisie* and, to a lesser extent, the working class as the main target of the influence of penetrating capital since these were the classes that were most active in the popular uprising. On the other hand, the impact of penetrating capital is portrayed by these authors predominantly as acting on the cognitive state of the consciousness of these classes without acknowledging what they are doing; they thus transform what is intended to be an economic explanation into a purposive one. Moreover, as noted earlier, an exogenously stimulated capitalist relation is not the only nor the most important source of political consciousness nor of discontent as seems to be suggested especially by Markakis and Ayele. Finally, if by capital is meant 'private foreign capital', as seems to be implied by these authors, then it is not logical to speak of the impact of incorporation before it has taken place, before, in other words, a sizeable amount of foreign capital has been imported into the country. As argued in chapter 4, the amount of private foreign capital invested in Ethiopia was absolutely minimal.<sup>4</sup> Halliday and Molyneux confirm this fact when they point out that Ethiopia and Afghanistan were not attractive economically to be absorbed into the world economy<sup>5</sup> perhaps meaning that those countries did not have the natural resources that would attract foreign capital.

Clapham rejects the validity of economic determinist explanations altogether and shifts the whole debate to the political sphere. To him, it is the political ineffectiveness of an inherently decaying monarchy and not economic exploitation that leads to revolutions. Essentially, Clapham focuses his analysis on the state perceived as being autonomous from economic or class reductionism.<sup>6</sup> Since states are at the centre of all revolutions and since it is obvious that a decaying state which is unable to control its citizens must collapse, Clapham's emphasis on the autonomy of the state is very much to the point. However, the collapse of an old-state need not necessarily lead to social and political transformations, as the collapse of the decaying Gondar dynasty did not at the time of Tewodros and his successors. Further, one of the main reasons for the failure of General Mengistu's coup of 1960 and the success of the 1974 uprising was, arguably, the fact that an enlarged and more politicized urban social sector had emerged between the two conjunctures. It appears that the varied structures should be used not only to explain the constraints and

opportunities of the *ancien régime* but also to explain those of the modern social sector which appears to be equally important for the emergence of the revolutionary crisis of 1974.

Perhaps, more than the works of Halliday and Molyneux as well as that of Clapham, the method employed here to explain the emergence of revolutionary crisis is a reaction to Skocpol who is one of the most influential contemporary authorities on the sociology of revolutions. To her, the emergence of a revolution is the causal convergence of three structural dimensions (the division of society into producing, property-owning, surplus-appropriating classes, the internal repressive and resource extractive capabilities of the state and the external military and economic pressures upon the state). Skocpol explains that she developed her theory from the classical Marxian perspective of the division of society into producer and surplus-appropriating classes and from conflict theory.<sup>7</sup> Her work appears to be eminently relevant for the project of explaining the Ethiopian revolution not least because her work is concerned with revolutions in agrarian bureaucratic societies (France, Russia and China) which were the main focus of her study. Further, she maintains that the studying of the specific inter-relations of class and state structures and the complex interplay of domestic and international developments is useful for describing the logic of social revolutionary causes and outcomes 'from France in the 1790s to Ethiopia in the 1970s'.<sup>8</sup> However, it is in order here to point out some of the difficulties involved in applying Skocpol's model to the Ethiopian experience.

The first of these is Skocpol's insistence on what she calls 'the non-purposive structural perspective' of the causes and outcomes of revolutions. In this, the central point of her argument is that the causes and outcomes of revolutions are determined by social, state and international structures and not by the will and actions of the agents of revolutions.<sup>9</sup> Without doubt, Skocpol advances forceful arguments in support of her position; nevertheless, she can still be accused of reducing the sociology of revolution to the study of fate.

Despite its structural reductionist insistence (its refusal to take human will into account) the approach does make sense in the context of the causes of revolutions when the 'emergence' of revolutionary crises appears to be beyond any individual's or

group's control. The Ethiopian experience is a case in point. By all accounts, the uprising was spontaneous and it could hardly be otherwise in the absence of any political organization to direct the course of events, if historical events can be directed at all. Even then, an argument can be made (as in the previous paragraph) that the cognitive state of the social actors had a role to play in influencing the collapse of the *ancien régime*. Moreover, when it comes to the course and outcome of the revolution (to the coincidence at times between the intentions of the agents of the revolution and outcomes, to the struggles between revolutionaries and counter-revolutionaries, to the influence dictators yield), the impact of human will and action looks even greater.

Secondly, though Skocpol acknowledges the international capitalist system as a valid causal explanatory component, she gives much more emphasis to political than to economic considerations. In what she calls the 'organizational realist perspective', she treats the state as an autonomous organization in competition with other states and in potential conflict with agrarian class structures.<sup>10</sup> According to this scheme, a typical scenario of the emergence of a revolutionary crisis would be if the state, because of international military threats, launched a programme of centralization or economic restructuring which went against the interests of the dominant class. A revolutionary situation would emerge if the dominant class was in a position to obstruct the programmes, paralyse the regime and open the way for the lower-class revolt.

Arguably, such a situation existed in the Ethiopia of the 1930s when Italian invasion was a reality and when the aristocracy were obstructing the centralization and modernization drive of the monarchy (centralization and modernization set in motion by European expansionism in the first place). Nevertheless, such structural conjunctures did not lead to a revolution at the time. By 1974, however, the peasantry had shown no tendency to revolt and the aristocracy was replaced by the new elite as a result of the modernization policy of the monarchy so that it was unable to play its obstructive role.

To sum up, the international environment was relevant in several respects. European expansionism was important in setting in motion the processes of territorial consolidation, centralization and modernization starting from the end of the nineteenth

century. The threat posed by the countries of the Middle East in the post-war years was important in driving Ethiopia to the security umbrella of the US and, hence, in bringing her to the centre stage of the cold war; in a broad sense aid and trade were important in exacerbating the food crisis of the early 1970s and, also, in creating constraints on the economic development of Ethiopia; and the contact of the new elite with Western Europe was important in providing contemporary political modes to the former.

The emergence of the revolutionary crisis was in part the result not of capitalist penetration, which in the case of Ethiopia was incidental, but of the longtime centralization and modernization policy of the monarchy which gave rise to a class of military and civilian bureaucrats, teachers, students and workers who together embodied the core of the 1974 protest uprising. Further, Skocpol's idea of state competition leading to changes in domestic economic policies which result in agrarian elite obstruction and in peasant revolt does not appear to be relevant to the emergence of the revolutionary crisis in Ethiopia. The fact that the crisis did not involve the agrarian class structures distinguishes the Ethiopian experience from the French and Soviet revolutions but not necessarily from those of China and Vietnam where the rural sector was mobilized after the collapse of the old-states.

#### (C) THE MOBILIZATION OF THE RURAL POPULATION

The question in the abstract of 'which class is revolutionary?' does not seem to be particularly helpful. The workers, who are normally portrayed by Marxists as the most revolutionary of classes, have been accused in the circumstances of the two World Wars of having played a reactionary role in abandoning the principles of proletarian internationalism and in fighting on the side of nationalist and conservative forces. Conversely, the middle class which is normally portrayed as reactionary had, according to Marx, played a revolutionary role at the time of the French revolution. Further, Lenin and later Soviet scholars have accorded a revolutionary role to anti-imperialist, anti-communist and nationalist Third World leaders.<sup>11</sup> There seems to be a general consensus that the feudal class is reactionary though it could, perhaps, arguably be maintained that the class did not necessarily play a reactionary role in the German and Japanese

transformations in which it acted in concert with the reforming upper class. From this, it can be concluded that whether a particular class is revolutionary or not depends not on the intrinsic disposition of the class so much as on the context within which it is operating.

In the wake of the successful peasant revolutions of the twentieth century, and particularly in the wake of the Vietnamese peasant revolution which pinned down the resources of a superpower over such a long time, the contexts within which peasants participate in radical politics have been made the subject of scrutiny by Western scholars. Thus scrutinized were the immediate circumstances of the peasants including their geo-politics, their mode of production and their relations with landlords; the relations of the peasants to political organizations; their relations with the state; and the impact of the international capitalist world on them.<sup>12</sup> It is believed that of these composite factors, political organizations, state competition, relations with the old-state, geo-politics and mode of production are, in various degrees, the most relevant to the mobilization of the Ethiopian rural population. As described in chapter 4, the Ethiopian rural relations of production were so diverse that one could find parallels between them and those categories that are familiar in the Marxian tradition: primitive, communal, classical, feudal, Asiatic and capitalist. Nevertheless, suffice it here to comment only on three rural social formations (the nomads, the tenants and the *rist*-holders) as these together constituted almost the entire rural population.

The general literature on nomad participation in radical politics is thin on the ground; however, the Ethiopian experience confronts us precisely with this question. It has been pointed out in chapter 1 that the Islamic nomads of the Ogaden and of the Eritrean Sahel plains had been involved in regional or secessionist struggles against the central Christian government since about 1960. It was argued, further, that this was occasioned by the emergence among them of political organizations (WSLF and ELF) and by the ability of these organizations to persuade the nomads that it was in their interest to provide the organizations with human and material resources and participate in the struggle. It was also pointed out that the involvement of the nomads in radical politics was made possible by the material and

diplomatic support provided by the Islamic states of the Middle East in the hope of promoting the cause of their co-religionists in those regions of Ethiopia.<sup>13</sup> Previously it has been pointed out that the Islamic nomads of Afar were similarly mobilized in 1976 by the ALF with the backing of the conservative Arab states.<sup>14</sup> In these cases, it is not difficult to see how the interplay between the emergence of even conservative political organizations, state competition and geo-politics (the fact that the nomads lived in areas that could easily be penetrated by the political organizations and the Islamic states) goes to mobilize nomadic people into radical politics.

On the other hand, the new regime has failed to mobilize the nomadic people into the revolutionary process and, hence, into the political life of the country. This was because some of those communities have continued to be controlled by the regionalist political organizations. Further, in the case of the remaining, the institutions created by the revolution (cadres and mass organizations) have not been versatile enough to penetrate the ever mobile nomads and influence their lives. The regionalist organizations have, in this regard, shown superior commitment and versatility.

The sedentary farmers who constitute the great majority of the people live in the Highlands of Ethiopia. Save in the numerically unimportant cases of those in the Highlands of Bale and Eritrea, the rest were neither mobilized by any political organization nor incorporated into the political life of the old-state. The Derg, in competition with the leftist political organizations (most notably EPRP and AESM) for the hearts and minds of the peasants, issued the policy of Development Through Co-operation Programme in November 1974 and the Public Ownership of Rural Land Proclamation in March 1975. With the help of these legislations the landed class was ousted from their land holdings and the peasantry was organized before the year was out.

The deployment in the countryside of some 60,000 teachers and students from January 1975 under the Campaign Programme created the occasion for EPRP and AESM to strengthen themselves by recruiting members from among the participants of the programme and to take an active part in the politicization and organization of the peasant masses. The teachers and students, who had already been highly politicized, were if anything over-

zealous in their campaign to instigate the peasants to revolt and drive the landlords out of their holdings. The speed with which these groups acted was so great that the Derg's radicalism could not keep abreast of the events. Despite that, it can only be said that the Derg did, indeed, take the initiative in the mobilization of the peasants; not only did it issue the Campaign Programme which created the conditions under which the teachers, students and political organizations were able to act, but also issued the Proclamation which authorized the 'nationalization' of rural land and its redistribution to the peasants. Further, even more important was the fact that it committed the state's military resources against landlord backlash.

Regarding the degree of incorporation of the rural population into the new polity, a distinction is often made between the peasants of the north and those of the south on the basis of the particular relations of production that had prevailed among them. Prior to the reforms in the south, where big land ownership and crop-sharing arrangements were widespread, the peasants are said to have embraced the transformation with open arms; whereas in the north, where the *rist* system was widespread, the peasants are said to be resistant to the change and to the new regime. Viewed from the perspective of the prevalence of guerrilla activities against the regime in the north, the argument seems to hold water. However, there are considerations which militate against pinning down the resistance entirely to the differences in the modes of production that had existed in the north and south.

First, though there was a greater incidence of share-cropping arrangements in the south, there were at the same time important pockets of tenancy among minority groups in the north. The figures of the Ministry of Land Reform and Administration suggest that the extent of tenancy in the south and north was about 25 per cent and 11 per cent of the rural population respectively. Secondly, though the extent and variation is not clear, upper-class surplus appropriation and exaction of certain 'seigneurial' rights had persisted both among share-croppers and *rist*-holders. Thirdly, more important, was the fact that the Derg's reforms were carried out in the north in competition with a number of other political organizations which were opposed to it, namely, EPLF, EPRP, EDU and TPLF. The preponderance of resistance in the north can in part be explained by geo-political

factors: by the region's proximity to northern Sudan and the Red Sea and through them to the Middle East from where much of the assistance to the insurgents has originated. It has already been noted that the conservative Arab states were providing assistance to ELF, EDU and ALF and trying to bring them under a joint front and that the EPLF, which was, probably, receiving much of its assistance from the progressive forces in the Middle East and beyond, was promoting EPRP and TLF.

In some respects, the factors relevant for the mobilization of the nomads and peasants were similar. In both cases, geo-politics and political organizations appear to have played an important role. On the other hand, however, the nomads (but not the peasants) seem to have been capable of acting in the face of danger to their security posed by the old-state. This can perhaps be explained by the fact that they live a mobile life which had precluded the emergence among them of an upper class allied to the state and capable of regulating their daily lives. This could only have made it difficult for the state to establish a presence of its administrative machinery in their midst and control them. These factors, coupled with the emergence of political organizations among them, shielded the nomadic people from reprisals by the old-state. The international factor appears to have been as important to nomad mobilization in the Lowlands as the collapse of the old-state was to the peasant mobilization in the Highlands.

The elite, especially when organized and armed, appears to play the most crucial role in the mobilization of the lower class; this seems to have been borne out by the experience of Ethiopia. This is not surprising since it is the class capable of articulating the grievances of the lower class, providing alternative political models, acting as a vehicle for the transfer of resources from international sources and since, above all, it stands to benefit from the redistribution of power involved in the revision of the status quo. The Ethiopian experience suggests that the convergence of nationalism and Leninist strategy in a political organization appears to make it much more potent and effective than organizations which lack one or both elements. TPLF which espoused Maoism and which operated among the linguistic group of Tigrai from which its members were drawn is the only credible organization to the south of Eritrea which has survived the 1977 new regime's onslaught against the pan-Ethiopian and regionalist

political organizations. Conversely, EDU which was right wing and EPRP which was left wing (both being pan-Ethiopian organizations) were not based on a particular nationality and they were both wiped out by the Derg during 1977. The triumph in Eritrea of the left-wing EPLF over its right-wing rival (ELF) appears to confirm this argument. The doubling by TPLF and EPLF of Maoist-style guerrilla strategy and the exploitation of local nationalist sentiments appears to have given these organizations superior qualities in mobilizing the rural population.

Skocpol makes a distinction between autonomous patterns of peasant mobilization (the French, Russian and Mexican revolutions) and directed patterns of peasant mobilization (the Chinese, Vietnamese and Cuban revolutions and the anti-colonial movements in Portuguese Africa). Under the first pattern, the peasants revolt during the breakdown of the *ancien régime* thus undercutting the landed upper class and preparing the way for the emergence of the revolutionary state. In these cases, the organizations of the new state do not mobilize the peasants politically but rather by coercively imposing administrative and military controls on the countryside. Under the second pattern, on the other hand, the peasants are directly mobilized by organizing revolutionary movements either before (Cuba and Portuguese Africa) or after (China and Vietnam) the collapse of the *ancien régime*. According to Skocpol, though peasant participation under the second pattern is less spontaneous than under the first, the results could still be more favourable to the peasants because, during the revolutionary process, direct links would have been established between them and the political organizations and because peasant resources and manpower would have ended up participating in the building up of the new regime's social institutions and state organizations as a result of the direct mobilizations.<sup>15</sup>

Viewed from these perspectives, the mobilization of the Ethiopian peasantry appears to have been an episode unto itself. Unlike the first pattern of mobilization, the role of the Ethiopian peasants at the time of the popular uprising of 1974 was minimal. It was neither spontaneous nor autonomous nor did it lead to sudden land seizures nor to refusal of any feudal rights, thus preparing the ground for a revolutionary regime to take over.

Further, the mobilization of the Ethiopian peasants does not fit the second pattern either. Initially, EPRP had a peasant-based

guerrilla strategy with which it sought to encircle the urban centres and squeeze out the *ancien régime*. However, despite the fact that it continued to establish and strengthen isolated rural military bases after the outbreak of the revolution, EPRP was deflected from that strategy by its choice in the summer of 1976 to launch an urban armed struggle against Mengistu's coalition; the result was total defeat in the urban centres and internecine squabbles which led to the dismantling of its bases in the countryside. With the exception of TPLF which may have designs of replacing the central government by over-running the cities from a rural base, this put an end to the possibility of a direct peasant mobilization by an organization contending for power against the *ancien régime* and against the new one.

Instead, the peasants were mobilized mainly by the Derg after the *ancien régime* had collapsed and, hence, without their human and material resources having participated in the revolutionary process in exchange for land redistribution and for abolition of upper-class exploitation. The one exception to this was the fact that the hundreds of thousands of the militia were raised from among the peasants; in the spring of 1977, in this way, the peasants did, indeed, take part, not so much in the red terror, but in the new régime's anti-regionalist and anti-counter-revolutionary wars. However, this came (not as a result of reciprocal benefits) but as a result of forceful recruitment made possible by the new régime's coercive imposition already achieved before the wars of 1977.

The imposition on the peasants of the régime's social and administrative institutions began with the establishment of peasant associations as envisaged by the Public Ownership of Rural Land Proclamation of March 1975, which was substantially implemented in the same year. Thereafter, the associations were established at the *wereda*, *Awraja*, provincial and national levels. In this way, the peasants were subordinated to the Derg and then to the Party. The peasants were also subordinated to the local government administration through which superior government decisions were communicated and implemented. According to the 1975 Proclamation the main function of the associations was to take part in the redistribution of land. Later, however, their functions were extended to cover a wide mandate over local social, economic, political and security affairs. In the meantime, the intensification of the struggle between EPRP and Mengistu's

coalition and, later, the member organizations of the coalition *inter se* gave a boost to their use by the regime as instruments of campaign and coercion in its drive to oust members and supporters of those political organizations from the ranks of the associations. More importantly, however, they recruited from among their members hundreds of thousands of men to help in the raising of a people's militia which fought in the wars against Somalia in 1977 and of the regions since then. One of the effects of the emphasis laid on the organization, politicization and arming of the peasants and, in that way, sucking them into conflicts of the political organizations has been the neglect of their social and economic functions.

Perhaps, the fact that peasant participation in the revolutionary process was not based on reciprocal benefits with the government but rather exacted coercively goes some way to explain the regime's attitudes towards them. When prompted by aid agencies, its officials often argue that the quota system (by which the peasants are forced to sell a portion of their product to the government at below the market price) should not be abolished because the peasants have benefited a lot from the revolution whereas the urban population has not. Further, the regime has felt free to forcefully move the peasant from one end of the country to the other under its 'Resettlement Programme' (a programme ostensibly designed to give fertile land to the drought-affected peasants). It has also felt free to forcefully herd them into villages from their pre-existing scattered hamlets under its programme of 'villagization' (a programme intended allegedly to facilitate the delivery of services like schools, clinics and meals).

To sum up, with the exception of the nomads and the highland peasants a variable number of whom have come under the control of the regionalist movements over the years, the remaining sections of the rural population have been mobilized and incorporated into the new polity. Since then, the peasants have controlled the movements of anti-government elements in the countryside, and provided the regime with fighting men as well as with their 'surplus' produce to feed its army. What they have received in return is not clear. The redistribution of land has granted them a mere right to use land; it has not led to the control of their surplus any more than the previous system had done. The one-sidedness of the benefits in the relations between

the peasants and the state is, arguably, a result of the way they were mobilized. It did not come about as a result of instigating them to take part in the revolutionary processes with any degree of enthusiasm through promises of good times to come but as a result of coercively organizing, politicizing and arming them. If the Ethiopian experience is a case of peasant revolution, it can be so only to the extent that the peasants are used by the new state.

#### (D) THE CONTENDING AGENTS OF THE REVOLUTION

Various writers have proposed different social groups and classes as being effective agents of the Ethiopian revolution. The candidates are the lower class (workers and peasants), the upper class (the high civilian and military officials), and the intermediate social strata. However, the question of which class or other social group 'led' the revolution is important in the characterization of the revolution and the answer to it depends on the approach adopted.

An example of this is Marx who defines the role of classes in revolutions as follows: the generation of a nascent mode of production within the confines of an existing one creates a dynamic basis for the growth of unity and consciousness of each proto-revolutionary class through ongoing struggles with the existing dominant class . . . The revolution is accomplished through class action led by the self-conscious rising revolutionary class, i.e. the bourgeoisie in bourgeois revolutions and by the proletariat in socialist revolutions.<sup>16</sup> In Ethiopia, there was no middle class to talk of and the small size of the proletariat that existed did at best participate in the urban uprising of 1974 and, like the other social institutions, became the arena of struggle for the regime and the political organizations thereafter. At no stage did it play a leading role. Marx did not envisage the intermediate and peasant classes as revolutionary.

The ideas of latter-day Marxists are, perhaps, more relevant to the Ethiopian case than those of Marx himself; however, their controversial nature makes their usefulness doubtful. It was they, most notably Soviet scholars, who developed the notion of the non-capitalist path of development or states of socialist orientation according to which it was envisaged that an amalgam of intermediate and/or lower classes in pre-capitalist states could

lead any revolution at all. But then, the controversy has since been raging as to whether such a revolution is nationalist, middle class or socialist which in effect means that the question of which class is leading it is unsettled.<sup>17</sup> Arguably, a version of this approach is that of Markakis who maintains that the Ethiopian revolution was led by the workers and peasants with the support of certain sections of the intermediate classes especially the students.<sup>18</sup> However, in the case of Ethiopia, it is difficult to maintain that intermediate classes and their organizations were organically linked to the exploited classes since any interaction between them and the workers and peasants was at best superficial having come only after the outbreak of the revolutionary crisis of 1974.

Skocpol, who draws her approach from Marx, defines social revolutions as follows: 'Social revolutions are rapid basic transformations of a society's class and state structures and they are accompanied and in part carried through by class based revolts from below.'<sup>19</sup> The changes that have taken place in Ethiopia certainly amount to a rapid and basic transformation of class and state structures. However, the reference to social revolutions being of necessity accompanied or in part carried through by class-based revolts from below is of doubtful validity at least to the experience of Ethiopia. In fact, when Skocpol talks about revolts from below, she has in mind peasant revolt in the overthrow of her *anciens régimes* of France and Russia or the overthrow of a post-revolutionary state which fails to control the countryside as in the case of post-1911 China. Skocpol does not think much of urban uprisings. In the case of Ethiopia, however, urban revolt was by far the most important factor in the overthrow of the old-state. Peasant participation came as part of the revolutionary regime's programme of reform. In fact, whether the word 'revolt' can ever be used to refer to any of the Ethiopian peasant activities at any stage is doubtful.

Another approach is proffered by Trimberger's notion of 'revolution from above'. According to it, high military and civilian bureaucrats, without great land holdings or ties to landlords or merchant classes, overthrow traditional rulers and institute a programme of modernization covering radical social and economic reforms.<sup>20</sup> Halliday and Molyneux endorse, with some proviso, this proposition as being valid to the Ethiopian case.<sup>21</sup>

Here again, the problem is the question of the actors in the revolution. Skocpol's cases show a crucial role being played by the lower class. By contrast, the cases of Trimberger (the revolutions of Japan in 1868, Turkey in 1923, Egypt in 1952 and Peru in 1968) show the crucial role being played by the upper class (the high military and civilian bureaucrats). It may be maintained that since the radical socio-political reforms in Ethiopia were by and large given by the Derg to the peasants (instead of resulting from reciprocal transactions between the two), the revolution was carried out from above. However, viewed strictly from the class point of view, it is doubtful whether the notion of 'revolution from above' fits the Ethiopian experience at all.

Such a possibility existed in the abortive coup of 1960. One of the differences between it and the 1974 onslaught against the old-state was the fact that the former, perhaps like most military political revolts, was led by high military and civilian officials while the latter was led by lower-ranking officers, NCOs and privates. This seems to suggest that the 1974 political crisis was, if anything, a result of lower-class action or a revolt from below as argued by some observers on the basis that the lower-ranking officers and privates were from humbler backgrounds than the senior ones. The fact that in 1974 the employees of all the government and non-government organizations were at odds with the top several officials in each of these organizations has, generally, also been invoked to support the argument that the revolt of that year was from below. Whatever the merits of these arguments, it is difficult to maintain that the Ethiopian socio-political transformation was a case of revolution from above since, in 1974 and after, it was the intermediate classes that were the most important actors in the revolution and since the high military and civilian officials were eliminated by them.

Upper- and lower-class action in the early stages of the Ethiopian revolution was made to look important. However, this was not because the lower class revolted and prepared the ground for the takeover of power by the revolutionary regime nor because the upper class, which was in any case weakened by long years of the monarchy's modernization programme, put up much resistance against the revolution. Rather, it was, arguably, because, being influenced by Leninist strategies, the agents of the revolution saw the lower class as a potential ally of the revolution

to be cultivated and the upper class as an enemy of the revolution to be eliminated and, consequently, echoed these notions in their campaigns and actions.

In other words, it was the intermediate classes (the security forces, the civilian bureaucrats, the students, teachers and workers) who, without much support from below or much resistance from above, 'revolted' in 1974 and prepared the ground for the takeover of power by the armed forces. Moreover, afterwards, the course of the revolution is characterized not so much by lower- and upper-class conflict but by the struggle of the political organizations *inter se* and between them and the regime. It appears, also, that the intensity of the struggle as reflected in the red terror and the depth of the transformations as reflected in the radicalism of the nationalization of rural land was the result not of class but of rivalry between the same actors over power. Thus, Skocpol's and Trimberger's notion of lower- and upper-class participation in revolutions does not appear to be half as important to the Ethiopian case as that of the intermediate class.

With some proviso, I find Tilly's idea of revolution more aptly describes the effective actors and the interplay between them that gave birth to the transformations in the Ethiopian revolution than do the works of Marx, Skocpol or Trimberger. According to Tilly's model, a revolution is a special kind of collective action in which the government and other organized contenders for power fight for ultimate sovereignty over a population and in which the contenders succeed in displacing existing power holders.<sup>22</sup> Tilly's idea of 'multiple sovereignty' which relates to the occasion of the take-over of power from an old-state can be extended to describe the course of the revolution afterwards. Examples of this in the case of Ethiopia were the post-1974 struggle among the political organizations which culminated in the red terror of 1977, and the ensuing intense competition over the recruitment of members by the remaining organizations during which the population was forced to obey more than one authority. More relevant to the issue at hand is, however, the fact that Tilly accords a central role not to upper or lower class but to organized group action in the course and outcome of the revolution. It was the organized corporate groups that were most active during the popular uprising of 1974 and, afterwards, it was the political organizations that took their place and brought about 'socialist' socio-economic and political

reforms by creating pressure on the Derg. Needless to say, these organized groups were dominated by the intermediate sections of the population.

This may explain how the interplay of actions by the organized groups up to at least 1977 influenced the outcomes of the revolution but it does not explain the question of why the intermediate classes, especially the lower-ranking officers and privates, became active in the 1974 popular uprising in the first place. Here, perhaps, culture rather than class is the more helpful of the two explanations. According to some anthropologists, the class stratification of the Ethiopian society has not been as strictly articulated and solidified as it is in Europe. According to Levine, for example, the Ethiopian peasant thinks that he is born to great destiny and that his current position is to him only provisional.<sup>23</sup> Further, it is widely known that the son of a well-to-do person leaves his home early in his childhood for a distant place and pursues priesthood, a military-administrative career or any other profession by attending a church school or by serving a master often in extremely deprived circumstances. Also, whatever title he earned in his lifetime, like fiefdom, was often not capable of being passed on to his heirs. Yet again, though one of the dynasties maintained that it was a descendant of Solomon the Wise and, hence, claimed an exclusive hold on the throne, there were other dynasties that ruled northern Ethiopia over the centuries. For example, two outstanding nineteenth-century monarchs (Tewodros and Yohannis), who initiated the territorial consolidation and centralization of present-day Ethiopia, had no royal connections whatever and, arguably, suffered no legitimacy crisis as a result. In other words, class and position were, to say the least, less transgenerational, and vertical social mobility more widespread, than in Europe. To Moore at least, culture plays a dominant role in whether a social group took part in revolutionary politics or not.<sup>24</sup>

Perhaps, this suggests that in Ethiopia an individual or group capable of altering its social position would readily take advantage of a favourable situation created by the convergence of structural changes even when that involves the use of force and violence. Compared to other social groups, the army had the advantage of being organized and armed, perhaps the reason why the other classes and social groups were not able to act effectively and alter

their position. Moreover, with the establishment of Revolutionary Flame and the Workers' Party of Ethiopia, the army acquired a political organization and ideology which gave it a sense of purpose, international allies and further access to the resources of coercion on top of what it had inherited from the old-state. Though the civilian political organizations greatly influenced the outcome of the revolution, they were no match for such a military and political organization and were doomed to lose the struggle against it.

That the army should succeed in taking power is hardly surprising when we consider the multiplicity of military coups and political revolutions in the Third World by which the Derg could not but be influenced. In fact, the first attempted military coup in sub-Saharan Africa was the one attempted against Haile Selassie in 1960 in which most of the Derg members would have participated by fighting on the side of the loyalists. As such, they were fully aware of the fate that befell the 1960 coup leaders and their followers (capital punishment, imprisonment and banishments to remote garrisons) and were well aware of what would befall them, should the old-state make a comeback, after they got involved in the 1974 mutinies and arbitrary arrests of government officials. This was a good reason for soldiering on with the business of overthrowing the government once they were implicated in the popular uprising. Probably, the turning point in this regard came with the massacre of the sixty officials of the old-state in November 1974. After that, they could not live safely as private citizens since there was danger of reprisals from friends and relations of the victims.

#### (E) THE NEW RULING ELITE

During the popular uprising of 1974, the employees in each of the governmental and non-governmental organizations, who went on strike, submitted lists of demands to be met by the government. As noted in chapter 2, the employees were most adamant about one demand, namely, that several of the highest officials in those organizations must be removed from their positions before the employees considered going back to work. A similar divide between the highest officials and the rest also emerged within the security forces where the distinction between the higher officials

and the rest probably began. It was the NCOs and privates of Negele and Dolo who, provoked by a denial of access to the water wells of the officers, put the latter under arrest in January and submitted their list of grievances to the central authorities.

In the following months, protest co-ordinating committees sprang up in the military and police units followed by higher co-ordinating committees claiming to represent the various units. The government's response was to create its own military committees in the hope of lobbying support from among the security forces and turning the tide of events in its favour. It appears that the unit committees were dominated by NCOs and privates and that the government's committees were dominated and led by colonels. The junior officers up to and including majors' who attended both the government committees and the high co-ordinating committees can best be described as having vacillated between the two for the duration of the uprising. When the Derg was established in June, however, the junior officers identified themselves with the NCOs and privates by providing leadership for that body. Like the high co-ordinating committees that preceded it, the Derg was numerically dominated by NCOs and privates. Thus, through the exclusion of the senior officers down to the colonels from participation in Derg activities, the new line of divide drawn between the senior officers and the rest was institutionalized.

Apart from the vertical division, there was also a competition or conflict among the junior officers themselves which predated the revolts of 1974 and which was reflected in the Derg. The conflict was based on whether they graduated from the Holeta Military Academy or from any one of the other academies (the Harar Academy, the Police Abadina College, the air force or the navy). Those who went to the Holeta Academy started their military careers as private soldiers. Then, they served for many years in operations while they climbed up the NCO ranks and, upon passing an entrance examination, were admitted to the academy for two years of training. Upon graduation, they were made second lieutenants. Their entrance examinations required no more knowledge than basic arithmetic and a skill in reading and writing the national official language (Amharic) and their two years of education at the Academy involved basic training in military affairs such as logistics, ordnance and weapons

operations. The college's curriculum did not include any academic subjects whatever.

Mengistu, who is a graduate of the Holeta Academy for example, joined the army in the middle 1950s as a boy scout and was promoted to private soldier when he came of age. Despite the deliberate insinuations of the mass media to the contrary, the circumstantial evidence suggests that Mengistu never attended school for more than two years before he joined the army. Some of the other junior officers, who also joined the Derg, did attend evening classes and complete primary and/or secondary school education and, in fewer cases, attain university education as in the cases of Major Atnafu who was a university undergraduate and Major Asrat who had a master's degree in administration. Like most of the other junior officers in the Derg, Mengistu probably attended a secondary school in Harar for a few years when he was serving under the Third Division but did not go beyond that.

By contrast, those who went to the other academies, with the exception of those who attended the Police Abadina College, were recruited from among the secondary school graduates and given the equivalent of three years' university education, advanced military training and graduated as second lieutenants. Obviously, the latter were intended to constitute the elite corps of the armed forces; they were pampered by the monarch both as cadets and graduates. One example of their preferential treatment was the proposal that the first round of Harar Academy graduates in 1960 should be paid more than their counterparts from Holeta. The scheme was dropped when it was learnt that the graduates of Holeta in the same year were going to mutiny in protest. Apparently, Mengistu, who was in the latter group, was identified as one of the ringleaders of the threatened mutiny. The negative statements written in his record at the time are generally displayed to the military cadres as evidence that he had always been a revolutionary.

Thus, the junior officers from Holeta were looked down upon for their academic shortcomings by their counterparts from the other military establishments. However, with the establishment of the Derg, they were able to more than redress the balance and swing it completely in their favour. The emergence of certain developments was to assist them in this endeavour. The biggest single officers' group in the Derg was from Holeta. These officers

who had lived the lives of the NCOs and privates (who were very much in the majority within the Derg) understood their sentiments and ambitions. For their part, the NCOs and privates could only see in the Holeta officers the reflection of their own lives and destinies and identify with them. Very soon, the Holeta officers closed ranks with the NCOs and privates in the Derg against the other members and ousted them from positions of influence. No doubt, Mengistu's oratorical skill was useful in exploiting the sentiments of such a majority and guaranteeing, not only the leadership of the Derg for himself, but also support for any actions he was to take without the knowledge of the Derg.

A very powerful instrument that Mengistu used against his competitors in the Derg, and later outside it, was the military force committed to safeguard the security of the Derg from the time of the latter's establishment. Probably, it was initially made up of the guards of the Fourth Division headquarters where the Derg held its early meetings. Then, it grew to replace the division-strong royal bodyguard when the headquarters of the Derg moved to the palace towards the end of 1974. Finally, it became big enough to be in charge of the security of the capital city and the surrounding areas.

One of the main functions for the establishment of the Derg was the rounding up of the allegedly corrupt officials of the *ancien régime* with a view to bringing them to justice. Their arrest was, therefore, in full swing as of the inception of the Derg. In fact, one of the first actions of the Derg was the establishment of a committee from within and outside its membership to head the Derg's security force and to preside over the arrests. Mengistu, who was made the chairman of that committee, appears to have established close links with members of the committee, particularly with its commanders, which enabled him to use it against anyone he chose. Lt Col Daniel Asfaw, who had been a year mate of Mengistu at Holeta and who became a member of the committee and later commander of the Derg's security force, is acknowledged to have been Mengistu's hatchet-man in the executions of Aman, Sisay, Teferi and their associates. It was these palace coups and executions that guaranteed Mengistu's triumph over the other members of the Derg and his emergence as a dictator in February 1977.

However, if Mengistu was to rule the country, it was not enough

for him to assert his authority over the Derg alone but, rather, to extend it to include the security forces and the society at large. In addition to the Derg's security force, the military cadres were an important instrument in this. Their political career can be traced back to the popular uprising of 1974. The unit committees which were active in co-ordinating protest activities in the military and police units were retained by the Derg as a bridge between it and the units. However, as some of them and their units became opposed to Derg rule, they were called to the capital city towards the end of 1974, given a short seminar, dubbed 'apostles of change', and assigned to the various government departments to act as watch-dogs for the Derg and be directly responsible to it.

Starting from 1975, these, in addition to new recruits from the security forces and to a lesser extent from the civilian bureaucrats, were sent to the socialist countries for political training and, upon their return, made members of Mengistu's political organization (Revolutionary Flame). Further recruits of that organization were trained in the Yekatit '66 Political School run by the members of the civilian political organizations which were working in concert with Revolutionary Flame. Though predominantly based on the military, Revolutionary Flame also had civilian members who were active in the population in addition to taking part in the activities of the Joint Front of Ethiopian Marxist-Leninist Organizations. The military cadres, on the other hand, were active within the security forces holding the army, the police and the Intelligence Department firmly behind the regime.

In fact, the first to fall prey to the onslaught of the Derg's security force were the sixty or so officials of the *ancien régime* who were executed *en masse* in November 1974. The senior officers and the graduates of the elitist military establishments were decimated within a few years of that, either through executions by the military cadres, banishment to the war fronts where they were exposed to enemy fire-power or through emigration from the country altogether. The harassing and ousting from their land holdings of the rural upper class in 1975 was carried out with the aiding and abetting of all the civilian left. The victory of the instant communists over the veterans in the wake of the 1977 red terror was achieved through street assassinations and incarcerations of the members of all the leftist political organizations by the Derg's security force and the cadres of Revolutionary Flame.

The headquarters of the Derg's security force (the palace) appears to have been the breeding ground for the regime's assassins and torturers who haunted the urban centres by night and perpetrated some of the most ghastly horrors in the many prisons that sprang up all over the country in the period following the red terror.

In terms of power gained, the most important beneficiary of these victories was Mengistu. He was, probably, the most influential member of the Derg from the time of the latter's inception. On 3 February 1977, however, he led a palace coup against Gen. Teferi Bante and his group in the Derg and asserted his absolute hold on that body and, hence, on the state. After that, he set about consolidating and formalizing his power by liquidating all the political organizations, by establishing a party in 1984 under his control and, in 1987, by adopting a constitution which recognized an all-powerful office of a state president which he filled.

After Col Daniel's death in the palace shoot-out of 3 February 1977, the Derg's security force was brought under the administration of Major (later Gen.) Getachew Shibeshi, a Derg member and graduate of the Holeta Academy. It is widely rumoured that Mengistu's palace was guarded by Cuban troops after that. More likely than not, the Cubans were in charge of training members of what used to be the Derg's security force and what, after Mengistu's emergence as an autocrat, became the Central Command resembling a pretorian guard. It was believed to be the best trained of the military commands in charge of the security not only of Mengistu and his palace but also the central province of Shoa in which the capital city is situated.

Towards the end of 1976, the Derg had decided to bring the military cadres under a separate administration. In pursuance of that decision, they were brought under the newly created Military Political Affairs Department. Starting from February 1977, Sergeant (later Captain) Legese Asfaw was appointed to head the Department. When, in the summer of 1980, Mengistu wanted to be the sole leader in charge of forming the WPE, he sought the authorization not of the Derg, Revolutionary Flame nor his close associates, but, rather, that of the military cadres. At the time, Captain Legese Asfaw convened them and had them adopt the decision that, from then on, Mengistu would replace JFEMLO and form the party single-handedly. Thus, Mengistu became not only

the Chairman of COPWE and the Secretary General of WPE but also in charge of appointing Party functionaries and recruiting members of the Party, the Central Committee and the politburo. No doubt, the military cadres would have been the first to be recruited as members. This illustrates the importance given by Mengistu to the military cadres. He knew that, by controlling the security forces with the help of the military cadres, he could impose his will on the politburo, the Central Committee, the cabinet and the society at large.

Thus, the core group that has emerged victorious over all other forces is the military cadres composed predominantly of NCOs and privates and led by Mengistu closely aided by his confidants like Getachew Shibeshi and Legese Asfaw. Though important within the population, the civilian cadres are dispensable and must take a secondary place. The military cadres, on the other hand, share a sense of solidarity as having been comrades in arms and as having a common antipathy towards civilian and military intellectuals and are enthusiastically behind their hero (Mengistu). Most of them live with the military units isolated from society and hardly ever get to know of anything that goes wrong elsewhere; when they do, they tend to blame the high government functionaries for obstructing Mengistu's well-intentioned policies.

It is not believed that Mengistu's autocratic powers are in any way diminished or curtailed by the military cadres; however, as shown in the case of allowing them to appoint him to become the sole leader of the Party and, consequently, of the country, he recognizes their influence and usefulness. Accordingly, he pampers them as the monarch before him pampered the aristocrats and elite officers. Elements drawn from among them, including individuals who were privates in 1974, are appointed as administrators of provinces, managers of corporations, ambassadors and, more frequently, as party functionaries. It can be said that the junior officers, NCOs and privates, in addition to holding the army behind the regime, play the role of the aristocracy under the old-state in occupying the key positions of the state. If, as opposed to Haile Selassie's feudal autocracy, the post-revolution one has totalitarian features, it is the military cadres which control the state apparatus and constitute its backbone.

Mengistu's close associates were the Derg members who, in the

early years, supported his position in that body and who later came together with him to form Revolutionary Flame in the early part of 1976. When he led the successful palace coup, the members of the political organizations who had been collaborating with Revolutionary Flame and who supported him against Gen Teferi Bante and his group joined his faction. On that occasion, they became members of the Derg's Executive Committee and, after the establishment of WPE in 1984, they became politburo members and/or heads of the Party's departments. Though dominated by Holeta graduates, there were among them members of the other forces. Examples are Fikre Selassie Wog-Deres (air force), Birihanu Baye (Harar Academy), Teka Tulu (the police force). Their influence declined after the palace coup since Mengistu was no longer dependent on their support against his competitors in the Derg. It appears that the civilian officials including members of the politburo were given their position either because they have expertise to offer or because they represent a given interest group. It is doubtful if any of these are privy to the inner circle.

#### (F) TOWARDS AN EVALUATION OF THE REVOLUTION

There seems to be a consensus on the understanding that a degree of socio-economic and political transformations has to be achieved before a social revolution can be said to have taken place. However, there is lack of clarity on what exactly the effect of the sum of such transformations is or ought to be. In fact, Clapham appears to suggest that it is not necessary to adopt some criteria against which the transformations could be weighed; to him, it is enough for transformations to have been achieved for a revolution to exist even when the transformations have brought about little change from the past.<sup>25</sup> To Markakis, a revolution can be said to have been achieved if the sum of transformations amounts to true socialism.<sup>26</sup> To Halliday and Molyneux, the transformations must bring about an effective distribution of social and political power for an irreversible socialist revolution to be achieved.<sup>27</sup> None of these authors in fact goes into the question of evaluating the transformations in any detail.

Likewise, Skocpol seems to be satisfied with a mere achievement of transformations. She delimits the scope of transformations thus: 'Social revolutions differ from other sorts of conflicts and

transformative processes above all by the combination of two coincidences: the coincidence of societal structural change with class upheaval; and the coincidence of political with social transformation.<sup>28</sup> In this way, she distinguishes the conflicts of social revolutions from other conflicts like rebellions, coups and political revolutions. Further, she distinguishes transformations of social revolutions from other sorts of social transformations like the industrial-commercial revolutions and the rise of nation-states. To Skocpol, the transformations achieved in Japan, Germany and Turkey do not amount to social revolutions; to Trimberger, on the other hand, they do.<sup>29</sup> Both appear to agree that, whatever their implications to economic progress, radical socio-economic reforms in themselves constitute revolutions, in the case of Skocpol, if the transformations are accompanied by revolts from below, and, in the case of Trimberger, if the transformations are carried out from above.

To Marx, on the other hand, transformation of the mode of production is central, in the order of revolutionary outcomes.<sup>30</sup> As opposed to Skocpol and Trimberger, therefore, Marx would regard the unleashing of more dynamic relations of production than the pre-existing ones as a more important requisite to social revolutions than mere social and political transformations.

The question that arises here is whether revolutions are progressive in the economic sense or not. Here, note must be taken of Clapham's important caution against adopting some assumed goal and concluding that the goal will inevitably be attained once the revolution is taken to be a proper one or, conversely, concluding that the revolution is not a real one because the goal is not met.<sup>31</sup> In considering whether revolutions are progressive or not there is, perhaps, the danger of falling foul of Clapham's warning against what he has called the teleological conception of revolution. However, this cannot be allowed to stand in the way of inquiring whether the older revolutions like those of France, the Soviet Union and China or the post-war Third World revolutions, of which there were a number, were progressive or not and, given their performance over time, of making reasonable projections into their prospects. This may lead to a kind of evaluation of revolution but then evaluation is no less scientific than explanation assuming that the two are different. If such a scientific enquiry leads to the finding that some revolutions

have been progressive but not others, it would certainly be fruitful to establish, if possible, wherein lies the difference between the two types of episodes.

At any rate, there are further considerations as to why the question of whether revolutions are progressive or not should be accorded a central position in the order of transformations. First, though writers in the field do not always explicitly acknowledge it, they revert to a recognition of its centrality quite frequently. Apart from discussing economic aspects of post-revolutionary reconstructions in her cases Skocpol, for one, states in her introductory chapter that the Russian revolution produced an industrial and military superpower and the Mexican revolution made it one of the most industrialized of post-colonial nations.<sup>32</sup> Secondly, much of the appeal of engaging in revolutionary activities not only to professional revolutionaries but also to large sections of the people who get involved rests on economic nationalism and the pursuit of faster rates of industrialization. The frequency of revolutions in the Third World can in part be explained by this consideration. Thirdly, dwelling on social and political transformations alone would, it is believed, render the sociology of revolutions sterile. On the face of it, the pursuit of equality (an example of social structural transformation) is worth all the effort. However, apart from the fact that it is unattainable, economic measures like redistribution of land taken with a view to equality as an end in itself can lead to the levelling down of society, fragmentation of the means of production and lower productivity.

Finally, there are many excesses of revolutions like suspension of legality, diaspora, mass executions, torture and terror which are often prevalent in the immediate post-revolution years and which obviously cause the people concerned undue suffering. Legality, democratic rights, accountability to the people of the new institutions created by the revolution and the like could be used as criteria against which the quality of the transformations could be weighed. In fact, these criteria have been used in the relevant chapters to evaluate the component parts of the transformations. Nevertheless, since the rule of law and the standards of human rights break down during revolutionary crisis, it is, perhaps, not in order to give emphasis to such standards here. If, in addition to the suffering of the people, the social and political trans-

formations are not progressive in the economic sense and promise some benefits to the majority of the people in the not too distant future or, even worse, if they are retrogressive, then social revolutions must be taken for what they would be: a mass suicidal delirium that seizes nations at certain stages in their history or a structural crisis about which men and women are unable to do anything but fall prey to their excesses.

The literature on the Ethiopian revolution suffers from similar shortcomings as the above. Much of it ignores the economic transformations achieved altogether and the rest discusses in a cursory fashion the areas in which nationalizations have taken place without evaluating whether the measures are likely to lead to a growth in the national economy. Though inadequate in itself, it is hoped that chapter 4 is a modest corrective in this regard. It has been noted in that chapter that in 1975 the new regime nationalized rural land and the major means of production in the industrial sector expropriating national and foreign investors. Starting from 1978, the regime made a concerted effort to launch a central planning machinery in order to manage the nationalized industries, state farms and rural land, especially that part which had been collectivized. These radical state interventions in the economy and the adoption of scientific socialism as the official ideology were partially responsible for the strengthening of close diplomatic and security relations with the socialist countries, and for the worsening of relations with the West. Arguably, these policies together amounted to the adoption by Ethiopia of what is called 'the non-capitalist path of development' often understood to include an emphasis on the state sector of the economy, thorough-going agrarian reform, limitation on foreign investment and a pro-East foreign policy.

The adherence to the non-capitalist path of development, it is believed, raises a number of fundamental economic questions with negative implications in the international and domestic arenas about which only a brief mention can be made here. Under the old-state, Ethiopia had not been able to attract much international private capital, perhaps, mainly because of the absence in the country of the sort of natural resources required by foreign interests. Despite the new regime's policy of attempting to attract private foreign capital through the establishment of joint ventures in which the state was envisaged to have a minimum of 51 per cent

of total shares, foreign investors have not found it in their interest to risk their capital by investing it in Ethiopia, not least because of the expropriation of foreign assets that had preceded the issuance of the Joint Venture Proclamation. Thus, in addition to the absence of the relevant natural resources, the new policy has acted as a barrier to private foreign investment.

The picture regarding bilateral and multilateral aid is more complex. Though Ethiopia had, through its leftist policies, fallen foul of Western expectations and though the US for one is by law bound to prohibit bilateral assistance to such countries and to exercise against them its weighted voting power in the international economic organizations, Ethiopia has not done too badly in exploiting the international public assistance programmes. Despite the fact that direct US bilateral assistance has been suspended for a long time, Ethiopia has been a beneficiary of a great deal of food aid (which is traceable to the US government and EEC sources) and of economic development aid from the EEC, the World Bank and other UN agencies, and from a lot of the Western countries which have been willing to extend direct state-to-state assistance. Further, the US-weighted voting power in the International Coffee Agreement has not precluded Ethiopia from selling her major export (coffee) through that organization to Western countries including the US.

Obviously, the West has not victimized Ethiopia as much as it has Vietnam, Cuba and Nicaragua; rather, it has chosen to use its economic muscle on Ethiopia, as it has done with most other socialist countries, as sticks and carrots in its foreign policy drive to influence her political direction. Though counter-factual, it may be maintained that had Ethiopia not offended the West, she might have avoided all the sticks in addition to attracting greater transfers of international capital and other forms of public aid. In fact, Ethiopia's per capita benefit from aid has been reduced in the post-revolution period to become one of the lowest in Africa. Also, an important point is that the radical Third World states including Ethiopia have not found it appropriate to pursue autarchy as a possible alternative but rather sought to secure aid not only from the socialist countries as is expected but also from the West. Some which have attempted that alternative like Tanzania and China have not found it fruitful and have abandoned it. Autarchy is a luxury which they cannot afford since

they need the aid for the purpose of importing skills, capital goods and weapons from abroad without which they can hardly survive, let alone achieve faster rates of development.

The adoption of the non-capitalist path of development creates further complications by bringing the country concerned to the centre stage of the cold war. The force of example is here too overwhelming to maintain otherwise. The right-wing/left-wing contenders for power in Afghanistan, Nicaragua, Mozambique, Angola, just to mention a few, are provided weapons by the West and East to fight it out to the bitter end. In the case of Ethiopia, the aggression perpetrated against her by Somalia and the counter-revolutionary wars she had to fight against the EDU, ELF and ALF, which were supported by the Middle East and through them by the West, can be seen as an extension of the cold war into the Horn of Africa.

There are occasional reports suggesting Western involvement in the regionalist and anti-government wars of Ethiopia.<sup>33</sup> Further, the circumstances lend support to this position. These peripheral wars have increased dramatically not only in the areas where they existed prior to the outbreak of the revolution, but also in the areas where they emerged afterwards. The bulk of the weapons used by these forces come from abroad; they certainly come from the Middle East but Western aiding and abetting of those benefactors cannot be ruled out; if the West challenges the other radical states through the promotion of dissension, there is no reason to suggest that Ethiopia was made an exception. The choice of the non-capitalist path of development has reduced the new regime to a defensive position in these crippling wars as it has done to the radical Third World states which have pursued a similar revolutionary course. Anti-colonial Third World revolutions have produced politically independent states; anti-imperialist (anti-world-capitalist) Third World revolutions, on the other hand, cannot be said to have produced economically independent states.

The debilitating effect on the national economy of these wars is obvious. However, it is not possible to attribute all the ills of the economy to the hostility of international and domestic 'enemies' of the revolution as Mengistu has, time and again, tended to emphasize in his public speeches. The implications of the regime's policy on the domestic economy must also account for a

good deal of the inefficiency in the running of the economy. Whereas in the West a company is run by a manager with the assistance of some experts in accounting, engineering, salesmen and the like, the equivalent in the socialist countries (a state enterprise or a state farm) is run by the same kind of people in addition to a multitude of civil servants working at each level of the state administrative machinery from the central government down to the enterprise. The amount of red tape, the delay in the procurement of raw materials, the inefficiency in the distribution of products, the concealed unemployment, the sectional and regional autarchy involved in managing the state enterprises is well recorded in the case of the older socialist countries. A further crippling feature of the socialist management of the economy is the fact that the means of production are owned by the state and that the interest not only of workers but also the bureaucrats involved in the management is limited to their pay. The protection of the means of production and the maximization of profit (which have important implications to efficiency) have no real guardians like the owner in the capitalist countries. Yet again, the attempt to substitute incentives based on private ownership and personal gain by an increasingly elaborate system of collective incentives (the raising of social consciousness, working for the communist and nationalist ideals and group bonuses) has not proved as effective as the former. It is these and similar management difficulties that Ethiopia has been importing since the adoption of central planning as an aspect of her non-capitalist path of development strategy. In her case, the problems are further compounded by the fact that the skilled administrative substructure required at each level of the administrative hierarchy is lacking in quality as well as quantity.

From the perspective of employment difficulties as well as the depth of the food crisis that has been the cause of so much suffering and death in Ethiopia, it can be said that the need to adopt an efficient agrarian strategy would have been even more urgent than the pursuit of an efficient industrial policy. Up to the early 1980s the regime's policy was to collectivize the redistributed holdings and bring them within the central planning machinery, a policy which would have raised similar problems as those that concern state enterprises and farms. As the decade wore on, however, collectivization slackened for a number of reasons. These

included lack of interest on the part of the peasants, their expectation that the state would provide all the inputs without them having to do much about it, the inability of the government to provide the inputs that it kept on promising in order to promote collectivization, and the inefficiency of the token collectives already established.

The result has been that only a tiny part of the arable land (under 2 per cent) has been collectivized. Since then, the regime has been forced to try and promote productivity through the targeting of extension services to the millions of individual peasants without much success in promoting their productivity. The difficulties involved are too detailed to go into at this stage; suffice it here to mention just a few. First, there is lack of incentive on the part of the farmers to increase productivity because the regime appropriates a large part of their produce through forced purchases at below the market price, levies taxes, and collects mandatory contributions towards social institutions and various causes. Secondly, the farmers are allowed to use their holdings until such time as their associations decide to redistribute land, a practice that has had negative implications for the care of the land and the independence of the farmers from association leaders. Thirdly, providing inputs like fertilizers and agricultural implements through farmers' service co-operatives and farmers' associations which are charged with the responsibility of collecting payments for them has led to the wasting of substantial amounts of financial and other resources partly because the leaders do not have the requisite skills for keeping appropriate balance sheets and partly because of corrupt practices.

When viewed at the national level, these problems are colossal. The bulk of them emanate from the socialist orientation of the revolution, from lack of faith in the merits of the individual's pursuit of enlightened self-interest and, consequently, the preference of social groups and organizations to the individual as the basic economic units, and from the conviction that state intervention in the economy would achieve a faster rate of development and a more just society. The non-capitalist path of development in Ethiopia has put an end to the development of the emerging commercial farms which certainly were extremely efficient in terms of raising productivity. If socialist orientation is more inimical than feudalism to the emergence of capitalism, as

appears to be the case, it is at least debatable which of the two relations of production are more progressive.

The concept of the non-capitalist path of development is a highly controversial subject among Marxist intellectuals. Much of the controversy revolves around the question of whether it will lead the Third World countries that have adopted it towards a socialist transformation or not. A lot of the debate among the Ethiopian leftist political organizations and among leftist writers on Ethiopia has similarly dwelt on the question of whether the Derg's rule would lead to a socialist transformation or end up being a mere military dictatorship. As suggested in the preceding paragraphs, however, the fact of socialist orientation (real or unreal) is part of the problem. The concern that the Derg is lacking in socialism assumes that socialist relations of production are necessarily more progressive than their capitalist counterparts, an assumption not validated by reality.

In fact, the bulk of the older socialist countries have abandoned central planning in favour of the market economy or are in the process of so doing. For the Third World states, the capitalist path of development is not necessarily a solution. While it may be argued that it is the more efficient method of mobilizing the national economy, it does very little to alter the existing dependency relationship between the rich and poor states. The non-capitalist path of development does poorly on both counts. The point is that, given the context of world-time, Third World 'socialist' revolutions like that of Ethiopia are no more progressive than middle-class revolutions in achieving economic growth and independence. If anything, the evidence suggests that they are less so. At any rate, if the non-capitalist path of development leads to socialism and then to capitalism, as it seems to be doing in the case of the older socialist states – as opposed to providing a mechanism for by-passing capitalism as it was originally intended – it is a much more circuitous route to capitalism than a mere middle-class revolution.

The import of the preceding paragraphs is that Ethiopia has achieved transformations in the social, political and economic fields, that the transformations, nevertheless, do not amount to a progressive change in the economic sense of the term and that whether this turn of events amounts to a social revolution or not depends on the approach adopted. If the arguments attempting

to show that the transformed economic system is not progressive are granted, it is, interestingly enough, Marx's approach that would exclude the changes achieved by Ethiopia from the realm of social revolution. This is so not because his requisite for revolutions (a change in the mode of production) is not met – since the nationalization of the means of production in Ethiopia is arguably such a change – but because he assumes that the changed mode of production is essentially more progressive than the one it replaces. In other words, he envisages capitalist relations of production to be more progressive than those that prevail under feudalism and socialist relations of production to be more progressive than those that prevail in capitalist societies. By this token, the transformation undergone by Ethiopia is, as argued above, not progressive and, therefore, not a social revolution.

A contrary position can be arrived at based on Skocpol's and Trimberger's models which do not require progressiveness as a requisite for revolutions. Except for their positions on the need for the participation of the lower class or upper class in their revolutions, the models of those authors come near enough to embracing the Ethiopian episode within the scope of social revolutions. If, despite Marx, the Ethiopian experience is considered to be a revolution, it appears clear from the contemporary 'revolutions' that are taking place in the East European states that Ethiopia is in desperate need of another revolution from above, below or an intermediate social group to undo some of what has already been done and much of what continues to be done. However, we can say this only if we recognize that revolutions are or can be progressive, i.e. if they can bring about change for the better.

*Postscript*  
*The collapse of Mengistu's regime (1987–1991)*

Mengistu's regime, the main focus of this book, collapsed in May 1991. The time of its demise came between the completion of this work in June 1989 and its publication, thus justifying this postscript.

In 1987, Mengistu's regime looked absolutely unassailable. By 1981, he had organized the entire population into numerous kinds of local and national mass organizations. By 1984, he had personally and painstakingly organized the Workers' Party of Ethiopia and subsumed the mass organizations under it. By 1987, he had formalized the structure of the state through a constitution, thus enlarging the state apparatus so much that he was teasingly accused of harbouring secret designs of ruling the entire continent of Africa.

What is more, he had, with the aid and advice of the socialist countries, extended the state's security forces to an unprecedented level in the history of the country. The mass organizations had armed wings within them intended to counter local criminal and counter-insurgency activities. The intelligence department was raised from a section to a ministerial level with branch offices at all the nation's administrative levels and in each of the other government departments. The army, which was well armed by the Soviet Union, was expanded to become the biggest military force in sub-Saharan Africa with almost half a million men under arms. It was with the instrumentality of these forces that Mengistu had managed, by 1978, to liquidate the contending political organizations, contain the regional insurgents, defeat Somali aggression and consolidate his hold on power.

Despite the superfluous superstructure, however, Mengistu's regime began to lose its grip on power starting from at least 1987. From then on, there were rumblings within the armed forces

partly because of the anguish they suffered from the prolongation of the civil wars and partly because of corruption and apathy on the part of the officers and high civilian officials. Starting from 1988, the Eritrean and Tigrain regionalist insurgents who had been confined to limited and very remote areas managed to capture important bases and towns in those regions. In 1989, a good number of the generals and other senior officers plotted a *coup d'état* against the regime but were captured and executed, an episode which signified a crisis in the heart of the state itself. The decline of the world communist movement at the time forced the regime to officially renounce its hitherto jealously guarded ideology of Marxism–Leninism in March 1990 further disorientating the party and state functionaries. In 1989–1990, the EPDRF forces annexed more and more territories of northern Ethiopia and in May 1991 marched into the capital city forcing Mengistu to flee the country.

The decline and collapse of Mengistu's regime can be explained by several factors. There were at least three intrinsic weaknesses of the government which rendered it, in the closing years of the 1980s, incapable of, first, riding over the wave of the international ideological crisis brought on by the renunciation of communism by most of the socialist countries of the world; and, secondly, liquidating the TPLF and the EPLF, as it had managed to do with several other insurgent movements, or alternatively, contain their guerrilla activities, as it had managed to do in the previous years. The intrinsic weaknesses were its abysmal record on human rights and the failure of its economic policies, which conspired above all else to alienate the regime from the people, and Mengistu's style of excessive autocracy which alienated him from the state and party functionaries and resulted in a politico-military crisis by the end of the 1980s.

#### HUMAN RIGHTS

From its inception in the revolutionary upheaval of 1974 to the end of the decade, the rule of the Derg was characterized by an excessive use of force and violence. Members of the ruling class of the pre-revolutionary order were declared to be the enemies of the workers and peasants. They were, therefore, dispossessed of their power and privileges and, in a lot of cases, eliminated. Thus,

from 1975 to about 1977, hundreds of thousands of the officials of the *ancien régime*, landlords and businessmen were either subdued or wiped out in this way.

The use of force and violence was directed not only against the ruling class of the old-state but also the agents of the revolution. A number of political organizations, which were created by the advocates of change, had come to the surface in the years following the outbreak of the revolution. In the struggle for power that ensued between these and the Derg, tens of thousands of the leaders, members and supporters of the political organizations were imprisoned, tortured and/or liquidated starting from 1976. With the rise of Mengistu to absolutist powers in February 1977, the use of force and violence was officially christened 'the red terror' and greatly intensified with the result that the organizations were completely liquidated by 1979.

The treatment meted out to the movements that sought some kind of autonomy or independence from the state was similar. Such movements, which were opposed to the centre on religious, ethnic and regional nationalist grounds, had been rising and falling since the early 1960s among the peoples of Somalia, the Oromo and Eritrea. Also, in the wake of the revolution, several others came to the surface as, for instance, among the Afar and Tigray linguistic groups. As of the end of the 1970s, the regime managed to subdue some of these movements and contain those it could not eliminate altogether such as the EPLF, the TPLF and a few others which were operating among the Oromo. The territorial integrity of the country was maintained, thus, only with military force that befitted wars of international magnitude.

The resort to such force and violence can be explained by several factors. With the casting of blame, during revolutionary times, at the door of the old-state for all the ills in the country and with the ensuing breakdown of law and order, members of the previous ruling class are usually violently ousted from their positions of power and privilege. The breakdown of law and order also means anarchy and chaos necessitating the assertion of sovereign power by one group or another, usually by force. In addition to the fact of inevitable conflict between the two competing ideologies of local and pan-state nationalisms, where they exist side by side, a revolutionary state normally seeks, and

often manages, to assert its authority beyond its national boundaries let alone within it. Generally, the endorsement by the Marxist–Leninist ideology of violence as a valid strategy of power struggle and the zealous pursuit of that ideology by the regime as well as the bulk of the pan-Ethiopian and regional movements could only have intensified the pursuit of force and violence as a means of achieving perceived ends. Whatever the merits of these theoretical considerations, however, Mengistu's regime was seen by the national and international public as a brutal transgressor of human rights for the force and violence it perpetrated against the old ruling class, the contenders of power and the regionalist movements and for the hundreds of thousands of innocent citizens who perished in these struggles.

#### THE ECONOMIC CRISIS

Perhaps, the sacrifice of human rights might have been excused if the standard of living of the people had improved as a result of the new economic order; however, this was not so as it became glaringly clear in the first half of the 1980s. The socialist economic policy, which was launched in 1975 and pursued until almost the collapse of the regime, did not deliver the goods either in the industrial or in the all-important agricultural sectors.

Initially, it was hoped that the collectivization of rural land and its integration into a central national planning system would release the productive resources of the peasantry. Nevertheless, this was abandoned by 1984 (after only 1.6 per cent of the arable land had been collectivized) simply because it was obvious that the policy was not leading to greater productivity but, rather, to an ever-greater dependence of the farmers on state grants and subsidies. As of then, the regime diverted its attention towards herding the millions of peasants up and down the country from their scattered hamlets into villages. Dubbed 'villagization', this policy, which in 1975 was envisaged by the regime to naturally follow collectivization, was now given priority before it and pursued vigorously and forcefully with reverberations of domestic and international disquiet about its congruence with human rights. It was probably launched as a counterinsurgency strategy rather than as a means of facilitating the delivery of state services to the peasants as the regime claimed. It was a case of putting the

carriage before the horse since the services like water wells, meals and clinics were actually non-existent.

Also, the abandonment of collectivization forced the regime to redirect and concentrate its technological inputs on the individual subsistence farms and, thereby, hopefully promote their productivity. This did not succeed either for a number of reasons. One of the effects of the nationalization and redistribution of land to the peasants was to further subdivide their holdings and raise the question of whether the plots were not rendered incapable of accommodating technological inputs. Also, the inputs were channelled through the farmers' service co-operatives which led to a wastage of a great deal of resources partly because the leaders, who were elected peasants, did not have the skills required for the keeping of accounts and partly because corrupt practices among them became endemic. Though the 1975 nationalization of rural land was said to have liberated the peasants from exploitation by landlords, they were, nonetheless, subjected to *corvée*, to the payment of contributions to the many state-promoted fund-raising activities and subscriptions to the numerous mass organizations that mushroomed in the wake of the revolution.

Moreover, in addition to the payment of income tax, the farmers were made to sell to the state a portion of their produce at a rate much lower than the market price, often referred to as 'the quota system'. The officials argued that the peasants had benefited from the nationalization and redistribution of land and that the regime was justified in imposing the quota system on them partly to feed its army and, more importantly, to sell the 'requisitioned' produce at reasonable price to the urban populations who it thought had not benefited from the revolution as much.

Haile Selassie's agrarian strategy of *laissez-faire* had given rise to pockets of highly productive commercial farms in some of the provinces starting from the middle of the 1960s. These were also nationalized in 1975 but not redistributed; rather, they were kept intact as state farms. However, the move put an end to the pre-existing productivity of the sub-sector; excessive bureaucratization, mismanagement and corruption all having had a heavy toll on it. However, the regime found the state farms useful; the heavily subsidized produce, in addition to that requisitioned through the quota system, was used to feed its cumbersome army.

In fact, in addition to the intrinsic weaknesses of the strategies adopted, the civil wars that were waged on many fronts were responsible for the failure of the regime's economic policies. Hundreds of thousands of the country's able-bodied men perished in the pursuit of those wars leaving their families and dependants at the mercy of their communities. The continued conscription of the urban youth, in addition to widespread and increasing unemployment among them, resulted in their emigration to neighbouring countries and beyond, while the pursuit of that policy in the countryside deprived agriculture of its most productive labour force. The gnawing of inflation into the standard of life of the urban population, particularly of the salaried classes whose pay had been frozen since the outbreak of the revolution in 1974, gave rise to tremendous dissatisfaction among them. The siphoning off of the agricultural surplus through the quota system to feed the enormous army had stifling repercussions on the productivity of the farmers. Something in the order of 70 per cent of the annual budgetary appropriation was allocated to the war effort over the years. Though the figures were not made public, it would appear that a good deal of the country's foreign exchange earnings was committed to servicing the debts incurred in weapons purchases.

The failure of the economic policy was made abundantly clear by the famine of 1984-1985 when up to 100,000 people were said to have perished. The immediate cause was the failure of the rainfall in the affected regions, like Tigrai and Wollo, aggravated as it was by the civil wars which prevented the movement of goods and services between the surplus and deficit areas. The only thing the regime pursued as a solution to the disaster was forcing the drought-affected people of Tigrai and Wollo in the north to resettle mainly in the western provinces of Wollega and Illubabor. The programme was carried out efficiently by the regime with the help of its mass organizations, cadres and the army. Nevertheless, the policy was not unopposed. TPLF accused the government of intending to depopulate the region and undermine the movement while the OLF accused it of intending to 'reconquer' the Oromo people of the western provinces and their land. There was also general disquiet on the part of the international community regarding the consistency of the way the resettlement scheme was carried out with the standards of human rights.

On the whole, it was clear that the state did not provide for those affected by the drought, at best, because it was unable to do so on account of its empty granaries and coffers or, at worst, because it was unwilling to do so. These developments undermined the moral basis of the regime's right to rule particularly since it had justified the overthrow ten years earlier of Haile Selassie's regime and the summary execution of some sixty of its dignitaries for their inability to provide for those affected by the 1973-1974 famine and for their wastage of national resources on celebrations. The callousness of the anomaly was felt all the more strongly since, at a time when thousands were dying for lack of food, Mengistu's regime was excessively indulgent with the resources of the state, expending them on imported luxury items like whisky, fancy clothes and pens, a rather costly assembly hall and the like. All this was in honour of the inauguration of a Leninist party in 1984.

For these reasons, the regime's economic policies, particularly its agrarian strategy, came in for a lot of criticism from intellectual citizens, and Western donor agencies. The focus of their criticism was the failure of the regime to provide incentives to the farmers by removing from their backs the bulky bureaucracy and especially the quota system, thus leaving the agricultural sector to be governed by market forces. In 1987, the EEC and the World Bank, long-time benefactors of economic aid to the regime, were able to secure from it a commitment to remove the quota system and the checkpoints which prevented the free flow of agricultural products from the farms to the urban centres. Nevertheless, the regime was reluctant in fulfilling its commitments.

Interestingly enough, the Soviet Union was one of the critics of the regime's economic policies. Even in the pre-Gorbachev period, Soviet economic experts attached to the Ethiopian central planning office produced a lengthy report recommending the adoption by the regime of a policy resembling the USSR New Economic Plan of the 1920s as well as the suggestions of the Western aid agencies. Mengistu is rumoured to have condemned the document as a manifesto of revisionism and shelved it. Again, during his July 1988 visit to the Soviet Union, Mengistu came under pressure from Gorbachev to liberalize his agrarian and investment policies. After a lot of prevarication about the inapplicability to Ethiopia of the reforms that were then unfolding

in the socialist countries and after the barring of any reference by the media to the Russian terms *glasnost* and *perestroika*, Mengistu finally moved the Central Committee to adopt what sounded like far-reaching reforms concerning commercial farms and joint ventures between public and private capital. Nevertheless, the policies were not pursued by the government with any zeal nor did they encourage new investments. In fact, the demise of the new institutions did not come until Mengistu officially renounced socialism in March 1990 and the people, in consequence, took the law into their hands and destroyed the new villages, the co-operatives and the quota system.

#### POLITICO-MILITARY CRISIS

If the record of the regime in the human rights and economic areas alienated the rural as well as the urban population, its failures in the political field did the same to the party and state functionaries, particularly in the second half of the 1980s. The politico-military crisis of the state, which is, arguably, the most central cause for the decline and collapse of the regime, flowed from the excessively centralized and autocratic nature of the regime and from the attendant lack of the rule of law.

After having eliminated the internal and external threats to his power by 1978, Mengistu turned his attention to the construction of the mass organizations, the Leninist party and the state apparatus. With the help of the mass media, the cadres of the party, the mass organizations and the security forces, the regime was, thus, able to mobilize with great efficiency the population for a given purpose like villagization, resettlement, demonstrations, conscription and the like. However, the organizations so created and declared to operate on the Leninist principle of 'democratic-centralism' were, in practice, devoid of any democratic content. They were not intended to develop into institutions but, rather, meant to serve as personal instruments of control by the autocrat.

Mengistu sought to take the credit for the initiation and adoption of new policies/legislations; more often than not, thus, he made the exercise of those powers his exclusive preserve. The politburo, the council of ministers and the legislative assembly (the Shengo) were forums to which he put what he had decided on behind the scenes and where the members of those bodies

rubberstamped what he proposed to them. Obviously, this could result only in the alienation of those officials.

Further, Mengistu's style of divide and rule, and the general absence of legality, not only aggravated the process of alienation of the officials, but, also, had the effect of creating fear among them and preventing them from taking any initiatives. Throughout the years of the revolution, divisions were rampant in each of the civilian and military institutions between the professionals, on one hand, and the new institutions like the so-called 'apostles of change', security agents and party cadres, on the other. With the exception of a handful of individuals who were Mengistu's relations or very close to him in other ways, none of his officials including members of the politburo, the ministers and generals ever felt safe from false accusations and harassment at the hands usually of the party functionaries. On such occasions, they found that the discharge of their tasks was obstructed or they themselves thrown into prison until they were given an audience by Mengistu, in which they had to prove their innocence or suffer the wrath of the autocrat which could mean instant imprisonment or death.

Under the circumstances, it was difficult for the officials to continue to be committed to the regime and its policies. Whereas in earlier years they were preoccupied in pleasing Mengistu and, thus, securing high party and government positions, it was common for them, in the second half of the 1980s, to be heard discussing public issues, in the safety of private conversations with lesser mortals, blaming Mengistu for the failure of policies and distancing themselves from them. No doubt, this was made possible partly because of the regime's relaxation of total control of society as it felt sure of itself with the passing of time and partly because the confidence of the officials in the regime's survival was getting worn. The lack of legality and a sense of insecurity was the main explanation for the continued defection to the West of some of the highest officials of the regime right up to the end of the decade.

If this was the case with the highest dignitaries, it is not difficult to imagine why the lower party and government functionaries should be any more committed to the regime. They suffered from a greater sense of insecurity from harassment than did the higher officials; also, they would lose less from the departure of the

regime than would their seniors. In the second half of the 1980s, the cadres also became more vocal in expressing their sense of alienation privately. In the first place, they had not joined the party out of an ideological conviction but out of a desire to better themselves by securing promotions to higher positions. When this was not readily forthcoming and when, instead, it meant being closely followed in their routine activities, paying membership subscriptions, and rendering free intelligence service to the authorities by regularly reporting to the local party offices, they became increasingly jealous of their friends who had not joined the party. The general international retreat from Marxism–Leninism in the last years of the 1980s greatly demoralized them; and Mengistu’s renunciation of that ideology in 1990 finally threw them into disarray.

The army was not spared the regime’s debilitating illegality and policy of divide and rule either. Both the department of intelligence and the party were heavily represented within the hierarchy of the armed forces and within each of the units everywhere, including those deployed in the war zones. Their main functions were teaching Marxism–Leninism and spying on their colleagues. The professional officers, NCOs and privates were often unaware who in their midst were members of the security department and/or of the party. This in itself instilled suspicion and fear among the troops, thus exacting obedience from them. When they were accused of insubordination or conspiracy, which was apparently quite frequently, the result was, more often than not, summary execution.

By all accounts, another point of frustration on the part of the army was nepotism and favouritism. Those who were lucky enough not to have been killed were kept in the war zones starting from before the outbreak of the revolution without any holidays when they could go back to their places of origin and visit their friends and relations. One exception to this was when they became disabled or chronically sick in which case they were taken to places of recuperation and then returned back to their homes with a minimal pension. Another exception was when an NCO or a private was chosen for a permanent transfer to a non-war zone or for further training at one of the military academies. However, these privileges were available only to those who could pull a string.

Another form of corruption spoken of widely was bribery and misappropriation of funds on the part of the officers. It was widely believed by the soldiers, as well as the general public, that the officers received bribery from and sold weapons to anyone including the fighters on the other side and that they misappropriated funds allocated for the purchase of items to be used by the soldiers. Also, the army believed that, despite its own numerical superiority over the insurgents and its possession of qualitatively and quantitatively better weapons than them, it could not win and put an end to the war because the officers had a vested interest in the perpetuation of the conflict. The officers were accused of resorting to all forms of corrupt practices to frustrate the success of military operations even when the tactics meant the loss of many of their own soldiers. There are in fact reports that, before the insurgents attacked important bases like Massawa, they bribed the government's officials and secured their collaboration in the destruction of those cities.

By the second half of 1987, the army had grown so war weary and grievances were so widespread that some units in the north were said to have demanded to see no less an official than the president himself. Even worse, some brigades were defecting from Eritrea to the Sudan and others entrenching themselves in remote parts of Eritrea and the neighbouring provinces and refusing to fight. Apparently, some officials were sent from the centre to the north but failed to avert the decline in the morale of the soldiers or convince the defectors to return to the fold of the army.

An outstanding illustration of how Mengistu's style of autocracy, in addition to the malpractices among the officers, alienated the army and plunged it into disarray is provided by Mengistu's February 1988 visit to Eritrea and his summary execution of Brigadier General Tariku Aine (commander of the Nadew Command in Eritrea) and the purging and demoting of other senior officers. After having talked to members of the armed forces there and listened to their grievances, he, probably at the instigation of the provincial party leaders, picked on the general as a scapegoat for the shortcomings of the officers and of the government. The general is said to have contributed to his death by choosing to address Mengistu about the true state of the army's demoralization. Be that as it may, Mengistu's move did not appease the

army. On the contrary, the move backfired and led to a further alienation of the troops, especially since the general had faithfully served in the region for a long time, since he was very popular among his followers and since it was generally hoped that the entrenchment of due process of law in the 1987 constitution would have put an end to such deviations from legality.

The February execution, demobilization and demotion of the senior officers is viewed by many as marking the precipitous drop of the army's declining morale and as the turning point in the fortunes of the war effort against the rebels. From then on, the latter were able to conquer territory after territory and drive out the regime's forces from northern Ethiopia. In this endeavour, Mengistu helped them by further demoralizing the army through his summary execution of senior officers every time an important base was captured by them. An example of this is the execution of many officers after the government's loss of Enda Selassie (Tigray) to the rebel forces in early 1989.

Also symptomatic of the politico-military crisis of the state was the abortive *coup d'état* of May 1989. During Mengistu's visit in that month to the then East Germany, a shoot-out broke out in the Ethiopian Ministry of Defence, on which occasion, some top generals were killed and others put under arrest. It was later explained that the action was taken to abort a very advanced coup plot against the regime which was hatched by those killed and detained. Apparently, the officers were disgruntled by the disastrous battles of that year in Tigray and by the subsequent withdrawal of the government from the province altogether. After Mengistu's return, the air force was apparently extremely reluctant to obey orders; in Asmara, there was a lot of division and killing within the army itself; and, in other units, a lot of officers were arrested. These developments suggested that the coup plot was probably well entrenched within the armed forces. The failure of the coup was a point of great disappointment to the public. The latter had been not only wishing for the overthrow of the regime because of its alienation from it, but also actually expecting it because of circulating underground papers and rumours which had suggested the existence of a coup plot. Mengistu transformed the disappointment into a general resentment on the part of the civilian and military population by having his recently honoured plotters humiliated on television programmes and by intervening

in their trial by a military court. Whereas some of their colleagues refused to try them and whereas the public was expecting at least an amnesty, Mengistu intervened on the last day of the trial and had the judges abruptly close the court to the public and mete out death sentences to them. In the evening of the same day, it was announced on radio and television that the sentences against the accused were already carried out. Twelve generals were executed in this way.

Perhaps, the apex of the state's crisis came with Mengistu's renunciation of Marxism-Leninism in March 1990 when he announced to the people, over the heads of his officials, that the private sector would be given a free hand and that WPE would be replaced by a multi-party system. Incidentally, it was precisely for having uttered the same words that Col Atnafu Abate was executed in 1977 by Mengistu and his cohorts. Be that as it may, Mengistu's announcement only enhanced the underlying process of disintegration of the fibre of the state. The peasants took the law into their hands and abolished or ransacked the institutions and programmes which were implemented in the name of socialism like villagization, collectivization and the quota system. In some places, the party's cadres were killed and, in the case of others, forced to flee for the safety of the urban centres. Further, the annulment of WPE by Mengistu, carried out as it was behind the backs of the party functionaries, led to a great sense of betrayal, indignation and protest on the part of some members only to be told that socialism had been totally discredited.<sup>1</sup>

In the closing years of the decade, therefore, there was a general lack of sense of direction, malaise and sudden increase of corrupt practices within the state apparatus. By all accounts, bribery, amassing of wealth abroad, and sending one's wife and children abroad on the part of the party and government apparatchiks had become rampant. Obviously, at least starting from 1989, the regime had been living on borrowed time and had become, as Mengistu once said of the last months of Haile Selassie's government, a hut made of dried corn stocks which required only a little touch to collapse. While for Mengistu's regime that touch finally came from the Eritrean and Tigrain insurgents, it is obvious that the regime's crisis of the time was deepened by the then decline of the world communist movement and the ensuing end of the cold war.

## THE INTERNATIONAL DYNAMIC

In the immediate aftermath of Mengistu's successful February 1977 coup against his competitors in the Derg and his subsequent rise to absolutist power, Ethio-American relations plummeted to an all-time low. Apparently, one of Jimmy Carter's first moves after his election to the presidency was his reading of volumes on the Horn of Africa with a view to leaving his mark on the region. However, the leftist leanings of the post-revolutionary regime, its human rights record, the direct clash between Carter's human rights and Mengistu's anti-imperialist rhetoric, and the misunderstanding and mistrust that had persisted between the two countries since the outbreak of the revolution continued to be a source of friction between them. By May, Mengistu closed a number of US offices in the country and declared many US citizens *persona non grata*. From then on, Mengistu was in the bad books of US policy makers.

In the meantime, Ethiopia's relations with the East improved dramatically. In the middle of 1977, the Republic of Somalia invaded Ethiopia against the wishes of the socialist world which sought to effect a negotiated settlement between the two. The fact that Mengistu's regime was at odds with the US, that it was more receptive than the government of Somalia to the peace proposals of the socialist states and that it had adopted NDRP as the official ideology of the state in 1976, led to Ethiopia's shift of alliances from the Western to the Eastern security bloc. Starting from then, the Soviet Union became the chief supplier of the regime's armaments which greatly contributed to the latter's emergence as the victorious actor in the conflicts with Somalia, the political organizations that sought to oust it from power, and with the regional insurgents. The regime owed its existence and its maintenance of the territorial integrity of the country to the cold war to a much greater extent than Haile Selassie's regime before it had done.

However, Gorbachev's ascent to the leadership of the Soviet Union in 1985 and his subsequent programme of political and economic reforms had the effect of discrediting the Marxist-Leninist ideology, weakening the world communist movement and ending the cold war between the two security blocs. Towards the end of the decade, those reforms, which were first initiated

from above, had the effect of encouraging the peoples of the East European socialist states to rise up and oust their communist parties from power. Of the older socialist states, only China, North Korea, Vietnam and Cuba have stuck to their ideological guns to this day. They are, nevertheless, more isolated, weaker and less assertive than they ever were before.

Further, as the cold war was thawing, the superpowers began to put their heads together on international issues. The summits of the heads of state, which started with the encounter between Reagan and Gorbachev in Iceland in 1988, appear to have been the most important forums where they initiated policies. They were able to do this not only on regional issues but also on domestic conflicts between their clients in those Third World countries where socialism had prevailed but a right-wing resistance persisted. This was the case in Nicaragua, Afghanistan, Mozambique and Angola where the conflicts have been, or are in the process of being, resolved. In some of these cases, the superpowers hosted joint conferences as in the case of Angola; in others, the conflict was dealt with by only one of them with the tacit understanding of the other, as in the case of Afghanistan.

Similarly, the decline in the world communist movement and the attendant thawing of the cold war had a number of implications for the domestic and international politics of Ethiopia. One effect was the actual or threatened loss to the regime of the diplomatic and material support it had enjoyed from its socialist allies, support which was predicated on the cold war. For instance, during Mengistu's July 1988 visit to Moscow, Gorbachev told him that Soviet involvement in Ethiopia was a result of Brezhnev's years of stagnation from which the USSR had broken away and that the latter's unqualified economic and military commitment to Ethiopia could not continue much further. He told him that, for Soviet support to continue, the regime had to liberalize its political, agricultural and investment policies and to arrive at a non-military solution to the wars in Eritrea and Tigray.

Mengistu's reaction was, apparently, to take comfort in the thought that Gorbachev was a revisionist and that the Soviet hard liners would overthrow him. Thus, Mengistu persisted in his old position by declaring that the reforms in the socialist countries did not have any bearing on Ethiopia's conditions and by preventing the media from using words like *perestroika* and *glasnost*. This was

not for much longer. In a November 1988 meeting of the politburo, a split emerged between proponents of liberalization and the rest. Though, at the time, Mengistu avoided taking sides, he felt it necessary to submit a very critical appraisal of the economy's shortcomings to a subsequent meeting of the Central Committee of WPE which adopted a resolution abolishing a ceiling for capital savings, allowing renting land for commercial farms and inviting joint ventures between the government and private capital for projects requiring large amounts of capital.<sup>2</sup> However, the regime was too preoccupied with security questions to implement these policies with any vigour. The end of those policies, which could be said to have been initiated by the changes in the communist world, came in March 1990 when Mengistu officially renounced Marxism–Leninism with the result that, as noted earlier, the state functionaries were thrown into confusion and the people set about dismantling the new institutions identified with the regime.

Moreover, the cooling of relations between Ethiopia and the socialist countries precipitated a sharp decline in whatever confidence Mengistu had enjoyed from the people. Starting from 1988, the crisis in confidence was no longer limited to his close associates who accompanied him to Moscow and then to members of the politburo and the Central Committee, but, also, trickled down to the lower ranks of the government and party functionaries and the people at large. While it did not lead to a popular uprising and the ousting of the party from power, as it did in some of the East European states, it, nevertheless, led to wild rumours and expectations of an impending overthrow of Mengistu from leadership. As the events of 1989 in Eastern Europe unfolded, the expectation of Mengistu's demise further intensified. The ground for the March 1990 disarray was thus laid.

The disapproval of the Soviet Union also affected the military co-operation between the two countries. Gorbachev turned down Mengistu's request for a substantial increase in the supply of military hardware during his Moscow visit in July 1988. Since then, parts of the weapons supplies under the existing arrangement have, apparently, been replaced by food aid though the rest has been trickling almost to the last days of the regime. The existing arms agreement was valid until 1991; probably, the regime received most of the weapons promised under the agreement well in advance of that date of expiry. Further, it was reported in 1990 that

the Soviet Union indicated its unhappiness about military co-operation with the regime by grounding its Antonov planes and, hence, preventing them from flying to the Eritrean capital (Asmara) on the ground that the latter was a combat zone.<sup>3</sup>

The loss of his Eastern allies, coupled with the increased military pressure exerted by the regional insurgents, forced Mengistu to seek friends in the West. Contrary to Haile Selassie's government, that of Mengistu had allied itself with the radical regimes and movements in the Middle East and, hence, with the Middle Eastern camp that was most radically opposed to Israel. In a radical departure from this regional policy, Mengistu reinstated diplomatic relations with Israel in November 1989, relations that were severed in late 1973. No doubt, the regime hoped it would receive diplomatic and material support from Israel and, in this way, survive the military challenges of the regionalist forces. It appears that Israel was willing to co-operate; however, the US was, if anything, extremely disapproving about the emerging close collaboration between the two states.

In fact, the regime had hoped that the good offices of Israel would be handy in improving its relations with the US and, in this way, strengthen its bargaining arm *vis-à-vis* the rebels and secure economic assistance. In March 1990, for instance, the architect of the Ethio-Israeli relations and an uncle and close confidant of Mengistu (Kassa Kebed) was sent to the US expecting to be given an audience by President George Bush and Secretary of State James Baker. However, he was able to meet only Herman Cohen (Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs) and returned without any promise of aid. The US persistence in cold-shouldering Mengistu only led the latter to accuse Israel of bad faith. Perhaps the regime's last attempt to woo the US was its declaration to contribute fighting men to the allied forces in the war against Iraq and its pointing of an accusing finger at the EPLF's position on the same war. None of this effort enabled Mengistu to come in from the cold of US foreign policy.

It was not only Mengistu but also the regional movements which were vying for Western attention. These, as well as the pan-Ethiopianist organizations, which were bitter enemies of the government, were, if anything, ideologically more to the left of Mengistu's regime. In fact, an important, if not the most important, difference between them and the government had been the

fact that they felt the latter to be less committed to the ideology. Despite that, towards the end of the 1980s, they all, without exception, renounced Marxism–Leninism. As noted earlier, the regime was no exception to this general trend of retreat from the communist ideology.

Despite that, while Mengistu was unable to improve his relations with the US in the late 1980s, the relations between the US and the two insurgent organizations (EPLF and TPLF) were improving by leaps and bounds. It appears that, following the Reagan–Gorbachev Iceland summit, it was Chester Crocker, Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, who adopted a policy on the subject in 1988 and his successor, Herman Cohen, who implemented it from 1989 to 1991. In 1989, deputy secretary Eagleburger authorized James Cheek (US ambassador to the Sudan and formerly a *chargé d'affaires* in Ethiopia) to develop relations with those two organizations.

One of the outcomes of this was a May 1989 official visit of Esayas Afeworqi (the General Secretary of EPLF) to the US. On the same trip, Esayas was able to meet prestigious politicians such as senator Edward Kennedy and representatives Howard Wolpe and Bruce Morrison. In January 1990, a team of congressional staff toured areas under EPLF control. On their return to Washington, they instigated a 28 February joint hearing before the House subcommittee on Africa and the House subcommittee on hunger where they proposed a non-binding resolution calling for economic sanctions against Ethiopia. Further, EPLF had an office in Washington from 1985 but its representatives there have been forbidden to enter the Department of State since then. Starting from August 1989, however, they were welcomed in for frequent meetings with John Davison (director of the office of East African affairs) and John Hall (the Ethiopian desk officer).

Obviously, Cohen was impressed. Not only did he host a luncheon at the prestigious Foreign Service Club in honour of Esayas in May 1989, but also testified at the February 1990 joint House hearing that Haile Selassie's 1961 dissolution of Eritrea's federal status was illegal and was a source of current problems in the region and that the Eritreans had a right to self-determination within an Ethiopian framework. On 28 March, he gave a similar testimony to the Senate Africa subcommittee. This was not

necessarily different from the position he took during his August 1988 visit to Addis Ababa that the US felt that Ethiopia's unity must be respected and strengthened. Further, the position was consistent with the US 1940s and 1950s policy on the Eritrean question; despite the existence at the time of alternative proposals (including the (re)unification of Eritrea with Ethiopia, an independent state of Eritrea, the partition of the territory) proffered by different interest groups, the US had strongly supported a federal association of Eritrea with Ethiopia.

TPLF underwent a similar diplomatic transformation as the EPLF over the same period. In 1989, ambassador Cheek is reported as having contacted the leaders of that movement in the Sudan.<sup>4</sup> Following this, Meles Zenawi (General Secretary of TPLF) emerged from the isolation of the rugged mountains of Tigray, Gondar and Wollo and began visiting the West. In November, for instance, he went to the UK where he had harsh treatment at the hands of the media on account of having expressed admiration for the Albanian Stalinist ideological model. However, during his March 1990 Washington visit, it was reported that he had renounced Marxism–Leninism, i.e. at the same time as Mengistu did. This was followed in February 1991 by TPLF's issuance of a liberal political and economic programme. TPLF's renunciation of communism, which was publicized by the organization much more vigorously than EPLF's, led to Washington's diplomatic support for it.

Thus, the EPLF/TPLF renunciation of communism, their commitment to a pluralist political and economic order and their survival as viable military organizations transformed them in the eyes of Washington from being viewed as communist, and at times Muslim fundamentalist, guerrilla movements, into respectable liberation fronts. Mengistu's efforts, on the other hand, did not bear any fruit. It was in this context of isolation of Mengistu and the rising influence of EPLF/TPLF that the negotiations between them took place. In 1989, the mediation of ex-president Jimmy Carter, by then an old hand on the problems of the Horn of Africa, was invoked. On 18 April, he met Esayas in the Sudan and again later in the same month on his way back from Ethiopia. There, he learnt of Esayas's conditions for talks including the removal of Mengistu from power, conditions that the latter repeated during his visit to Washington the following month.<sup>5</sup> On

5 June, Mengistu made a call for unconditional talks followed by a declaration that Ethiopia's unity was not open to discussion. Though EPLF made demands like the presence of outside observers and its own recognition, the reaction was not taken by Addis Ababa as a rejection.<sup>6</sup>

Finally, on 7 September, Carter managed to bring the delegations of the regime and EPLF to Atlanta, Georgia, where procedural issues including the questions of observers, where and when the follow-up meetings would take place, and the agenda for substantive talks were discussed. Again, in November, Carter managed to get the parties together in Nairobi but they were unable to go beyond wrangling over procedural matters. At the last meeting, for instance, the EPLF chose the UN as one of its observers but the latter was unable to take part because it was not invited by a state. The Ethiopian government declined to oblige by asking the UN to attend, ostensibly because it had chosen its own observers and because it was up to the EPLF to find its own.

Perhaps, even Carter's modest achievement of bringing the parties together would not have succeeded without the involvement of the superpowers. By early June, Herman Cohen and Anatoly Adamshein (the Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister) had met in Luanda and Rome where they came to an understanding on the question of negotiations between the same parties. On 13 July, Yuri Yakalov (head of the African Department of the Soviet Foreign Ministry) met Esayas in London; a subsequent USSR statement said that the only thing that couldn't be negotiated was Ethiopia's territorial indivisibility, a position reiterated by Cohen during his August visit to Ethiopia.<sup>7</sup>

In 1990, Herman Cohen replaced Jimmy Carter and became the sole mediator between the regime and EPLF. He used the occasion of a general assembly session to revive the collapsed Nairobi meeting and, in a Washington conference of 2 October, brought an Ethiopian delegation led by the foreign minister (Tesfaye Dinka) and an EPLF delegation led by its head of foreign affairs, Ali Said, a delegation which included Secretary General Esayas. A month later, Cohen hosted another meeting between the same delegations in Rome.<sup>8</sup> Just prior to the last meeting, it was reported that Mengistu's regime had conceded the settlement of the Eritrean question through a referendum which had been the EPLF's official position for a long time. However, when he

later denied having agreed to such a term, he was accused of having reneged from his position.

In March 1990, i.e. in the aftermath of its spectacular military successes in Tigray, the TPLF for its part issued its terms for talks. These included: the setting up of a provisional government made up of all political organizations; the dismantling of repressive institutions; the release of political prisoners; the return of exiles; the expulsion of foreign military experts; and the closure of military camps. Again, when Mengistu made his call for unconditional talks on 5 June, TPLF expressed its willingness to enter into negotiations by making further demands: talks must start within a month and discussions must be recorded and published by a third party.<sup>9</sup>

Mengistu's policy towards TPLF was, like the ostrich, to ignore it; his call for negotiations was in fact directed only towards EPLF. However, this was not for much longer. As TPLF continued to squeeze the regime's forces out of the northern provinces in late 1989 and 1990, the regime began to take note of the organization's existence. The result was that, during that period, no less than three meetings were held between the two under the auspices of Washington.

In the last one, held in early 1990 in Rome, for instance, the TPLF insisted that member organizations of the Joint Front, which it had been promoting, should be represented in the negotiations and that the meeting should consider solutions for all the political problems of the country including the questions of democracy and national self-determination. In June, it offered a cease-fire in return for the establishment of an interim government in which the regime would be a participant on an equal basis with a number of other political organizations. The Shengo (the Ethiopian legislative assembly) made the counter-offer of a place in the political life of the country for all political organizations which were in favour of the unity of the country.<sup>10</sup> These negotiations bore no fruit either.

Basically, the negotiations failed because none of the parties wanted them to succeed. Compromise is alien to the Ethiopian political culture. The parties went to the negotiating table only to bid for time and to look more conciliatory than the other in the eyes of the international public. Be that as it may, the last time that Cohen brought together the delegations of Tesfaye Dinka, Esayas

Afeworqi and Meles Zenawi, as well as the OLF, was in the London meeting of May 1991 (in the wake of Mengistu's departure from office). It was at that meeting that he invited Meles to enter Addis Ababa and become the leader of Ethiopia, look away when Esayas became leader of an Eritrean provisional government, and let Tesfaye Dinka and members of his delegation disappear from the political scene altogether. In the end, it was Cohen, and not ex-president Carter, who left his mark on the history of the Horn of Africa; however, it is not clear whether he has done so by presiding over the disintegration of one of the oldest sovereign states in the world outside Europe and the Americas.

It is often claimed that Mengistu's regime collapsed because of shortage of military supplies. If the Soviet threat of drying up the flow of arms deliveries had matured and if, in that eventuality, the regime was unable to supplant its sources of weapons supplies, the effect of lack of war materials on the regime's ability to wage war would have been detrimental to its survival. However, the military supplies from the Soviet Union had continued to trickle almost to the last days of the regime. Also, there was no report of shortage of weapons at all. Rather, the importance of the change in the international political scene appears to have been, not in starving the regime of weapons, but, rather, in disorientating it by creating a confidence crisis among its erstwhile supporters (party functionaries, government officials and military officers) and by depriving it of friends on the international scene. Thus, the effect of the international dynamic was to aggravate the manifold internal and external crises and, in this way, contribute to the downfall of the regime.

#### THE PREPONDERANCE OF REGIONALISM

Taking advantage of the central political crisis of the early revolutionary years (1974-1977), the various regional insurgents brought under their control large territories particularly in the northern part of the country. In the case of Eritrea, for instance, only its capital city of Asmara had, at the time, remained under government control. Then, the situation was reversed. In the wake of its 1977-1978 shift of alliance to the East and its victory over the Republic of Somalia, the regime deployed its newly acquired military might against the numerous regional insurgent

movements and through a series of campaigns, eliminated some of them altogether and pushed back the rest to remote areas of the provinces. Again, towards the closing years of the 1980s, the pendulum swung in favour of the regionalist forces so much that they were able to destool the regime that was squatting on an extremely shaky socio-economic and political order. In this regard, the movements based on the Oromo, Tigrai and Eritrean peoples are worthy of mention.

At least four political movements based on the biggest linguistic group in the country (the Oromo) have been rising and falling since the early 1960s. The origin of the present day Abba Oromo can be traced back to a 1961 establishment in the province of Bale of a movement aided and abetted by the then newly independent Republic of Somalia. Despite its many years of isolation, the movement has outlived Haile Selassie's and Mengistu's regimes and is active in that province to this day. Militarily more important as of the middle 1980s were the OLF, which was formed in the wake of the revolution, and its splinter group (the Oromo Islamic Front). These trace their origin to the formation in the late 1960s of political cells among the Oromo modern elite. While the Oromo Islamic Front's operations are limited to the provinces of Hararghe and Arsi, the OLF's have been extended to cover the frontier territories of the western provinces of Wollega, Jimma and Illubabor. The fourth is the Oromo People's Democratic Organization (OPDO) which was created in the late 1980s and which operates very closely with a northern movement (TPLF). Its main area of operation is the central province of Shoa.

The guerrilla operations of OLF and the Oromo Islamic Front appeared to have been boosted by the regime's 1984 programmes of resettlement and villagization. Much of the resettlement of the drought-affected people of the north took place in the western provinces of Wallega, Jimma and Illubabor. This gave rise to a good deal of resentment among the local people particularly since they were made to contribute land, food and farming animals to the newcomers. The OLF was able to exploit this local resentment by evoking sentiments of the domination of the Oromo by the peoples from the north and the usurpation of their lands. Though it never controlled large territories to the exclusion of the regime for an appreciably long

period of time, it has since been able to carry out hit and run operations much deeper into those provinces than hitherto.

The regime's programme of villagization, which was implemented concurrently with the resettlement programme, was first launched in Hararghe, perhaps with a view to undermining the activities of OLF and the Oromo Islamic Front. The programme was certainly greatly opposed by the latter who instigated the local people to resist its implementation by any means at their disposal including evacuating their land holdings and marching into the neighbouring Republic of Somalia. Though the insurgents were able to infiltrate and launch attacks in areas around the provincial capital of Harar, their military successes were not all that spectacular. Villagization may well have weakened the activities of the organizations by undercutting their information network among the people of the region.<sup>11</sup>

The rebel movements in the extreme north region of Eritrea and in the adjoining province of Tigray immediately to the south have been, militarily, more important than the movements based among the Oromo. Throughout the years of the revolution, the rival Eritrean movements like the ELF and EPLF, which predate the revolution by thirteen and five years, respectively, were busy exporting insurgency into the neighbouring provinces. This they did by training fighters for the movements which were active in those provinces and by providing them access through the territories they controlled. The TPLF, EPRP, EDU and ALF have all enjoyed such support over the years. Of all these and other movements which had been operating in northern Ethiopia, it was only EPLF and TPLF which survived Mengistu's counter-insurgency onslaughts as militarily viable organizations.

The military successes of EPLF and TPLF came in the wake of the politico-military crisis of 1987 and after. On 17 March 1988, the EPLF forces overran the important base of Afabet, to the north-west of Asmara, and, in a two-day operation, destroyed the Nadew Command there by killing an estimated number of 10,000 to 20,000 troops, and by capturing a sizeable assortment of tanks and other heavy weapons, and important ammunition and fuel depots. This was followed by the withdrawal of the government's troops from all their garrisons in the area of Keren (the most important government base in western Eritrea). Apparently, the fall of Afabet was not altogether unexpected. The government knew that

EPLF forces had, during the previous December, broken through the government's defences to the east of Naqfa (the most important base of EPLF for a long time) and had information that they were gathering in the area by moving supplies from the Sudan. In February, Mengistu was busy in Asmara listening to the grievances of the army, executing Brigadier General Tariku Aine (the commander of Nadew), and purging and demoting other senior officers. Consequently, at the time of its fall, Afabet was devoid of any officers.

Despite the fact that the TPLF was militarily active in Tigrai as of February, the regime decided to move some of the brigades of the 6th and 17th divisions in Tigrai to Eritrea in order to reinforce the garrisons in the latter region. Taking advantage of the weakened position of the government forces in Tigrai, TPLF attacked the troops near Enda Selassie on 25 March and, on the 26th, 28th and 30th, it overran Axum, Adua and Enda Selassie in western Tigrai. The government troops retreated to Gondar or Eritrea in disarray. In eastern Tigrai, the position of the government's forces deteriorated further at the end of March when the 119th brigade was pulled out of Adigrat and Wukro was again abandoned. Thus, of the government troops in Tigrai, only those in and around the provincial capital of Mekelle had remained intact.<sup>12</sup>

The regime's reaction to these setbacks in Eritrea and Tigrai was the declaration of an almost general mobilization as of April. On 28 March, Mengistu had met President Said Bare of Somalia in Djibouti and had concluded a peace agreement with him. This released the eastern and southern commands for redeployment to Eritrea and Tigrai. In this were included the conscripts of the national service, a compulsory programme which was launched in 1983 to give six-months training to young men and make them available for a call-up at any time. Further, some of the members of the party and leaders of mass organizations were selected from each government and non-government organization and continued to be sent to the north until at least the following summer.

In the meantime, EPLF and TPLF were improving their relations which had, in the previous several years, been deteriorating and retarding collaboration between them. The thorny question of national self-determination, which had in the last twenty years bedevilled the political debate of the Ethiopian elite

in general, was also at the centre of the differences between the two organizations. While the TPLF was most emphatic about asserting the Leninist–Stalinist cultural conception of national self-determination, the EPLF was, if anything, opposed to it. Apart from the fact that both organizations are based on the same linguistic group, the people of Tigray are homogenous while those of Eritrea are linguistically and religiously diverse. In the wake of their early 1988 military successes against the government, the two organizations were able to overcome their differences with the result that, in the subsequent years, TPLF began to reiterate official support for the EPLF's claim that the Eritrean question is a special case and that it should be resolved through a referendum. It appears that this TPLF support for what had been EPLF's position since 1980 paved the way for the collaboration between them.

In the end, the government's efforts at reinforcing its garrisons in the north only led to further military disasters in Eritrea, though it succeeded in temporarily pushing back the TPLF forces to the extreme western part of Tigray (Enda Selassie) where the regime stationed its biggest army in the province. From then on, it kept on sending probing units and militia raised from the locality into the rugged area adjoining the provinces of Tigray, Gondar and Eritrea with a view to dislodging TPLF's force from its main base there. That campaign was, by all accounts, disastrous particularly for the militia. More important, however, was the Enda Selassie battle of February 1989 which, in terms of its disasters for the regime, was comparable to the Afabet battle a year earlier. Apparently assisted by an armed brigade of EPLF, TPLF overran the regime's base there and killed soldiers in their tens of thousands and captured the abandoned tanks, armoured cars, automatic weapons and stockpiles of ammunition. Despite the fact that the bulk of the province was still in government hands, the regime suddenly and unexpectedly withdrew its army and civilian administrative personnel from the entire region of Tigray on 25 February and moved them to the neighbouring province of Wollo to the south.

If the regime had calculated that it would encircle Tigray and suffocate the insurgents by cutting off supplies from other provinces, or that the TPLF, as a 'Liberation Front for Tigray', would be content in capturing that province, it was mistaken. The

TPLF did not stop at overrunning the whole province of Tigrai but, also, marched into the northern provinces of Wollo, Gondar and Gojam and started attacking the regime's forces and its administrative posts. Thus, since early 1989 the Tigrai region had been lost to the regime for good and the theatre of conflict between it and the TPLF moved to the neighbouring provinces of northern Ethiopia.

The regime's only road access to Eritrea was through Tigrai; consequently, the loss of that province to the TPLF meant a blow to the regime's war effort in Eritrea. From then on, the regime's only surface route to its forces in Eritrea was by sea through Massawa, the more important of the only two ports of Ethiopia as well as of Eritrea. In early 1990, the EPLF made a surprise attack on Massawa and captured it. Out of desperation, the regime resorted to severe aerial bombardment of the port town but to no avail. With the biggest Ethiopian military force thus beleaguered in Eritrea and supplied only through the air and with the TPLF having captured Tigrai and extended its area of campaign to the northern provinces, the regime's hold on northern Ethiopia became extremely shaky.

As the battles of 1988 loosened the government's hold on Eritrea and Tigrai and the battles of 1989 its grip on the northern provinces as a whole, the battles of 1990 and early 1991 dislodged it from the northern sub-provinces of the central region of Shoa and of the nation's capital of Addis Ababa. During that period, there were reports of a number of skirmishes in northern Shoa and of areas like Mahal Meda and Merabete having fallen into guerrilla hands. In fact, in the first half of 1990, there was widespread expectation that TPLF would enter the capital city on at least three occasions.<sup>13</sup> The ploy appeared to be to avoid the two roads going from the capital to the north-west and north-east, which were heavily defended, and enter Addis Ababa directly from the north. In what looked like a change of strategy, however, the TPLF concentrated its operations in the north-western provinces of Gondar and Gojam, swept directly south into the province of Wollega and attacked the capital city from its soft underbelly in the west. These campaigns, which covered territories hundreds of miles long, were accomplished in less than three months up to May 1991. When the rebel forces were within a 50-mile radius of the capital, Mengistu commandeered a twin-engine plane (on 20 May) and

fled the city for Nairobi and from thence to Zimbabwe. Though Mengistu's officials led by General Tesfaye, who became president, and Ato Tesfaye Dinka, who was appointed prime minister in the last days of Mengistu's rule, scrambled to create a successor government, its credibility was minimal and, in any case, it crumbled in the same month. EPLF was, soon after, able to rout the government's forces in the Eritrean capital (Asmara) and inherit the massive quantity of weapons left behind by the army.

As early as 1988, TPLF was advocating the replacement of Mengistu's regime by a coalition of all political organizations in the country. As power came within its grasp, it sought to emerge as the dominant group within the proposed coalition by organizing movements under its influence. That coalition became known as the Ethiopian People's Democratic Revolutionary Front (EPDRF) made up of TPLF, the Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement (EPDM), the Oromo People's Democratic Organization (OPDO) and the Ethiopian Democratic Officers' Revolutionary Movement (EDORM).

EPDM is a splinter group from EPRP which has been operating in Gondar and Wollo near the Tigrai region and which has, despite its name, been identified more and more with the Amhara linguistic group. Over the years, it has been working very closely with TPLF supporting its campaigns and its ideological and strategic positions. Starting from the middle of the 1980s, there has been an attempt to create collaboration between TPLF and OLF as in the attempt to launch joint operations against the regime's forces across the Afar region. Nevertheless, they have not been able to see eye-to-eye on the question of collaboration. Instead, in April 1990, TPLF set up the OPDO mainly drawn from among those Oromo soldiers of the government that it had captured over the years. OPDO is often seen as a rival group to the OLF. EDORM is made up of soldiers who defected from the government and was organized in May 1990 by TPLF.

Again, in 1990, TPLF suggested the establishment of an interim government made up of, not only the four members of EPDRF, but also the Marxist-Leninist League of Tigrai (the political wing of TPLF), the Ethiopian Marxist-Leninist Force (the political wing of EPDM), and the Ethiopian Proletarian Organization (the joint political wing of MLLT and EMLF). Moreover, while the TPLF seems to have been committed to a kind of multi-party

interim government which includes even WPE's proposed successor (the Ethiopian Democratic Unity Party), its invitation does not appear to include monarchists, EDU, EPDA, EPRP and AESM the last two of which EPDRF has been referring to as 'waiverers'.<sup>14</sup>

As noted earlier, in May 1991, Cohen invited the leaders of TPLF, OLF, EPLF and the Addis Ababa government, which had taken over from Mengistu, to a meeting in London. While the first two were invited to form the Ethiopian government, the EPLF was made to establish a provisional government of Eritrea. The delegation of the Addis Ababa government was left to its own devices and almost all of its members opted to defect to the US. The interim government was finally convened in July; its members became EPDRF, OLF, the Oromo Islamic Front, the Abba Oromo and, probably, hand-picked representatives of the various linguistic groups. The pan-Ethiopian nationalist groups, with the minor exception of EDU, were not represented. This, coupled with the dismantling of the Ethiopian multi-national army and its replacement by an ethnically based army, dictates the conclusion that regionalism had emerged preponderant in the post-Mengistu political order of Ethiopia.

#### CONCLUSION

At certain junctures in their history absolutist old-states cave in on themselves due to internal and external structural crises, primarily because of their internal decay. This was the case with the revolutions of France in 1789, Russia in 1917 and China in 1911 when the Bourbon, Romanov and Ch'ing dynasties collapsed.

Viewed from this perspective, the role of alternative contenders for power in the demise of old-states is comparatively small. In the cases of the French and Chinese revolutions there were, in fact, hardly any consciously organized political parties to speak of. Even in the cases of the Soviet and subsequent twentieth-century revolutions, political parties can be seen only as one of the variables in the complex of structural crises which caused the end of the states concerned. In this book, an attempt is made to explain the demise of Haile Selassie's regime in 1974 from the perspective of the convergence of a complex set of crises.

However, Mengistu's regime is no old-state such as the above. In

this sense, that regime is more comparable to revolutionary governments like that of China's Chiang Kai-shek than to the absolutist traditional dynasties. Perhaps, the cluster of 'revolutions', which took place in the late 1980s in the socialist countries of Eastern Europe, fall into the same category. As the title of this postscript suggests, nonetheless, seeing the demise of revolutionary states as a result of a convergence of external and internal pressures, as in the case of the demise of the old-states, provides a more solid package of explanations than does a consideration of the action of one organized group or another.

What is, perhaps, more interesting is to ask whether the collapse of the revolutionary governments in the late twentieth century, and, more to the point, that of Ethiopia, constitute revolutions or not. It is not possible to discuss this in any meaningful way at this stage since a revolution is made up of two component parts (the end of one system and its replacement by, arguably, a better one) and since the second of the component parts has not taken shape as yet. Suffice it here, therefore, to point out certain trends that may be indicators of the time to come.

First of all perhaps, the most clear trend is the ideological transformation from Ethiopian nationalism to ethnic and regional nationalism. There is a lot of evidence to suggest that Ethiopian nationalism was, until recently, a force to be reckoned with. During the course of Ethiopia's emergence as a sovereign state in the late nineteenth century, most of the ethnic groups in the country had contributed to the endeavour in material and human terms. Since then, they have withstood the test of external aggression particularly from Italian expansionism by fighting side by side. In the 1940s, when the question of the disposal of the ex-Italian colony of Eritrea was in the forefront, the majority of the people of that region opted for union with Ethiopia. Internationally too, Ethiopia's survival as an independent state was an inspiration to the anti-colonial struggle in Africa and to the civil rights movement of blacks in the West Indies and in America. Like his predecessors, Mengistu's rule for almost two decades derived its strength more from Ethiopian nationalism than from any other ideology.

It is a detail to go into the reasons for the evaporation of Ethiopian nationalism from the minds of the elite in the last twenty years or so but three factors seem to have been responsible

for it. They are: the emergence of Leninism as the preponderant ideology of the elite and its advocacy of the centrality of national self-determination, however that was understood; the post-petro-dollar rise to prominence of the Middle East which gave succour to the rise of regionalism and secessionism; and the religious identity of the regime, its economic ineffectiveness and its political feuding in recent years.

Haile Selassie's regime was generally identified with backwardness and with the country's Christian community, facts which alienated the progressive forces and the Muslim communities as well as the Muslim states in the region. Also, despite Mengistu's presumed dedication to Ethiopian nationalism and to the territorial integrity of the country, an important consequence of his rule has been the liquidation of the pan-Ethiopian organizations like EPRP, AESM and EDU so that, by the time he left, those organizations existed only in name with their members in a state of demoralization. This is in no way to assert that the latter were neutral to their own destruction but merely to argue that the failure of the pan-Ethiopian political organizations to galvanize the nationalist forces has opened the way for the preponderance of regionalism.

Also, the recent end of the cold war seems to be ushering in the end of the state-system which had been governing the relations of the European states in the last several centuries and those of the other continents since then. It has meant that the poor states can no longer hide behind the skirts of such principles as the sovereign equality of states and non-interference in domestic affairs but, rather, toe the line of the rich nuclear states willy-nilly. This development in the political sphere is in addition to the poor states' loss of their right of economic self-determination which has been increasingly the case since the West's assertion of structural adjustment in the last decade or so. In effect, the respect for the sovereign equality and territorial integrity of states has been greatly eroded with the result that the validity of the non-nuclear poor states is exposed to change in a direction as yet undefined.

Since history's experiment with the global state-system in the post-war years has not delivered the goods at least in Africa and in a large number of other Third World states, its demise need, perhaps, not be lamented. It has achieved neither peace, democracy nor wealth for the peoples of those regions and Ethiopia's

record in all these respects is worse than most. Under these circumstances, it is difficult to be optimistic about the survival of Ethiopia as a sovereign state with its territorial status quo intact. However, it is also difficult to be optimistic about what the break-up of Ethiopia into smaller states (into, for instance, Eritrea, Oromia, etc.) will achieve for the peoples of those areas. In fact, the likely outcome is the disintegration of the society into warring factions as in Lebanon, Yugoslavia and the old Soviet Union.

Despite these developments, there are certain trends which suggest that Ethiopia's survival as an independent sovereign state, however modified, is still in the balance. After they brought the province of Tigray under their control, the leaders of TPLF did not abandon Ethiopia to her own devices but, rather, demonstrated their Ethiopianness by becoming her rulers, by providing a modicum of security to the people and by maintaining the country's territorial integrity, save in the case of Eritrea. If the running of the country through an army based on one ethnic group looks like the domination of the many linguistic groups by the one for the moment, EPDRF is committed to a democratic resolution of this and other issues within two years of coming to power. Further, in spite of the fact that the centre of power has, since at least the overthrow of Mengistu, shifted from Addis Ababa to Asmara, regional pax-Eritreana has not meant revenge and reprisal as in the cases of Liberia and Somalia. Interestingly enough, there are reports that EPLF's forces have, since the change, been deployed in parts of Ethiopia alongside those of EPDRF, supporting the latter's efforts in providing security to the people and in maintaining Ethiopia's territorial integrity. Also, assuming that there is no change of heart on the matter, the US and, for what it's worth, Russia have been reiterating their support for the maintenance of Ethiopia's territorial status quo.

In the final analysis, the balance between Ethiopia's break-up into smaller states or her survival as a sovereign state must rest not only on the wisdom of the new rulers, and on the fulfilment of their commitments, but also on the extent to which the response of those who feel aggrieved is constructive and measured. No doubt, both sides have to operate within the constraints of domestic and international pressures. One important local pressure, for instance, is the fact that, in comparison to the other people in Ethiopia, those in Tigray and Eritrea have contributed

much more, in human and material resources, to the success of the present change. In consequence, the new leaders may feel obliged to reward the people of those regions. This could lead to the alienation of the regime from the peoples of the other regions to the extent that Tigrains and Eritreans are rewarded at the expense of the other peoples: at the expense, for example, of the latter's lands and other material resources.

Secondly, another transformation is the abandonment of theoretical and applied Marxism by all and notably by the present leaders of Ethiopia and the replacement of that ideology by political pluralism. In a way, this point is linked with the first one above. As the history of Europe has demonstrated amply, nationalism is certainly a very powerful force for mobilizing societies but, at the same time, an extremely dangerous phenomenon that spills over into violence at the drop of a hat.

It looks to me that, in recent years, two trains of thought have been observable among the radical elements within the Ethiopian elite. There are those who feel that their own distinct community is more advanced, Europeanized, civilized etc., on the one hand, and those who feel that theirs has been dominated, exploited, despised, etc., on the other. The first seek to dominate or rid themselves of the ones they think are backward and the second want to rectify history by avenging themselves for what they think was the past. Creating political organizations around such 'party programmes' of arrogance or resentment, and politicizing the different communities along those lines can only be described as dangerous and inimical to the aspiration to create a pluralist society. Unfortunately, when a political programme is predicated on the rights of ethnic groups rather than those of individuals, it has a tendency to look like the programme of racism or Fascism, ideologies which are, in their illiberality, more akin to Marxism-Leninism than to liberalism.

No doubt, it is difficult to say whether the commitment to the inauguration of a pluralist society, in place of the traditional or Leninist-Stalinist autocracies, will stick until a new liberal constitution is adopted and duly enforced. If it succeeds, nonetheless, it will be the most revolutionary departure from Ethiopia's political heritage. However, it is, perhaps, true that if democracy becomes the order in future Ethiopia, the people would owe it not to the ex-Marxist political organizations so much as to the wind of

liberalism which has swept them with it along with the rest of the socialist world.

Thirdly, yet another transformation is the proposed liberalization of the economy. Ironically, this is a march back to the days of Haile Selassie and his *laissez-faire* economic order which almost all the political organizations of the last twenty years or so have worked so hard to destroy. The chosen route is comparable to the Soviet Union's return to its Tsarist past; however, in comparison, Ethiopia's path to the past must be smoother since the envisaged socialist institutions had not taken root in the country as much as they had in the Soviet Union. Such a transformation will probably eradicate the constraints of a command economy and, given a sustained period of peace, revitalize agricultural, trade and investment activities. Externally, however, if the new leadership adopts an acceptable programme of economic liberalization, Ethiopia may move closer to meeting the strictures of structural adjustment but will remain a poor competitor for international financial and other resources when compared with the rest of the developing world and particularly with the ex-socialist states of Europe.

In the final analysis, it is not clear what the IMF/World Bank proponents of a liberal economic order are trying to achieve for the peoples of the Third World. Far from attaining development for the poor states, the policy cannot even arrest the decline which is taking place in the entire spectrum of the human development of Africa now demonstrable by any number of indices. The reality in that continent is civil strife, drought, death from starvation, environmental degradation and the like. The African elite may be blamed for neglecting these issues in favour of its pursuit of power and prestige; however, the problems are now too gigantic to be left to its responsibility alone. Since the West also has a hand in the present plight of Africa, what is, perhaps, needed is collaborative action on questions like the environment along the lines advocated by the green movement in the rich states of the world. A voice in the wilderness?

## *Appendix: chronology of events*

- 1908 The completion of the process of defining all present-day Ethiopian territories except Eritrea through the conclusion of boundary treaties with Britain, France and Italy.
- 1922 Ethiopia's admission into membership of the League of Nations.
- 1928 The establishment of the royal bodyguard.
- 1930 The crowning of Haile Selassie I as King of Ethiopia.
- 1932 The establishment of the Holeta Military Academy.
- 1936-41 The occupation of Ethiopia by Italy.
- 1941 The liberation of Ethiopia by the Allied forces. Eritrea which had been under Italian colonial rule for fifty years comes under British administration as enemy-occupied territory.
- 1948 The return to Ethiopia of the Ogaden which had come under British administration from 1941.
- 1952 The federation of Eritrea with Ethiopia in accordance with a UN General Assembly resolution. Economic and military agreements concluded between Ethiopia and the US.
- 1957 The establishment of the Harar Military Academy.
- 1958 The establishment of the Eritrean Liberation Movement.
- 1960 An abortive *coup d'état* against Haile Selassie by senior officers and the royal bodyguard. The emergence of British and Italian Somalilands into independence as the Republic of Somalia. The establishment of WSLF in Mogadishu.

- 1962 The dissolution of Eritrea's federal status and its absorption into the unitary state of Ethiopia. The formation of the Confederation of Ethiopian Labour Unions.
- 1965 The formation of the University Students' Union of Addis Ababa.
- 1968 The formation of an underground political organization abroad which later became AESM.
- 1970 The formation of EPLF.
- 1972 Formation of EPRP abroad. US starts demoting its military presence in Ethiopia.
- 1973 Successful Arab pressure on Ethiopia to cut diplomatic relations with Israel.
- 1974
- January Mutiny of the 24th unit of the Fourth Division in Negele and Dolo.
- 18 February Strike and demonstration of taxi owners, teachers and students; often considered the beginning of the 1974 popular uprising. The first round of military uprising. The resignation of Aklilou's cabinet and Endalkachew's appointment as prime minister.
- March Appointment of Alem Zewd's Committee by Endalkachew. All the urban corporate groups start going on strikes and demonstrations.
- April The second round of military uprising and the arrest of Aklilou and members of his cabinet as well as many senior officers and civilian officials. Appointment of the High National Security Commission by Gen Abiye.
- 28 June The official date for the establishment of the Derg.
- July The return to Ethiopia of EPRP leaders and the launching of their weekly paper (*Democracia*). The enhancement of the arrest of the old-state officials.
- August The launching of AESM's weekly paper (*Voice of the Masses*). The replacement as prime minister of Endalkachew by Michael Imiru.

- 12 September Deposition of King Haile Selassie and suspension of the 1955 revised constitution. CELU calls for a general strike as an expression of its opposition to Derg rule.
- November Issuance of Proclamation of Development Through Campaign Programme. Summary execution of some sixty officials of the old-state, the chairman of the Derg (Aman Andom) and Derg members.
- 20 December Adoption of the Ethiopian Socialism programme.
- 1975
- January The nationalization of financial institutions. The beginning of the return to Ethiopia of AESM leaders.
- February The failure of EPRP and AESM leaders to come to an understanding.
- March The adoption of the Public Ownership of Rural Land Proclamation. Formal adoption by AESM to give the Derg 'critical support'. The beginning of sending Derg members and others to the socialist countries including Tanzania for political training. The formation of EDU abroad.
- August The nationalization of urban land and extra houses. EPRP issues its programme and declares itself a party.
- September CELU calls for a general strike.
- December The adoption of a highly centralizing labour proclamation. The establishment of an AESM-dominated committee in charge of politicizing and organizing the masses. The beginning of the EPRP-AESM public campaign against one another in the papers.
- 1976
- April AESM declares its programme but falls short of calling itself a party. The adoption of the NDRPE. Formation of POMOA. Mengistu invites all progressives to form a joint front against reactionary forces.
- May EPRP rejects Mengistu's invitation to form a

- joint front. The establishment of the Yekatit 1966 Political School. The Derg issues a nine-point peace policy concerning Eritrea.
- July Sisay and his associates are rounded up and executed allegedly for plotting to overthrow the Derg. The official withdrawal by the Derg of the Campaign Programme. Deterioration of relations between Ethiopia and the Sudan because of the former's alleged involvement in a coup against President Numeri.
- August On the occasion of its general assembly meeting to hear the case against Sisay and his associates, the Derg appoints a committee under the chairmanship of Alemayehu to revise its constitution. EPRP decides to eliminate members of Mengistu's coalition.
- September Assassination breaks out between members of EPRP and Mengistu's coalition. EDU forms a coalition with ELF and ALF and goes into operation in the north-western province of Gondar from a base in the Sudan; it starts a propaganda campaign against the Derg with the help of Sudan's radio station.
- December The Alemayehu committee revises the constitution and bylaws of the Derg and strips Mengistu of almost all his Derg functions.
- 1977
- February A palace coup in which those who had emerged victorious in the previous December reorganizations are rounded up and executed. Mengistu becomes the chairman of the Derg and the unchallenged leader of the country. The launching of the red terror campaign against EPRP. Suspension of further aid by US to Ethiopia on the grounds of human rights violations.
- March Visit to the Horn of Africa by Fidel Castro and Soviet Premier Podgorni to try and resolve the dispute between Ethiopia and Somalia. The formation of JFEMLO.
- April The closure of the Kagnew installation and a



- 1984  
September The establishment of WPE. The second Congress of COPWE which founded WPE.
- 1986  
February First Congress of the Constitution Drafting Commission.  
April Draft constitution is submitted to the fourth regular plenum of the CC.  
May Second Congress of the Constitution Drafting Commission.  
September Third Congress of the Constitution Drafting Commission.
- 1987  
May and June The process of nomination and election of the Shengo members is accomplished.  
June Last annual meeting of the Derg.  
September The first session of Shengo.  
Mengistu is elected president of PDRE.  
The 1987 Constitution of PDRE comes into force.
- 1988  
February Execution of Brigadier General Tariku Aine.  
March The EPLF overruns Afabet.  
TPLF overruns the western subprovince of Tigrai.  
July Gorbachev turns down Mengistu's request for an increased supply of military hardware.
- 1989  
February TPLF overruns an important government garrison in Enda Selassie.  
The government withdraws its military and civilian personnel from Tigrai.  
May Abortive coup of Generals against Mengistu's regime.
- 1990  
March Mengistu renounces Marxism–Leninism.
- 1991  
May Mengistu leaves Addis Ababa for Kenya and Zimbabwe.  
TPLF captures Addis Ababa.

## Notes

### 1 THE BACKGROUND TO THE EMERGENCE OF THE STRUCTURAL CRISIS

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- 23 Articles 26–36 of the 1955 Revised Constitution of Ethiopia.
- 24 Clapham, *Transformation and Continuity*, p. 33.
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- 26 Halliday and Molyneux, *Ethiopian Revolution*, p. 69.
- 27 M. O. Ojo, 'African States and the Muslim World, the Development of Afro-Arab Relations with Special Reference to the OAU and the League of Arab States', unpublished PhD thesis, London, 1977, p. 90.
- 28 Congressional records, vol. 103, p. 181.
- 29 R. Hess, *Ethiopia: the Modernization of Autocracy*, Cornell University Press, London, 1970, pp. 222–6.
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- 31 Halliday and Molyneux, *Ethiopian Revolution*, p. 75.
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- 36 *Ibid.*, pp. 125–6.
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- 4 'A Communiqué Issued to Explain the Week's Developments', *Addis Zemen*, no. 342, 24 February 1974. *Addis Zemen* was and is the most important daily paper of the Ethiopian government. The present chapter draws a lot of its information from it because the paper is, by and large, an untapped source of a wealth of data, it is much more detailed than its English equivalent (*The Ethiopian Herald*) and because it was, at the time under consideration, quite free to publish anything on account of the fact that the censorship machinery was not functional. The titles of the articles were translated into English and the Ethiopian calendar converted into the Gregorian calendar by the author.
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- 6 'An Explanation Given By the Ministry of Education Concerning the Sector Review', *Addis Zemen*, no. 330, 8 February 1974.
- 7 'Prime Minister Gives an Explanation Concerning Teachers', *Addis Zemen*, no. 350, 7 March 1974.
- 8 'An Explanation Issued by the Ministry of Interior', *Addis Zemen*, no. 340, 22 February 1974; and 'An Explanation Issued by the Head of Police', *Addis Zemen*, no. 341, 23 February 1974.
- 9 'A Year Ago Today; from a Diary', *Addis Zemen*, no. 641, 21 February 1975.
- 10 'A Year Ago Today; from a Diary', *Addis Zemen*, no. 642, 22 February 1975.
- 11 'From Memory; around Markato', *Addis Zemen*, no. 642, 22 February 1975.
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- 14 'Communiqué', *Addis Zemen*, no. 342.
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- 16 'From Memory; a Taxi Driver', *Addis Zemen*, no. 641, 21 February 1975.

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- 23 'His Majesty's Address to His Subjects', *Addis Zemen*, no. 346, 1 March 1974.
- 24 'A Communiqué Issued by the Palace', *Addis Zemen*, no. 345, 28 February 1974.
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- 26 Erlich, 'Establishment of the Derg', p. 789.
- 27 'The Armed Forces Express their Allegiance to His Majesty', *Addis Zemen*, no. 347, 2 March 1974.
- 28 Erlich, 'Establishment of the Derg', p. 787.
- 29 'The New Prime Minister Gives an Explanation', *Addis Zemen*, no. 346, March 1974.
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- 33 'Five Ministers Take Oath of Office', *Addis Zemen*, no. 363, 23 March 1974.
- 34 'The Armed Forces', *Addis Zemen*, no. 347.
- 35 'Schools Open Today', *Addis Zemen*, no. 358, 20 March 1974, and 'All Ethiopian Schools Resume Work', *Addis Zemen*, no. 361, 21 March 1974.
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- 39 'Employees of the Civil Aviation Agency Say They Will Resume Work

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- 50 'The Ministry of Defence Issues a Communiqué', *Addis Zemen*, no. 371, 2 April 1974.
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- 52 'The Divisions of the Armed Forces Issue a Communiqué', *Addis Zemen*, no. 370, 31 March 1974.
- 53 'The Hararghe Third Division and Police Affirm their Allegiance to His Majesty', *Addis Zemen*, no. 370, 31 March 1974.
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- 56 'Parliament's Discussions of Yesterday Morning', *Addis Zemen*, no. 371, 2 April 1974.
- 57 'The People of Illubabor Demand the Appointment "for them" of People of Goodwill; the Students of Gondar and Wolame Submit a Petition', *Addis Zemen*, no. 372, 3 April 1974.
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- 60 'Self-congratulatory Demonstration Held in Assela', *Addis Zemen*, no. 379, 11 April 1974.

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- 63 'Employees of the Ministry of Finance Resume Work; Three Officials are Dismissed', *Addis Zemen*, no. 383, 17 April 1974.
- 64 'A Decision Concerning the Employees of the Ministry of Finance', *Addis Zemen*, no. 382, 14 April 1974.
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- 66 'Employees of the Ministry of Agriculture Submit a Petition', *Addis Zemen*, no. 391, 26 April 1974.
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- 68 'Employees of the Civil Aviation Agency Say They Will Resume Work if Five Officials are Dismissed', *Addis Zemen*, no. 366, 27 March 1974.
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- 70 'Employees', *Addis Zemen*, no. 366.
- 71 'An Acting Mayor Appointment for Addis Ababa', *Addis Zemen*, no. 380, 12 April 1974; and 'Employees of the Municipality are Cleaning the City without Rest', *Addis Zemen*, no. 381, 13 April 1974.
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- 84 'Ethiopian Muslims Hold a Big Demonstration in Addis Ababa', *Addis Zemen*, no. 387, 21 April 1974.
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- 102 'An Elaboration Grows by the Prime Minister's Office', *Addis Zemen*, no. 399, 5 May 1974.
- 103 'Lazardis Locks out 1,400 Workers and Closes Factory', *Addis Zemen*, no. 419, 30 May 1974; 'The Board Gives its Decision on the Case of Lazardis' Employees', *Addis Zemen*, no. 424, 5 June 1974; and 'The Thread Company Closes Indefinitely', *Addis Zemen*, no. 433, 15 June 1974.
- 104 'Answers of the Prime Minister', *Addis Zemen*, no. 435; P. Gilkes, *The Dying Lion: Feudalism and Modernisation in Ethiopia*, Davidson Publishing Ltd, Wiltshire, England, 1975; and Pliny the Middle Aged, 'The PMAC: Origins and Structure Part 1', *Africanist Notes*, vol. 1, p. 5.
- 105 'The Security Commission Examines the Petition of the Telecommunications Employees and Gives an Explanation', *Addis Zemen*, no. 418, 29 May 1974.

- 106 See for example 'A Warning Given by the Telecommunications', *Addis Zemen*, no. 423, 4 June 1974; and 'Employees of the Telecommunications Requested to Resume Work', *Addis Zemen*, no. 424, 5 June 1974.
- 107 'The Postal Service, which was Interrupted for Half a Day, Resumes Work', *Addis Zemen*, no. 398, 4 May 1974.
- 108 'The High National Security Commission Gives a Decision Concerning the Question of Students', *Addis Zemen*, no. 404, 11 May 1974.
- 109 'The Employees of the Diabaco Cotton Spinning Factory go on Strike', *Addis Zemen*, no. 410, 19 May 1974.
- 110 'The Diabacco Cotton-Spinning Factory Resumes Work', *Addis Zemen*, no. 441, 25 June 1974.

### 3 THE TURNING OF AN URBAN MOVEMENT INTO A JUNTA DICTATORSHIP

- 1 R. Lefort, *Ethiopia: An Heretical Revolution?*, Zed Press, London, 1983, p. 52.
- 2 H. Erlich, 'The Establishment of the Derg: the Turning of a Protest Movement into a Revolution', *Proceedings of the Fifth International Conference on Ethiopian Studies*, Chicago, Session B, ed. Robert L. Hess, 13–16 April 1978, p. 787.
- 3 In the initial stages of the uprising the officers were pressurized by the government to quell the soldiers' movements. Then they used to meet in the military club and exchange ideas; later, however, the radicals amongst them joined the meetings of the soldiers and civilians in the woods, churchyards, etc.
- 4 The History Committee, 'The Emergence and Development of the Ethiopian Revolution', October 1983, unpublished, chapter 3, p. 7.
- 5 Erlich, 'The Establishment of the Derg', p. 792.
- 6 Pliny the Middle Aged, 'The PMAC: Origins and Structure, Part 1', *Africanist Notes*, vol. 1, 1978, pp. 6–7.
- 7 *Ibid.*; and Erlich, 'The Establishment of the Derg'.
- 8 *Ibid.*, p. 792; and History Committee, 'Emergence', chapter 3, p. 8.
- 9 'The seven MPs who Interceded for the Release of the Previous Officials are Barred from the Assembly', *Addis Zemen*, no. 437, 20 June 1974.
- 10 Pliny, 'The PMAC', p. 8.
- 11 History Committee, 'Emergence', chapter 3, p. 8.
- 12 Pliny, 'The PMAC', pp. 7–8.
- 13 *Ibid.*
- 14 Erlich, 'The Establishment of the Derg', p. 792.
- 15 'It is All the People of Ethiopia Through their Votes that Determine

- the Future of the Government Administration', *Addis Zemen*, no. 512, 1 October 1974.
- 16 The Territorial Army is a reserve force with only a corps of about 10,000 standing officers and soldiers.
  - 17 History Committee, 'Emergence and Development', p. 8.
  - 18 Interview with Mr X.
  - 19 'The Military Administrative Committee Makes Appointments', *Addis Zemen*, no. 505, 13 September 1974.
  - 20 While the election of Mengistu and Atnafu on that day is common knowledge that of Gebriges Wolde Hana as Secretary General and the circumstances of his removal from that position have remained obscure.
  - 21 Erlich, 'The Establishment of the Derg', p. 788.
  - 22 See for example, 'General Aman Andom and the American Brigadier exchange Opinions', *Addis Zemen*, no. 453, 11 July 1974, and 'Lt Gen. Aman exchanges Opinions with an Ambassador', *Addis Zemen*, no. 455, 13 July 1974.
  - 23 In 1987, Comrade Mengistu Haile-Mariam was General Secretary of the Workers' Party of Ethiopia and on the verge of becoming president of the Democratic Republic of Ethiopia.
  - 24 'The Entire Speech of Comrade Chairman', *The Worker*, vol. 8, no. 388, 4 September 1987, pp. 8-9. *The Worker* is an organ of the central committee of the Workers' Party of Ethiopia.
  - 25 'A chapter in the struggle', A Provisional Military Administrative Council Special Issue on the First Anniversary of the Revolution Day, p. 24.
  - 26 'His Majesty Orders in Favour of the Ideas Presented by the Armed Forces Committee', *Addis Zemen*, no. 447, 4 July 1974.
  - 27 'The Armed Forces Committee expresses its Allegiance to His Majesty, and gives an Explanation about its Aims', *Addis Zemen*, no. 452, 10 July 1974.
  - 28 'A Chapter in the Struggle', p. 24; and 'Comrade Chairman's Report to the First Session of the National Shengo', *Meskerem*, vol. 8, no. 390, 10 September 1987, p. 8.
  - 29 'The Armed Forces Committee takes Useful Decisions and Expresses its Allegiance to His Majesty and the New Cabinet', *Addis Zemen*, no. 445, 2 July 1974.
  - 30 See for example: 'Confiscation Decision Taken Against Two Officials Who did not Give Themselves up', *Addis Zemen*, no. 456, 14 July 1974.
  - 31 'After an Emergency Meeting, a High Committee is Established to Consider the Country's Situation', *Addis Zemen*, no. 446, 30 June 1974.
  - 32 History Committee, 'Emergence and Development', p. 12.
  - 33 See the Ethiopian Revised Constitution of 1955, particularly articles 26-36.
  - 34 'His Majesty Orders', *Addis Zemen*, no. 447.

- 35 It appears from the circumstances that by 'obstacles' the Derg means individuals who did not co-operate with it.
- 36 History Committee, 'Emergence and Development', pp. 12–16.
- 37 'A Chapter in the Struggle', p. 24; and 'Comrade Chairman's Report', *Meskerem*, vol. 8, no. 390.
- 38 *Addis Zemen*, no. 458, 17 July 1974, 'Lt Gen. Abiye Abebe Gives Himself Up: the Sixty-one Detained Previous Officials Transferred to the Fourth Division'.
- 39 'An Important Appointment', *Addis Zemen*, no. 463, 23 July 1974.
- 40 *Addis Zemen*, no. 472, 3 August 1974, 'Appointment of Second Prime Minister and Members of the Cabinet'.
- 41 See, for example, 'The Armed Forces Co-ordinating Committee Issues an Elaboration', *Addis Zemen*, no. 458, 17 July 1974.
- 42 'It is decided that the Ministry of Pen should be Brought under the Control of the Armed Forces Co-ordinating Committee', *Addis Zemen*, no. 482, 15 August 1974.
- 43 'The First Measures of the Armed Forces Committee; the Dissolution of the Crown Council and the Chilot', *Addis Zemen*, no. 484, 17 August 1974.
- 44 'It is Decided that the Lion Bus Company should be Under the Ministry of Finance', *Addis Zemen*, no. 492, 28 August 1974.
- 45 'The Armed Forces Co-ordinating Committee gives an Explanation and Decision Concerning the St. George Brewery and the Prize Trust', *Addis Zemen*, no. 501, 7 September 1974.
- 46 *Ibid.*
- 47 See pp. 71ff.
- 48 'A Chapter in the Struggle', p. 24; and 'Comrade Chairman's Report', *Meskerem*, vol. 8, no. 390.
- 49 *Ibid.*, p. 9.
- 50 'Entire Speech', *The Worker*, vol. 8, no. 388.
- 51 Article 6, Proclamation 1, 1974, and Article 3, Proclamation 2, 1974.
- 52 See particularly the Amharic version of the preamble of Proclamation 2, 1974.
- 53 Article 8, Proclamation 2, 1974.
- 54 Article 3, Proclamation 1, 1974.
- 55 Quite contrary to its earlier decision to retain the Crown under Article 2 of Proclamation 1, 1974, the Derg, on 17 March 1975, abolished the Crown altogether thus opening the way for the continued exercise, by the Derg and its chairman, of the functions of a head of state. (See Article 2 of Proclamation 27, 1975.)
- 56 Article 6, Proclamation 2, 1974.
- 57 Article 5, Proclamation 2, 1974.
- 58 Article 4, Proclamation 2, 1974.
- 59 Article 5, Proclamation 2, 1974.
- 60 Article 6, Proclamation 2, 1975.

- 61 Article 6, Proclamation 1, 1974, and Article 3, Proclamation 2, 1974.
- 62 According to Article 5 (b) of Proclamation 1, 1974, the mandate of the Commission was to improve on Endalkachew's draft constitution and, according to Article 7 (1) of Proclamation 2, 1974, its mandate was to draft a new constitution altogether.
- 63 Article 3 (1) and (3) of Proclamation 12, 1974.
- 64 Article 9 of Proclamation 12, 1974.
- 65 'The Armed Forces Committee gives a Warning Concerning Offices which Intend to Go on Strike', *Addis Zemen*, no. 451, 9 July 1974.
- 66 Article 8 of Proclamation 1, 1974.
- 67 Article 9 of Proclamation 1, 1974.
- 68 'People's Government and the Students' Movement', *Democracia*, no. 8, 5 September 1974, p. 3, 'Some Real Events Indicate that the Government of the Select Officers is Fascistic', *Voice of the Masses*, no. 7, 15 October 1974, p. 6. In the early years, the terms 'Democracia' and 'Voice of the Masses' were popularly used to refer to both the papers and the organizations which produced them; later, however, the producers of *Democracia* became known as EPRP and those of *Voice of the Masses* as AESM.
- 69 See, for example, 'The Messages of Congratulations and Support to the Provisional Military Administrative Council Continue', *Addis Zemen*, no. 509, 18 September 1974.
- 70 'Those who Begged for Bread Suffocated with Tear-gas', *Democracia*, no. 14, 3 November 1974, pp. 1ff.; 'A Fascistic Event that Cannot be Forgotten', *Voice of the Masses*, no. 11, 29 October 1974.
- 71 'An Explanation is Given about Rent of Agricultural and House Tenants', *Addis Zemen*, no. 515, 25 September 1974.
- 72 'Some Real Events Indicate that the Government of the Select Officers is Fascistic', *Voice of the Masses*, no. 7, 1 October 1974, p. 6.
- 73 'Why did the General Strike of Workers Not Succeed', *Voice of the Masses*, no. 7, 1 October 1974, pp. 1-2.
- 74 'Not Possible to Mock the Joint Struggle of the Entire People', *Addis Zemen*, no. 515, 25 September 1974.
- 75 The so-called unit committees were probably a continuation of what I have called 'the unit co-ordinating committees as recognized by the Derg after its establishment'.
- 76 'The Workers of the Cotton Company Refuse to Accept the Decision of CELU', *Addis Zemen*, no. 516, 26 September 1974.
- 77 'News of Struggle', *Democracia*, no. 10, 18 September 1974, pp. 4-5.
- 78 'The Hunting of Progressives', *Democracia*, no. 12, 5 February 1967 (Ethiopian calendar), p. 6.
- 79 'Voice of Blood', *Voice of the Masses*, no. 9, 15 October 1974, p. 6.
- 80 'The Struggle will not Miss its Mark', *Democracia*, no. 16, 21 November 1974, p. 4.

- 81 *Addressed To*, no. 07/06 (a clandestine leaflet of the Army Aviation) cited in 'The Correct Path', *Democracia*, no. 4, 8 August 1974, p. 4.
- 82 'News of Struggle', *Voice of the Masses*, no. 8, 8 October 1974, p. 9.
- 83 'Voice of Blood', *Voice of the Masses*, no. 9, 15 October 1974, p. 6 and 'News of Struggle', *Voice of the Masses*, no. 8, 8 October 1974, p. 9.
- 84 'Hunting of Progressives', *Democracia*, no. 12, p. 6.
- 85 At about the same time there were other political organizations like Abiyot (revolution) but they were more obscure than EPRP and AESM.
- 86 See, for example, 'On the morrow of the celebration', *Democracia*, no. 11, 4 October 1974, p. 1, and 'The Struggle of the Broad Ethiopian people will continue', *Voice of the Masses*, special issue, no number, 13 September 1974, pp. 1ff.
- 87 Democratic rights were indeed provided for in the legislations of the *ancien régime* but their proper implementation was questionable.
- 88 'Let the People's Provisional Government be Established; Down with Military Dictatorship', *Democracia*, no. 13, 26 October 1974, pp. 1ff.; 'An Erroneous Choice Leads in a Dangerous Direction', *Voice of the Masses*, no. 10, 22 October 1974, pp. 1ff.
- 89 'It is Necessary to Distinguish Between Friends and Enemies', *Voice of the Masses*, no. 3, September 1974, p. 3; and 'To Farm Haphazardly is to Breed Weeds', *Democracia*, no. 1, no date, p. 4.
- 90 The word 'Fascist' was used by both groups, and more emphatically by the *Democracia* group, to refer to the Derg's violent reactions to the opposition. Whether it was used in the technical sense, and whether it was an appropriate term, became a matter of debate later on.
- 91 See, for example, Article 6, Proclamation 1, 1974.
- 92 Article 5 (b), Proclamation 1, 1974 and Article 7 (2), Proclamation 2, 1974.
- 93 'The Entire People of Ethiopia will Determine Through Election the Future of Government Administration', *Addis Zemen*, no. 512, 21 September 1974, and 'The Aim of Our Movement is to make the Ethiopian People Self-Governing and Self-Administering', *Addis Zemen*, no. 516, 26 September 1974.
- 94 'The Derg's Aims', *Addis Zemen*, no. 505, 13 September 1974.
- 95 'The Ethiopian Provisional Military Administrative Council Issues a Special Communiqué', *Addis Zemen*, no. 520, 3 October 1974.
- 96 Respectively, the legislations are Proclamations No. 7, 1974; No. 8, 1974; No. 9, 1974 and No. 10, 1974.
- 97 'The Derg Makes an Important Political Decision', *Addis Zemen*, no. 564, 26 November 1974.
- 98 *Ibid.*
- 99 'Unmitigated Fascism is Crowned in Ethiopia', *Democracia*, no. 17, 24 November 1974, p. 2.

- 100 'Additional Explanation Concerning the Important Political Decision', *Addis Zemen*, no. 565, 27 November 1974.
- 101 'None Can Make us Betray our Commitment to the Ethiopian People by Any Means', *Addis Zemen*, no. 563, 24 November 1974.
- 102 The scorn with which Derg members were regarded not only by Gen. Aman Andom, but also by experienced technocrats and intellectuals, for being ill-educated, low-ranking members of the armed forces and the police, has always created a crisis of confidence in them, resulting in distrust between them and these groups.
- 103 Dawit Wolde-Giorgis, *Red Tears*, Red Sea Press, New York, 1989.
- 104 The Derg had committed itself to have the officials tried by a Court of Law, not only in releases to newspapers but also in some of its basic documents like 'Ethiopia First', article 9 of Proclamation 1, 1974, and to a lesser extent in Proclamation 7 to 10, 1974.
- 105 See for example, 'News of Struggle', *Democracia*, no. 12, 15 October 1974, p. 5; and 'The Broad Masses will not Lose their Victory for Ever', *Voice of the Masses*, no. 9, 15 October 1974, pp. 4ff.
- 106 'The First Vice-Chairman makes speeches to Various Military Units', *Addis Zemen*, no. 559, 19 November 1974.
- 107 Dawit Wolde-Giorgis, *Red Tears*.
- 108 *Ibid.*
- 109 'Members of the Armed Forces Take Oath of Office', *Addis Zemen*, no. 571, 4 December 1974.
- 110 'Struggle', *Democracia*, no. 16, p. 4.

#### 4 THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC REFORMS OF 1975

- 1 Individuals close to Endalkachew's cabinet confirm a division of the members of that cabinet between Fabians and Conservatives.
- 2 'The Armed Forces Council Issues a Reminder', *Addis Zemen*, no. 34/498, 4 September 1974.
- 3 See for example, 'The Wealth Usurped from the Poor People Will be Used in the Service of Ethiopia Again', *Addis Zemen*, no. 34/472, 3 August 1974.
- 4 'The Working Broad Masses of Ethiopia, First!', *Democracia*, 2 July 1974, p. 1.
- 5 'All the Ethiopian People Will Determine the Future Government Administration Through their Votes', *Addis Zemen*, no. 34/512, 21 September 1974.
- 6 *Addis Zemen*, cited in 'An Erroneous Choice Leads in a Dangerous Direction', *Voice of the Masses*, no. 10, 22 October 1974.
- 7 'Ethiopian Socialism is Declared', Mimeograph, 20 December 1974.
- 8 'Ethiopian Socialism or Scientific Socialism?', *Voice of the Masses*, no. 19, 27 January 1975.
- 9 'What Kind of Socialism?', *Democracia*, no. 20, 25 December 1974.

- 10 R. Lefort, *Ethiopia: An Heretical Revolution?*, Zed Press, London, 1983, p. 84.
- 11 Individuals closely associated with the Derg confirm this populist tenor of the Derg's debate.
- 12 'A Decision of the Military Government', *Addis Zemen*, no. 34/598, 2 January 1975.
- 13 Article 4 (1), Proclamation 69, 1975.
- 14 Article 14, Proclamation 69, 1975.
- 15 'The Ten-Year Achievements and Future Plans of the Addis Ababa Bank', Archives of the Ethiopian Central Bank, 1974.
- 16 'Decision', *Addis Zemen*, no. 34/598.
- 17 Article 5, Proclamation 68, 1975.
- 18 Article 13, Proclamation 68, 1975.
- 19 Individuals closely associated with the drafting of the policy confirm the procedure adopted by the Derg.
- 20 Article 2, Proclamation 26, 1975.
- 21 Article 3, Proclamation 26, 1975.
- 22 Article 4, Proclamation 26, 1975.
- 23 Preamble to Proclamation 26, 1975.
- 24 Article 2 (2), Proclamation 26, 1975.
- 25 Zewdu Girma Selassie, 'Nationalization of Enterprises in Ethiopia: A Study of Domestic Policy Legislation in Practice', Archives of Law Library, Addis Ababa University, 1978, Appendix.
- 26 Article 3 (2), Proclamation 26, 1975.
- 27 Selassie, 'Nationalization', Appendix.
- 28 Article 6, Proclamation 76, 1975.
- 29 Article 5, Proclamation 76, 1975.
- 30 Article 8, Proclamation 76, 1975.
- 31 Article 2 (2), Proclamation 76, 1975.
- 32 Article 5 (2), Proclamation 76, 1975.
- 33 Article 7, Proclamation 76, 1975.
- 34 Alen Seged Gesese, 'Compensation for Nationalized Foreign-Owned Property in International Law with Particular Reference to Ethiopia', Archives of Law Library, Addis Ababa University, 1984, p. 45.
- 35 Central Statistical Office, Statistical Abstracts.
- 36 Ishetu Chole, 'The Mode of Production in Ethiopia and the Realities Thereof', *Challenge*, 1970, pp. 2–29.
- 37 'Decision', *Addis Zemen*, no. 34/598.
- 38 Article 7, Proclamation 26, 1975.
- 39 *Population and Housing Census: a Preliminary Report*, The Central Statistical Office of Ethiopia, 1984, p. 15.
- 40 *The 1984–94 National Economic Plan*, Archives of the Office of the National Central Planning Committee, 1984.
- 41 Here no distinction is made between individual ownership and what

is called 'rist rights', because the literature on the subject does not sufficiently articulate the difference between the two to warrant their treatment otherwise.

- 42 M. Bizunek and C. C. Mabbs-Zeno, 'The Contributions of the Green Revolution to Social Change in Ethiopia', *North-East African Studies*, vol. 6, no. 3, 1984.
- 43 'The Aims of the Derg', *Addis Zemen*, no. 34/505, 13 September 1974.
- 44 'Ethiopian Socialism is Proclaimed', *Addis Zemen*, no. 34/585, 20 December 1974.
- 45 Article 3 (1), Proclamation 31, 1975.
- 46 Article 7 (1), Proclamation 31, 1975.
- 47 Article 7 (3), Proclamation 31, 1975.
- 48 Article 4 (1), Proclamation 31, 1975.
- 49 Article 10 (1) and 23, Proclamation 31, 1975.
- 50 Article 4 (1), Proclamation 31, 1975.
- 51 Article 5, Proclamation 31, 1975.
- 52 Article 3 (2), Proclamation 31, 1975.
- 53 Article 5, Proclamation 31, 1975.
- 54 Article 8, Proclamation 31, 1975.
- 55 Article 9 (1), Proclamation 31, 1975.
- 56 Article 9 (2), Proclamation 31, 1975.
- 57 Article 12 (2) and (3), Proclamation 31, 1975.
- 58 Article 11 (3), Proclamation 31, 1975.
- 59 *Ibid.*
- 60 Until the Constitution of 1987, the government administration was structured at the *wereda*, *Awraja*, provincial and national levels.
- 61 See for example, 'Teachers, the People and the Students Go Out on Demonstration', *Addis Zemen*, no. 34/650, 5 March 1975; 'Permission Granted to the Broad Masses to Express their Support through Demonstration', *Addis Zemen*, no. 34/650, 5 March 1975; and 'About 80,000 Residents of Addis Ababa Take Part in Demonstrations', *Addis Zemen*, no. 34/651, 6 March 1975.
- 62 'One Does Not Provide Meat Without Knives', *Voice of the Masses*, no. 23, 12 March 1975, pp. 1 and 3ff.
- 63 'Special Issue', *Democracia*, no number, 9 March 1975, pp. 1ff.
- 64 H. Scholler and P. Brietzke, *Ethiopia: Revolution, Law and Politics*, Weltforum Verlag, München, 1976.
- 65 Article 10 (1), Proclamation 31, 1975.
- 66 See, for example, 'The First Chairman Visits The Seminar', *Addis Zemen*, no. 34/630, 8 February 1975; '222 Persons Receive Letters Appointing Them as *Wereda* Administrators', *Addis Zemen*, no. 34/642, 23 February 1975.
- 67 For more detail on the National Development Campaign see chapter 6, Section D.
- 68 'A Chapter in the Struggle', a special issue of the Provisional Military

- Administrative Council for the First Anniversary of the Revolution Day, 12 September 1975, p. 48.
- 69 Ethiopian Democratic Union is a Liberal Party created among the white émigrés in 1975.
- 70 By owner-cultivators is meant poor farmers who had freehold on their plots and it is intended to include those who had first rights over their plots. With the exception of the insignificant areas where what is called 'village ownership' prevailed and where the power of the village as opposed to the individual farmer to transfer land was almost absolute, the power of the individual farmer in 'family ownership' areas to transfer his holding was wide enough to amount to individual ownership.
- 71 Article 5, Proclamation 31, 1975.
- 72 Article 5 and 10 (1), Proclamation 31, 1975.
- 73 Abstract from Survey by Ministry of Land Reform and Administration, in P. Gilkes, *The Dying Lion: Feudalism and Modernisation in Ethiopia*, Davidson Publishing Ltd, 1975.
- 74 See Article 7, Proclamation 76, 1975 regarding surplus appropriation by the upper class in medieval Ethiopia; see D. Crummey, 'Abyssinian Feudalism', *Past and Present*, no. 89, November 1980, pp. 113–38.
- 75 Article 2991, 1960, Civil Code of Ethiopia.
- 76 According to an old employee of the Ministry of Land Reform and Administration, only in one sub-province of Wallega were tenants ever charged as high as 75 per cent of their produce as rent.
- 77 Doctor Taye Gulilat, 'The Tax in Lieu of Tithe and the New Agriculture Income Tax: a Preliminary Evaluation', *Seminar Proceedings on Agrarian Reform*, no. 170. Institute of Development Research, Addis Ababa University, 25 November–5 December 1974.
- 78 Articles 6, 21 and 25, Proclamation 31, 1975.
- 79 Dessalegn Ranhmato, 'Agrarian Reform in Ethiopia: a Brief Assessment', *Proceedings of the Seventh International Conference on Ethiopian Studies*, London. Ed. Sven Rubinson, 1982, p. 594.
- 80 The Central Statistical Office, Statistical Abstracts, 1987.
- 81 Article 27, Proclamation 31, 1975.
- 82 At the time of writing this book (1989) the government has not yet decided whether to settle the nomads or allow them to pursue their time-honoured way of life.
- 83 Article 7, Proclamation 76, 1975.
- 84 Article 4 (3), Proclamation 31, 1975.
- 85 The big commercial farms were not redistributed, but kept as state farms, constituting, according to the 1988/90 Three-year Plan of the Ministry of Agriculture, 29 per cent of the arable land, at the time of writing this book (1989).
- 86 Article 2, Proclamation 31, 1975.

- 87 Article 2 (5), Proclamation 31, 1975.
- 88 Article 8, Proclamation 71, 1975.
- 89 According to the 1988/90 Three-year Plan of the Ministry of Agriculture, based on the 1984/94 Ten-year National Plan, only 1.6 per cent of the arable land is actually collectivized. As a result the government has been forced to continue to grapple with extension services to the millions of petty cultivators all over the country.
- 90 No adequate information has been made available concerning the agencies involved in the drafting of Proclamation 47, 1975, which nationalized urban land and extra houses.
- 91 Article 3 (1) and 13, Proclamation 47, 1975.
- 92 Article 18 (1), Proclamation 47, 1975.
- 93 Article 3 (3), Proclamation 47, 1975.
- 94 Article 11 (1), Proclamation 47, 1975.
- 95 Article 11 (3), Proclamation 47, 1975.
- 96 Article 11 (2), Proclamation 47, 1975.
- 97 Article 5 (2), Proclamation 47, 1975.
- 98 Article 5 (1), Proclamation 47, 1975.
- 99 Article 5 (2), Proclamation 47, 1975.
- 100 Article 12 (1), Proclamation 47, 1975.
- 101 Article 4 (1), Proclamation 47, 1975.
- 102 Article 36 (8), Proclamation 47, 1975.
- 103 Article 36 (2) and (3), Proclamation 47, 1975.
- 104 Since 1975 the rent proceeds have been centralized and each local UDA applies to the central UDA for funds to be expended on local developmental and house repair activities. Usually, they receive about US \$1,000 once in a few years. This has meant a substantial curtailment of their participation in developmental activities.
- 105 Article 36 (1), Proclamation 47, 1975.
- 106 Ideas have been floating around that the shortage in the supply of houses was caused by their splitting up between family members in order to avoid nationalization, by the presence of a substantial number of foreign soldiers, by the immigration of rural people into urban centres and the like. A closer examination of these, however, has demonstrated that they are not adequate explanations for the phenomenon, making the reform and its effects more suspect. The fact remains, nonetheless, that a great shortage in the supply of houses has ensued from the reform leading to waiting lists for over a decade, causing a great deal of social problems like divorced couples having to share the same house, married couples having to live with relations or in single-room hostels, and Ethiopians abroad having to think twice before returning.
- 107 Article 22, 25, and 26, Proclamation 47, 1975.
- 108 Article 23, Proclamation 47, 1975.
- 109 Article 24 (2) and (6), Proclamation 47, 1975.

- 110 Article 32 and 35 (2), Proclamation 47, 1975.  
 111 'Election of Leaders of Co-operative Societies will Take Place Today', *Addis Zemen*, 24 August 1975.  
 112 Article 24, Proclamation 47, 1975.  
 113 *Ibid.*  
 114 Article 24 (2), Proclamation 47, 1975.  
 115 Article 27 (1), Proclamation 47, 1975.  
 116 Article 27 (2) and (6), Proclamation 47, 1975.  
 117 Article 27 (3) and (6), Proclamation 47, 1975.  
 118 Article 24 (1) and (7), Proclamation 47, 1975.

## 5 THE UPSURGE OF POLITICAL ORGANIZATIONS

- 1 J. Markakis and Nega Ayele, *Class and Revolution in Ethiopia*, Red Sea Press, New York, 1986, p. 52.  
 2 *Le Monde*, 6–7 June 1976, cited in *Advocate*, 'Le Monde Interviews EDU's Chairman', *EDU Advocate*, vol. 1, no. 2, August 1976.  
 3 'Who is Behind EDU?' (*Aims and Objectives of EDU is the programme of the organization; it is not dated, formatted in the form of articles, nor has it got page numbers.*)  
 4 *Ibid.*  
 5 'How does EDU Propose to Remove the Derg?', *Programme of EDU*.  
 6 'What are EDU's Plans after it Removes the Derg?', *Programme of EDU*.  
 7 'What does EDU Stand For?', *Programme of EDU*.  
 8 'EDU's Commitment to Land Reform', *Programme of EDU*.  
 9 'Economic Programme', *Programme of EDU*.  
 10 'What is EDU?', *Programme of EDU*.  
 11 'A Message from EDU', *Advocate*, vol. 1, no. 1, December 1975.  
 12 'What is EDU?', *Programme of EDU*.  
 13 'What does EDU Stand For?', *Programme of EDU*.  
 14 'A Message from EDU', *Advocate*, vol. 1, no. 1, December 1975.  
 15 'EDU's Commitment to Land Reform', *Programme of EDU*.  
 16 'How does EDU Propose to Remove the Derg?', *Programme of EDU*.  
 17 'Derg Upsets Ethiopia's Neighbours', *Advocate*, vol. 1, no. 2, August 1976.  
 18 'Confusion and Democracy', *Voice with Afar People*, *Advocate*, vol. 1, no. 2, August 1976.  
 19 'How does EDU Propose to Remove the Derg?', *Programme of EDU*.  
 20 'Opposition and Martial Law', *Africa*, November 1975, cited in *Advocate*, vol. 1, no. 1, December 1975.  
 21 'EDU Helps Defeat Peasant March', *Advocate*, vol. 1, no. 3, September 1976.  
 22 See, for example, 'EDU Forces Engage in Defeating Derg Troops in Many Districts', *Advocate*, vol. 1, no. 4, October–November 1976.

- 23 'AESM is Dismissed From Membership', *Voice of Unity*, April 1978. (*Voice of Unity* is the paper of the Joint Front of Ethiopian Marxist-Leninist Organizations, launched August 1977.)
- 24 Markakis and Ayele, *Class and Revolution*.
- 25 'Where Have We Got To?', *Voice of the Masses*, no. 37, 3 February 1976.
- 26 Markakis and Ayele, *Class and Revolution*, p. 15.
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- 19 Articles 2 (1) and 3, Proclamation 91/1976.
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- 15 *Ibid.*.
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## 9 THE FORMATION OF THE WORKERS' PARTY OF ETHIOPIA

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- 6 *Ibid.*
- 7 Article 8 of the May 1977 Constitution of the Joint Front of Marxist-Leninist Organizations (JFEMLO).
- 8 Article 9 of the May 1977 Constitution of JFEMLO.
- 9 Article 10 (A) of the May 1977 Constitution of JFEMLO.
- 10 Article 8 of the May 1977 Constitution of JFEMLO.
- 11 Appendix of the May 1977 Constitution of JFEMLO.

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- 37 'The Joint Communiqué of the Transitional Period', June 1978, government pamphlet.
- 38 'The Programme of Action for the Transitional Period', June 1978, government pamphlet.
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- 42 'A Proposal', *Revolutionary Flame*, January 1979.
- 43 'The Merger', *Voice of Unity*.

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- 29 Trimberger, *Revolution From Above*, pp. 105 and 106.
- 30 In fact, Marx's exposition of revolution is replete with the notion of how the emergence of a new mode of production gives rise to a new class which leads the revolution and liberates the new and more progressive economic order from the old socio-economic constraints. See for example: K. Marx and F. Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, Rustle, New York, 1963.
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- 32 Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions*, p. 3.
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