PROTEST IN ETHIOPIA

by

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An analysis of "Protest in Ethiopia" has to explore the complex crisis of a Christian feudal Empire, isolated for centuries, in the process of being transformed into a modern pluralistic nation within independent Africa. Many of the old tensions which have woven the Abyssinian world together, as woof and warp, or the centrifugal forces which have strained its unity, survive to this day. But the aspirations of the new generation and the transformation of the African world around are giving them a new dimension. Since 1960 especially the tension between the old and the new is becoming increasingly manifest, creating the kind of situation where all latent dissensions acquire new momentum, threatening to bring about the radical changes from which a new order emerges.

I/ To analyse the situation a brief outline of the traditional forms of protest up to the time of Menelik, or even of the Italian occupation, could be drawn. II/ Then it would be necessary to take stock of the contemporary forms of protest, trying to grasp how, while rooted in the past, they gain a new significance in the present context, which gives them consistence. III/ In conclusion it might be possible to speculate on the eventual interaction of the different forms of protest and the way they might combine or clash in the making of modern Ethiopia.

I. TRADITIONAL FORMS OF PROTEST

A. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

When seen from the outside, the Ethiopian Empire, from the time of Axum to the day of Adowa, may appear to be a homogeneous entity, through its very "otherness" from the world around. Throughout her history Ethiopia was willing to stand united when she had to face a common enemy from outside. But within she has always been a land of contrast, tribal turmoil, religious difference and feudal war: Tigre against Amhara - Gojjam against Begemeder; within Tigre, Agame versus Enderta, Tembien versus Shire. The Emperor himself was a war-lord. His capital was a camp (the origin of the word *katama* which only later came to its meaning of "town") which he moved around the country to quell rebellions or extract the tribute. When Fasilidas fixed his capital in Gondar, the imperial institution lost its grip over the remote provinces of the

South and soon the emperor was but a puppet in the hands of his powerful vassals. Yet one can argue that the continuous intestine tensions - similar to the positive and negative charge within the atom - were the sign of a common consciousness of being Ethiopians. This consciousness would bind together the traditional rivals as soon as an external danger arose, threatening the Abyssinian culture.* The most serious threat, especially from the time of the Gragn in the XVI° c. has always been Islam. Repeatedly in the XVIII° and XIX° c. Islamic hordes renewed their raids towards Gondar from the Sudan. Emperor Yohannes fell at Matema (1889) fighting the Dervishes; and at the turn of the century the Mad Mullah was once more pressing the *Jihad* in the South East across the Ogaden. In the traditional Abyssinian society, although the *Jabertis* - Muslims of old stock - have acquired a kind of *droit de cite*, Islam has often been a way of resisting Amhara assimilation: Wollo and Kaffa illustrate the case. But within the Christian fold itself, the unity of the Coptic Church, which has never been centralized in any way, was constantly strained by the rivalries between the Tigrean North and the Shoan South.

In the midst of feudal turbulances, popular protest rarely took any consistency beyond the stage of popular explosions as those of Gondar in the time of the Mesafint (XVIII° c.). The peasants, so often pressured by their *Ras* and plundered by his rivals, had only one recourse: flight into the remotest areas of their mountains until the storm was over. The armies, traditionally living on the land, often turned into hordes of bandits who, after the battle, took to the hills and continued their trade as professional *Shiftas* (out-laws).

Thus from the XIII° to the end of the XIX° c. the tradition of protest in the Abyssinian society seems to have followed a pattern of feudal rebellions which simply gave the stronger lord a better share in the land, without altering a system from which in fact the victor wanted to profit. The outcrop of the rebellions was the rise of the *Shiftas* as a kind of national institution. But they too had no intention of changing the order - or disorder - from which they made a living. Theodros, who himself acceded to power

* *The term Abyssinian has taken a pejorative shade, although in a historical context it does help to distinguish the traditional Amhara-Tigre culture from the Axunite civilization or from the present-day pluralistic Ethiopia.*

through daring and might, cracked down with all his energy both on *Shiftas* and rebellious *Rases* but he could not lead his country beyond the initial stage of law and order in the feudal status quo. It is from his reign, however, that modern Ethiopia began to rise as an empire in the process of re-unification. From his time on the autonomy of the Nobles declined rapidly, and the days of feudalism were numbered.

Menelik II (1889-1913) doubled the size of the empire by re-conquering the South. He opened the door to modernization. Finally he allowed the Italians to settle on Abyssinian soil. These are three factors of transformation which will eventually breed their own form of tension:
1 - The "troubles" which sporadically erupted between 1890 and 1930 in the newly re-conquered provinces from Harar and Bale to Sidamo and Kaffa were not in fact "rebellions" but rather wars of resistance against invasion and Amharization. By right of conquest the Amhara settled themselves as a landed gentry and restored or established Christianity. The conquest was militarily successful and the assimilation apparently accomplished, but in fact the wounds that were opened then are still oozing.
2 - In Eritrea the Italians implanted their rule, a veneer of their culture, and tried to build an economy linked with their country. Apparently from 1885 to 1935 the relations between the *Nativi* and the *Nazionali* were relatively cordial and easy-going on the whole. The Eritreans, an intelligent and industrious people, drew some benefit from the colonial experience. They enjoyed better education, a certain economic awakening and even an initiation to modern administration and political life. The Italian rule definitely strengthened the Norther-Tigre people in their sense of "otherness" towards the Amhara.*

* *A puzzling question lingers a propos of the survival of Eritrea itself: why did Menelik - a man who was so proud of national autonomy - leave the Italians, whom he had crushed at Adowa (1896) and could have then easily pushed to the sea - why did he leave them carve out their colony from Assab to Agordat, cutting deep into Tigre? No document has been produced that could substantiate the hypothesis, but it may be that for the Amhara emperor it was then the most practical and safest way to solve the problem of Tigre, which he felt he could not absorb <u>en bloc</u> there and then. It was at the same time a way of leaving out the lowlands which had long been an open door to Islamic influence and had just been threatened once more by the assualt of the Dervishes.*

3 - As for modernization, inchoate as it was, it already opened the way to the reforms that Tafari Makonnen would be able to realize, and above all to his very access to power as Haile Selassie I against Lij Eyasu and other potential rivals.

The history of Haile Selassie's ascent to power from the early days of his regency (1916) to his coronation as emperor (1930) is a guide-book to absolutism through a maze of intrigues. Yet, at the threshold of the Italian invasion Ethiopia could still be considered as a feudal empire, where the nobles, on the whole subdued by Haile Selassie's political and military superiority, remained masters in their own provinces, collecting their own taxes and mustering their own armies.

B. THE HIATUS OF THE ITALIAN INVASION

The death-blow to Traditional Ethiopia came with the crushing defeat in 1935-36. The Nobles were discredited as war-lords. Only a few, like Ras Imru, distinguished themselves in the guerrilla warfare which went on under Italian occupation. Others, like Ras Hailu Tekle Haimanot, openly cooperated with the conqueror. Still others, breaking the traditions of chivalry, imitated the Emperor and took refuge abroad, while the majority sunk into insignificance altogether.

The impact of the defeat itself, and the short but determined fascist occupation disrupted the traditional pattern in many ways. For the first time the country was being knitted together by a basic road network, and administration was centralized and organized on modern lines. The Italians endeavoured to curb nascent nationalism by mercilessly mowing down the budding modern *Intelligentsia* which refused to cooperate. They did not succeed however in exploiting the animosity of the regional minorities against Amhara domination. Instead, while attempting to do so they contributed in stirring up a sense of Ethiopian identity against the *Frenji*. The Church, also a citadel of conservatism which suffered systematic persecution and pressure from the 'Romans', remained adamant in its opposition and greatly strengthened the national resistance to the Foreigners.

C. THE RESTORATION

When Haile Selassie entered Addis Ababa on the 5th of May, 1941, he could not simply resume his work where he had abruptly left it only five years before. Although very little seemed to have changed at the surface, traditional Ethiopia

had collapsed. The emperor himself was no longer the same man: his enthusiasm for modernization had been tempered by the bitter experience of defeat. The policy of enlightened despotism which had characterized the first decades of his rule was outdated in the post-war context. But owing to the state of his country, Haile Selassie had little chance to shape up a new policy. The feudal aristocracy had lost all relevance, but the nobles were still there, anxious to re-assess their privileges and influence. The Church offered its traditional loyalty, remaining unaware, however, of the deep transformation which had undermined the world around. The modern elite, an essential link between the old and the new, had been decimated and could not be reckoned as a major instrument in the building up of the new nation. So the Emperor, partly by personal inclination, partly owing to circumstances, considered that his first task was to restore and strengthen his autocracy and to keep in his own hands the evolution of his country from a medieval empire to a modern nation. The aftermaths of the war brought a bulk of immediate problems: There was first the urgent necessity of imposing law and order throughout the territory. In several parts of the Highlands, as Gojjam and Tigre, the patriots were still in control of the *maquis* they had organized against the Italian occupants. It was not always clear whether they had to be counted as loyalists, or as champions of feudal separatism, as vanguard political dissidents, or even simply as professional bandits, like the *Shiftas* of old.

Then there was the problem of foreign interference: the British who had helped liberate the country and restore Haile Selassie, at first considered Ethiopia as a reconquered enemy territory. They gave the emperor the support he needed to reaffirm his authority, but at the same time they curbed his territorial ambitions. Thus they organized Eritrea as an autonomous region under a "caretaker administration". When Trevaskis writes about this experiment:

> *A subservient population, accustomed to hear and obey orders of an alien colonial government, were converted into a people who were learning to think and act for themselves.*[1]

he may be overstating the facts. Yet it is evident that Eritrean separatism was reenforced by the British *interregnum*. Although legally accomplished, the federation with Ethiopia (1952) leading to complete administrative and political assimilation (1962) did not absorb the tension, as the present rebellion, which was already in the making in 1960, clearly demonstrates.

Meanwhile similar difficulties were to persist in the South-East with regards to the Somali minorities and the emergence of the Somali republic.

There was finally the necessity of reorganizing the country on the basis of a centralized modern administration able to foster a dynamic economy. This would mean in particular fiscal and land reforms as well as industrialization, which would require foreign aid and therefore a whole complex of alliances and international involvements.

Haile Selassie, then 48, undertook the bulk of these problems as his personal burden and planned to solve them at his own pace and according to his own vision. His rule would be a subtle blend of open-mindedness to change, paternalistic autocracy, crowned by a jealous sense of tradition. Ethiopia must safeguard the identity she had matured through the centuries. In his endeavour to build a modern nation without upsetting the traditional values of the Ethiopian world, the Emperor would have to reckon more and more with the impatience of the youth he was himself providing with a modern - one could even say alien - education in order to find among them his indispensable cooperators in transforming the country. This new elite turned out to be the most bitter adversaries of his policy of *despotisme eclaire*.

It is against this general background that we will now analyse the main currents of protest in present-day Ethiopia:

A. The separatist rebellions in Eritrea and Ogaden.
B. The peasants' unrest in Gojjam and Bale.
C. The military coup of 1960.
D. The students' riots.

II. PRESENT DAY PROTEST IN ETHIOPIA

A. *SEPARATIST MOVEMENTS* -

1. In the North:

a) The Old - Tigre.

Among the manifestations of regional separatism immediately after the restoration, the revolt of Tigre stands out as a typical recrudescence of the old feudal spirit. Tigre is the land of Emperor Yohannes. His grandson Ras Seyum Menghesha had had an ambiguous attitude vis-a-vis the Italians and the Emperor felt safer to have him kept in confinement

in Addis Ababa. This, the Tigreans, whose patriots had maintained a stubborn pressure on the Italians throughout the occupation, considered as an affront to them all, the *Agazi* ('Free People' from the time of Axum) all the more so since they were now governed by Shoans. The separatist tension which had been simmering since 1941 finally burst out in 1943, under the leadership of Blatta Haile Mariam.

> *Haile Mariam was a provincialist. He claimed he could rebuild Tigre and recapture the glory of the times of Emperor Yohannes. He was little interested in either religion or the British, but he found it convenient propaganda to claim that Shewa was opposed to the Alexandrian connection of the Ethiopian Church, and that the British, one-time allies of Yohannes, would support an independent Tigre.*2

The allusion to the religious stance of the Emperor towards Alexandria and his pursuit of *autocephalia* for the Ethiopian Church underlines the persistence of the traditional rivalry between the Christians of the North (Tigreans centered on Debre Bizen and Debre Dammo) and those of the South (Debre Libanos of Shewa). As for the alleged British support of the rebels, it is difficult to give this any credence, but the emperor made sure that the British were on his side by asking them to help him smash the rebellion and reopen the communications with the North through rebellious Tigre. The fact that Haile Mariam was able to levy 6,000 men, who kept on fighting for three full months, and the fact that Menghesha, Ras Seyum's heir, had been with the rebels, show how strong regionalism still was in the 40's. However, in 1947, Haile Selassie felt that the situation was sufficiently safe to appoint *Leul* Ras Seyum as governor of Tigre, his old fief. Today Tigre is and apparently considers itself an integral part of Ethiopia.

b) The New - Eritrea

The separatist tendency manifested by the Tigrean uprising of 1943 survives in today's Eritrean rebellion. It is no longer Haile Mariam's dream to recapture the glory of the times of Yohannes, but it has its fundamental trait: anti-Amhara opposition. The background of the movement has been sketched above: ethnic and linguistic disparity - Italian rule for 60 years - British administration. But it must also be stressed that a strong minority of the Eritrean population of the Highlands and the overwhelming majority of the lowland populations are Muslims who have always resented both the Amhara domination and their inferior status as Muslims.

The political annexion of Eritrea by Ethiopia - a *fait accompli* Nov. 14, 1962 - especially mortifying after the hope for a home rule of some sort contemplated during the British administration (1941-1952) has crystallized the latent discontent into an open rebellion. The Eritrean Liberation Front, mustering probably as many as 5,000 guerrillas, has been engaged in endemic warfare since 1962. In the minds of many Northerners this is not a mere rebellion, nor even a war of secession, but purely a war of resistance against a political assimilation which they have never acknowledged. That is why it has the sympathy and often the active support of many Christians who throw their lot with the dominant Islamic forces. "Dominant" because the rebels - called *Shiftas* by the government but styling themselves "Patriots" or "Freedom Fighters" - are actively supported by neighbouring Islamic states, and because the Muslims now openly challenge the Christian hegemony over the North. In spite of the military effort of the Ethiopians (10,000 regulars plus police and loyalist militia) and their ruthless method of scorching the land and destroying entire villages (among the Bogos Bilene around Keren and the Kunama in the Western Lowlands) the victory of the central government is not yet in sight. However, it is vital for Haile Selassie to maintain his policy of unification, for a defeat or even a compromise in the North would mean more trouble among other peripheral zones - including the bordering Tigre itself - which are potential areas of dissidence. In fact such a focus already exists in the South: Ogaden.

2. In the South:

a) The Old - Ogaden

"The Old," although plunging its roots down to the Islamic past of Harar (VII° c.) and the saga of the Gragn (XVI°c.) is not so old, in a way, since Ogaden had never been clearly integrated in the Ethiopian Empire before Makonnen, under Menelik II (1887/1890). The border zone between Somalia and Ethiopia and its water holes have always been a source of bitter rivalry. As for the nomads who roam the semi-desert steppes, they consider themselves as Somali and nothing else, refusing to be integrated in the structure of a modern state, be it Ethiopia or Somalia. After World War II their territory was restored to Ethiopian administration by the British only in 1948. In 1964 Muktal Dahir, one of the leaders of the Ethiopian Somali, who claimed a following of 12,000 guerrillas, stated: "My people are under no one's jurisdiction and take orders from no one but me. We have no intention of observing any cease-fire. Our fight with Ethiopia has nothing to do with Somalia."[3]

b) The New - Ogaden

Yet the rebellion which broke into open warfare in February/March 1964 was far more than a tribal affair. It was backed by Somali armed support and fuelled by Somali nationalism from across the border where the newly constituted Republic (1960) was dreaming of a Greater Somalia which would include chunks of Kenya plus Djibouti and Ogaden itself. The tension eased off only when Muhammad Ibrahim Egal became prime minister in July 1967. But the centrifugal tension of Ogaden is still there and quite active, with the threat of contaminating the predominantly Muslim plateau of Harar - of old the Emirate of the Gragn - and the upper Bale province (Muslim Galla), itself a source of trouble owing to the land question. In fact the Somali movement has recently surfaced in the news again by taking the bold initiative of transforming itself into "The Ethiopian National Liberation Front". This is how a certain Ali Baghdadi presents the new venture:

> *When the European colonial governments agreed to divide Africa among themselves in the Berlin Agreement of 1885, they made Ethiopia a local base and a small partner and guardian of their illegal interest in the Eastern section of the Black Continent. As a result of this collaboration the Ethiopian puppet emperor extended his corrupt and suppressive rule to neighbouring lands. The neighbouring African peoples whose countries were usurped by the Ethiopian ruler were denied independence and the preservation of their own identity and language. The oppressive backward reactionary futile system continues to exist to this day. However, the European powers were replaced by U.S. imperialism and its off-shoot, Israel, which built military bases to protect their economic and political interests.*
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> *For many decades the many peoples and nationalities suffering from this oppressive rule have revolted in defense of their freedom and their right to self-determination. The disunity and lack of coordination was due to the contradictions created by the reactionary authorities ... Now the Front for the Liberation of Occupied West Somalia has taken the initiative to unite all groups which are opposing the corrupt government. In a national convention held secretly in Ethiopia on June 27, 1971, unity among the different groups representing the different nationalities in the empire was considered to be necessary to secure victory. The Front for the*

Liberation of Occupied West Somalia's name was changed to the "Ethiopian National Liberation Front". The aim of the new organization is to topple the reactionary dictatorship sponsored by the U.S. and Israel, to liquidate all foreign bases, to eliminate economic, political and cultural influence of Western Imperialism and to establish a new, modern democratic republic based on industry and science.[4]

It is still a little too early to say whether the movement has progressed much beyond the initial enthusiasm reflected by the above piece of rhetoric. Leaving aside, therefore, the perspective opened by the would-be Ethiopian National Liberation Front, it is easy to perceive the connection which could be established between the Eritrean and the Ogaden rebellions through pan-Islamism. This, however, does not seem to have had any actual influence so far on either front, owing partly to the change in attitude of the Somali government (1967), and more recently of the Khartoum government (1971), but mainly owing to the regionalist character which both uprisings present. Even so the potential threat of an Islamic vice biting in from the North and from the South, with the pressure of the surrounding Islamic states behind it is enough to make the highland Christian Ethiopians nervous.

B. THE LAND QUESTION - REBELLIONS IN GOJJAM AND IN BALE

In Ethiopia over 90% of the population are employed in agriculture or animal husbandry, in one way or another. 70% of the G.N.P. accrue from their activity. But the country, which depends essentially on the progress of agriculture for its development, is plagued with a maze of land tenure systems among the most complicated, inefficient and unfair on the planet.

With daring oversimplification one could say that there are two fundamental principles, which support a double pattern of land tenure, clearly distinct in theory, but no longer so clearly distinguishable in a number of concrete situations: 1 - The first principle is that the land as such, - the whole country - is the property and dominion of the Emperor (or, in former days, of the ruler, *ras* or lesser noble, who could assert his independence). He owns and distributes land as he pleases (and this can hardly be taken as a 'historical present'). This granting of land will generate the *gult*-tenure, as explained below.

2 - Coexisting with the dominion right, we find a second fundamental principle. It is rooted in the concept of the village as the territory of a kinship group (allowing for fictive relationship granted to strangers who settle there). Each member of the village - male or female - has a right to his or her share of the village land; this is his or her *rest* or inheritance. The concrete result is inevitably the parceling up of the land into tiny plots, condemning the peasants to a mere subsistence economy.

1. Conflict of two fundamental rights: interference of the *gult* system with the *rest* system.

Etymoligically '*gult*' means 'gift', gracious reward. Its foundation is the basic right of dominion of the Emperor, who may keep for himself or grant to whomever he pleases the *usus fructus* of a land, for instance as a reward for military or administrative services to the Crown. In theory a land received as *gult* is not hereditary, and therefore cannot constitute a patrimony. But in practice most of the *gult*-land received by individuals or by the Church has eventually been transformed into some kind of *rest*, by the law of the strong. This transaction has given birth to the hybrid form of *resta-gult*. It is significant that the nearest term for 'landlord' in Amharic is precisely *gultagna*: 'the one who holds a gult,' the *gult* being the only way whereby a large estate could be acquired by one single individual. Another important notion linked with the attributions and prerogatives of the *gult*-holder is that the landlord, while exempt from tax on his own *gult*, was in charge of collecting the taxes in his fief, and was entitled to the *corvees* which he would deem appropriate for the common good.

Historically, up to 1935 at least, this kind of *gult*-grant by the Emperor was common. Notably it created a real social revolution in the Southern and Eastern provinces under Menelik II (1889-1913) when the Amhara and Amharized Galla conquered the South. Menelik's soldiers were granted extensive stretches of land and, at the same time, the Amhara administrators, as a new gentry, were entrusted with the levying of the taxes and the rights of *corvee* over the annexed territories. Thus wherever they established themselves, they superimposed their land-tenure system and evinced Sidamo or Kaffa, Arusi or Borana from their tribal land.

The overall result of this feudal evolution is that the arable land in Ethiopia today is possessed in the following way: 10% by small land owners; 28% by the Church; the rest, 62%, by the nobility, with the lion's share going to the

Imperial family.[5] The big land owners are absentees who live on the rents paid by their tenants or share-croppers, which may amount to as much as 75% of the crop. Besides, as the supply of labour is plentiful, the greed of the land owner sometimes renders the stability of his tenants very precarious.

Yet the peasants' rebellions - so far at least - have not been triggered by this system of exploitation, but indirectly by the efforts of the central government to redress the abuse of the *gult* system. Their root is to be found in the series of fiscal reforms initiated in 1941 as a prerequisite to land reform as such.

2. The fiscal reform and centralization of the revenues.

From the abolition of the *cotbrrd* (1941) and the land proclamation of 1944 to the decree of 1956 on land tax and the fiscal amendment of 1964 which finally constituted the decisive step towards unification and centralization of the land tax, the government of Addis Ababa laboriously endeavoured to suppress the feudal system of *fermage* which had traditionally fed the Emperor's, the Nobles' and the Church's treasuries. But nowhere, and in Ethiopia less than anywhere else, can a reform of this magnitude be achieved by a stroke of the pen. To bring about the desired up-dating was a feat far beyond the ability of an inadequate and remote central bureaucracy. The actual result was that the government instituted and did its best to collect new land taxes, while the former holders of the *gult* right continued, also to the best of their ability and often more successfully, to grab as much as possible of their former taxes and revenues. This indeed could go on because the central administration was not able to tightly control the local administration or the traditional relationship "landlords/peasants," and because the peasants themselves did not grasp immediately the bearing of the fiscal reform, if they ever heard of it at all. They simply realized that the taxes were becoming heavier and heavier. When the agricultural income tax (1968) was instituted, it strained to the limit the patience as well as the purse of the peasants, who suffered the increasing pressure of the new fiscal system, without always being free from the claims of their traditional patrons. Revolt flared up in Gojjam, an old autonomous fief in Amhara country, and in Bale, a conquest of Menelik on the periphery of the Empire.

3. The Gojjam Rebellion (1968)

Gojjam is one of the old kingdoms of Medieval Abyssinia. It is Amhara country, but proud of its distinctiveness from

Shoa or from Begemeder. Protected by the Nile's formidable canyon, its geographical isolation gave it an autonomy that the Italian occupation itself was not able to alter. When Haile Selassie returned from exile, his rule was perceived by the traditional Gojjami in the fashion of a medieval suzerainety rather than of a modern centralized state. The episodes of the liberation of Gojjam demonstrate this strikingly, with Lij Belai Zelleka, the patriot leader of the Gojjam *maquis* taking orders from 'his' Lord, Leul-Ras Hailu (although an avowed *collaborateur* himself) in the very presence of the returning Emperor flanked by General Wingate. The feudal spirit persists to this day among the very conservative Gojjami peasantry, and it provides a good deal of the background for the troubles on tax and land questions.

The first waves came in the 40's when the peasants, supported by their landlords and clergy (who were particularly interested in the status quo) successfully opposed passive resistance to the collecting of the land tax by the central government. When, in 1951, and again in 1962, Addis Ababa, in view of more substantial land reforms, tried to send land assessors, and when in 1968 it tried to enforce the new agricultural income tax, the smouldering fire of revolt suddenly flared up, in a typical mood of *Jacquerie:*

> *When the central government sent tax assessors in May 1968 across the formidable Blue Nile gorge that more than symbolically separates Gojjam from the rest of Ethiopia, the Gojjami, who at first had ignored the central government's announcement of the new tax measures, refused to allow them on their land. Large land owner, small land owner, and tenant farmer alike resisted the government agents. At issue was the threat to communal land ownership. By accepting government assessment of land taxes the Gojjami realized that they would become vulnerable to government reclassification of all land ownership. Thus a significant confrontation developed between Addis Ababa and one of the provinces over the basic question of expanding state authority.*
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> *...Beginning in May 1968, the movement spread through five of the seven sub-provinces of Gojjam. Local village leaders who served as members of assessment teams were shot, and violence continued unchecked throughout Eastern Gojjam. Neither the Emperor nor his ministers of defense, finance, and interior were willing to challenge the Gojjami, whose rebelliousness against all government had*

served 30 years earlier as a catalyst for the Ethiopian patriots' resistance against the Italians.

After the rebels, who had formed a loose organization of perhaps 3,000 members, threatened to destroy the Blue Nile bridge, the only link across the Blue Nile gorge between Gojjam and the rest of Ethiopia, unless the assessors and the governor were removed from their province, the Emperor ordered 900 troops of regular army into Gojjam. His reasons were twofold: to protect the important bridge, and to prevent the farmers' tax rebellion from turning into a more dangerous political movement. To mollify the rebellious Gojjami, the Emperor called a temporary halt to tax assessment.

...Attempts by the government to convince the Gojjami to pay their taxes by sending prestigious churchmen from Addis Ababa failed, because the Gojjami clergy themselves were averse to the taxation of the land and produce that provided their livelihood. Moreover, the government was unwilling to send in more troops. It found itself in an increasingly difficult predicament, for army officers indicated in no uncertain terms that they could not open fire against their fellow Christians. The Gojjami stubbornly stood their ground, and the Emperor permanently halted tax assessment in Gojjam and dissolved the assessment teams. No arrests were made (and the governor was removed - Aug. 3, 1968).

...Thus the government proved to be powerless in its attempt to collect taxes. Despite the fact that the Emperor had placed his authority behind the tax reforms, the government ran into a situation in which it was opposed at the most basic level by all the traditional elements of a province, spontaneously and successfully mobilized to combat the kind of administrative modernization that is advocated not only by the Emperor but also by his severest critics among the developing political opposition.[6]

The revolt in Gojjam therefore presents a typical case of peasant conservatism and of Ethiopian regionalism. There is little trace here of any "class consciousness" on the part of the peasants, who stand as Gojjami with their nobles and priests against Addis Ababa in much the same way as the Chouans of Vendee stood against the Paris of Robespierre. Unconvinced that the central government is able or willing to do anything for them, feeling on the contrary that their traditional way

of life is going to be disrupted by governmental interference, the Gojjami simply want to be left alone.

4. The Bale Rebellion (1968)

Bale, a backward and neglected Southern province, peopled by Islamized Galla neighbours of the Somali tribesmen of the Ogaden, but themselves high-plateau cultivators, had also its uprising in the spring of 1968.

It would be erroneous, however, to associate it with the Gojjam revolt. Here again the peasants refused to pay taxes to the central government and to have their land surveyed. But they did so mainly because they felt exploited and frustrated both by the local (Christian) Amhara administration and landlords, and by the central Amhara government. Taxes were collected to no profit whatsoever for their own community.

The repression also has been very different: here the army, as Menelik's soldiers less than a hundred years before, sided wholeheartedly with the government, and the rebellion was energetically subdued. Typically, however, very little publicity, either in or outside Ethiopia, has been given to a conflict which reveals the exasperation of the non-integrated populations of the South. Even locally, silence and submission seem to be the rule. Meanwhile *Shiftas* are still in the mountains...

In Bale we have the reaction of a non-Amhara ethnic group - and of an underdeveloped peasantry - refusing to be pressured by the conqueror who invaded their land: such a feeling could indeed be radicalized much more readily than the 'traditional' Gojjami regionalism. But this brief analysis of the two contemporary peasant revolts in Ethiopia shows how difficult it would be to create a united peasant movement in the nation as a whole.

C. *THE MILITARY COUP D'ETAT: December, 1960*

Speaking about present-day protest in Ethiopia, one would feel inclined to take December, 1960, as 'the' landmark. In a way it is a convenient and fairly accurate choice. But as such, the coup may have been more important owing to the negative reaction caused by its failure: caution on the part of would-be conspirators, disappointment among the liberals, and above all, *durcissement* of the Old Guard and of the Emperor himself. Will history one day speak of "*The Decembrists*" of Addis Ababa?

A rough parallelism between December 14, 1960 in Addis Ababa and December 14, 1825 in St. Petersburg could indeed be established: as the *Decembrists*, the young officers of the Imperial Guard were the new elite of the military caste, smart young men with liberal ambitions, impatient with the backwardness of their country and the inefficiency and corruption of bureaucratic autocracy. As the *Decembrists* again, **the conspirators of Addis Ababa**, although much better prepared, lacked revolutionary professionalism. They overlooked the importance of popular support and neglected to infiltrate the populace. In both cases the troops themselves were left out all together, so much so that they were not aware at first that they were engaged in a rebellion. Once sparked, the revolution would spread by itself. In words practically borrowed from Muraviov or Pestel, Brigadier General Menghistu, commander of the Guards, told the students (Dec. 14th): "once we start the fire, it will burn on by itself. Then we will have doneour part"7. Actually the populace remained more passive even in Addis Ababa than in St. Petersburg, and the country overwhelmingly stood behind the Emperor, especially once it became clear that he was in control again.

As for Haile Selassie, deeply shaken by this unexpected treason where his own son might have been involved, he reacted in much the same way as Nicholas: from then on he would have to safeguard his autocracy, even at the cost of falling under the paralysing influence of the reactionaries who had proved to be his real allies. Thus December 1960 is *'the' crisis* - in the original Greek sense of the word - which revealed the chasm between the old and the new, and the Emperor found himself trapped on the side of the old.

One substantial difference seems to exist, however, between the military in present-day Ethiopia and the Tsarist army after 1825. The political stamina of the Ethiopian military, rooted in its long tradition of political arbiter, is far from de-fused. The warriors of Abyssinia always played a determinant role in the balance of power. Besides, in the days of old, the loyalty of the troops were to 'their' Lord, and everything finally depended on 'his' loyalty as a vassal to the Emperor, the supreme warlord. To mention only recent history: Theodros, Yohannes, Menelik and Tafari himself rose to power and asserted their supremacy mainly because of the military support they could muster. Even today the modern army of Ethiopia, reorganised after World War II on a national basis and technically divided into the different armed forces, may still retain something in common with the feudal allegiance to the commander, especially if he belongs

to an ancient family. Haile Selassie is more careful than ever to counter-balance the might of one Corps by the might of another, and to play the old game of *shum-shir* (promote-demote) in the appointments to key positions. For an outsider it seems clear that since 1960 "the military" (including a strong police force) is faithfully supporting the Regime, although from time to time rumors of plots, house-arrests, or the news of the execution or mysterious disappearance of some high-ranking officer may filter through. But even for anyone who may have an inside experience of the situation, it probably remains very difficult to assess how much personal ambition or rivalry, as in the days of old, or how much political commitment and genuine patriotism is at work, and to which intent, behind the loyalist stand of the most disciplined, the most modern and the most powerful institution in Ethiopia today.

D. THE STUDENTS

All the categories of protest surveyed so far keep a certain relationship with the traditional forms of tension in the Ethiopian world. In fact some of them are still purely traditional (Tigre, Gojjam). The students' unrest, on the contrary, is a brand new form of protest, for the good reason that the academic institution is a very recent creation in Ethiopian society. The schooling of the young in traditional Ethiopia was the task of the Church and, apart from the children of the Nobility endowed with private preceptors, only the young men destined to the service of the Church had any chance to learn how to read and write, and very little chance of going much beyond. Menelik opened the door to modern education and founded the first "government school" in Addis Ababa, in 1908. But it is Haile Selassie who really gave impetus to scholarization and higher education. In 1929 he opened the "Tafari Makonnen" secondary school in Addis Ababa, and in 1947 the "University College". Until 1966 he held the portfolio of education minister, doing his utmost, in his own way, to promote schooling at all levels. His education policy had a double goal: a) to foster national unity through Amharization and the inculcation of "a national awareness superseding strong regional, ethnic and religious loyalties";[8] b) to provide the State with the qualified modern elite needed for its bureaucracy (and eventually for its technical development). Although Ethiopia is still among the most backward countries in the world as far as literacy goes[9] the effort has been partly successful. Ethiopia has a rapidly growing proportion of educated citizens.

According to Hess[10], by 1969 about 15,000 Ethiopians (on 22 to 24 million) had completed their secondary or higher education. The global student population was some 35,000 in secondary education and 3,000 in higher education at home for 1,500 abroad. Half a million pupils were attending 1,000 primary schools throughout the country.

However, the educational effort remains only partly successful. If the program of Amharization and national upbringing is on its way - by nature a slow process - the ambition of the Emperor to use the educated elite as the instrument of progressive modernization according to 'his' views seems gravely compromised. On the one hand, except for a thin minority, education has not opened up the way to economic and social promotion, to the students' bitter disappointment; on the other hand, it has alienated the youth from their tradition and turned them into rootless people in their own society.

1. Economic Bottleneck

A part of the *Intelligentsia* has indeed been absorbed in the administrative cadres or liberal professions. Some are even integrated in the "Establishment", often through nepotism rather than through personal competence. But even among the most successful, many feel the frustration of working under officials of the old school who distrust them and resent their new ways. Many others have abandoned their dreams of reform and progress and have philosophically accepted the rules of the game imposed by the bureaucratic hierarchy.

Besides, education developed for the sake of bureaucracy cannot guarantee a white collar career to the bulk of students whom a lagging economy is unable to employ. This may affect only a few university graduates, but it strikes an overwhelming majority of the "half-baked" intellectuals, especially the flood of high school drop-outs who will not go back to the plough and have no competence to take the jobs sometimes filled by foreigners (e.g. Indian, Filipino or Peace Corps teachers, Italian technicians, etc.). Ethiopia offers a tragic example of a modern educational policy inadapted to the needs of an underdeveloped country.

2. Cultural Alienation

The other aspect of the failure, cultural alienation, may be worse still. It may not be so obvious in the upper

circles of the society, but it is a daily encounter in the small towns throughout the country and above all in the slums of Addis Ababa or Asmara. The "students" have been educated in a modern way, that is, they have tried hard to absorb elements of western culture which most of the time they have been unable to relate to their traditional background. They reject that background: the Church, the strict stratification of status, the family bondage. On the other hand, the traditional society around them remains unconvinced about the superiority they claim, especially since education does not provide them with the economic affluence which could buy them respect. Rejected by the traditional world he has come to despise, unable to insert himself in the modern world which considers him unfit, left to his dream of changing a system which he considers venal and obsolete, the Ethiopian "student" is the prototype of the malcontent ripe for radicalization. If he is still in school he lives with the fear of failure; if he has left school, he still labels himself a "student," unable to find where he belongs. It is with this background of resentment in mind that the students' protest has to be assessed.

3. The Evolution of a Crisis

The student world had gradually grown from a tiny nucleus of privileged youth in the 40's to a sizeable minority of students who were coming of age, chafing under the paternalistic supervision of the Emperor in the late 50's. As their intellectual outlook broadened, the problems discussed in students' circles evolved from matters of internal discipline to national and international issues. But it is the Coup of 1960 which spurred the student world to political activism. The students had no direct part in organizing the Coup, but the majority of them gave it their enthusiastic moral support.

1962 - After the Coup the government tried to channel the students' energies into constructive cooperation: through the National Service each student would contribute a year of teaching in some provincial high school. The scheme would allow the government to step up the rate of education in the secondary sector. The results, however, were not quite attuned to the government's expectations: the "servicemen," who resented this interruption in their studies, contributed to the radicalization of the secondary sector, and created an efficient network of student intelligence all over the country.

By 1965 "the students" could be considered as a new political force in Ethiopia. In that year their opposition to the government, which had been highly rhetorical and rather

disconnected so far, crystallized on the land question. The Emperor had finally decided to tackle the vital issue of the relationship "landlord/tenant" and had put a bill to that effect before Parliament. Parliament sat discussing the bill, which as a matter of fact they found inadequately prepared, a very good pretext to cover their stubborn antagonism of landowners to any kind of land reform.
- *February 1965*: The students for the first time manifested their political vitality by organizing a demonstration in front of the House of Parliament, launching the slogan: *The land to its tiller*. The police herded them back to campus without further incident.
- *April 1967*: The students organized a street demonstration protesting the violation of their constitutional rights (art. 45): free speech, free press, right of peacefully gathering and of forming an independent union. This time the government, reacting vigourously against "those trouble makers," had the Army occupy the campus.
- *March 1968*: On the occasion of the bill on the agricultural income tax (which created trouble in Gojjam and Bale) the students, afraid to challenge the government directly on the touchy issue, chose to vent their anger by picking on a miniskirt fashion show on campus organized by an American teacher. Miniskirts were the symbol of foreign depravation corrupting traditional dress and customs. In fact the target behind it was the U.S. involvement in Ethiopian affairs and the support given by the U.S.A. to the Regime. The demonstration successfully turned into a proper riot with cars burned and windows smashed.

Meanwhile in the provinces the high school and secondary school population had caught the virus and were using all possible pretexts (low marks at examinations, discrimination, immorality of foreign teachers, school fees etc.) to turn them into protest and violence. In 1968/69 trouble spots were spread from Addis Ababa to Nazareth, Soddo, Debre Brehan (one dead), Dessie and Bahar Dar, to mention only the places where actual rioting took place.
- *March 1969*: Trouble again disrupted the studies. A long list of complaints, going from restriction of academic liberty to the scandalous expenditure of foreign embassies, was circulated. The police arrested truck-loads of students, most of whom were taken to Sindafa, 35 miles north of the capital.
- *April 1, 1969*: In the course of these rides, one student fell to his death. This accident was the start of a noticeable shift in the sympathy of the populace, which so far had been strongly pro-Haile Selassie and hostile to the students whom they condemned as a bunch of spoiled *privilegies* who

had nothing to do but create trouble. Zewde Demeke's funeral gave occasion to a procession where the students were no longer alone.

- *December 28, 1969* (ahead of the ritual Spring riots): Trouble erupted with the mysterious murder of a student leader, Tillahun Gizaw. The students, unconvinced by the official version of the tragedy, snatched the body and took it to the campus to perform an autopsy. Body Guard broke in, invaded the campus, and officially five students died in the ensuing raid. Reliable inside sources, however, quote a dozen fatalities or more and scores of wounded among the students trapped inside the university.

- *May 1971*: Again the endemic trouble reappeared, but this time the circumstances were more favourable: the slow process of the radicalization of the populace was beginning to pay off. In Parliament the bill on land tenure was stuck once more by the patent conservatism of both Chambers, where a small minority was voicing its indignation for the first time. The cost of living was going up. The price of *tief* (basic cereal) and of butter had doubled within a few months - some say owing to market manipulations on the part of profiteers. For the first time a general strike by drivers paralysed public transportation. The drivers' salaries went up, and so did the bus fares. The students took upon themselves to make the ticket collectors refund the extra charge to the passengers. A press release dated May 26, 1971, reported:

> *Eleven secondary schools in Addis Ababa were closed yesterday because of student unrest which has reportedly led to arrests and serious injuries in a series of sporadic incidents... The secondary school pupils have been roaming the city in groups over the last few days throwing stones at buildings and buses and smashing windows as a sign of public protest against sharp increase in the price of food and public transport.*[11]

In fact, trouble was spreading from the students to the mass of the population, and for the first time since the mob riotings in XVIII°c. Gondar, the *tera saw*, the ordinary man, was reacting at least in the capital.

All the while, from the early 50-s, the Ethiopian students abroad, either in Europe or in America, have become more and more outspoken in their attacks on the government and even on the person of the Emperor. These attacks may damage the international prestige of Haile Selassie, but they have an immediate impact on the situation at home only if

their authors, returning to Ethiopia, have the courage to stick to the convictions they expressed while abroad. On the other hand, however, the students' unions abroad - *ESUE* (Ethiopian Students' Union in Europe) and *ESUNA* (- in North America) - with their efficient organization and large following, provide their members with a sense of solidarity and commitment, and integrate them into the wider sphere of international movements.

There has been one peculiar exception in the concert of dissent: the Eritrean students at home, and especially the students at the University of Asmara (chartered in June 1969). Although the Eritrean students are definitely as politically minded as their Ethiopian colleagues (in Addis Ababa as abroad the Eritreans are among the most active and influential), at home they have made a point not to get involved, proclaiming that "all this was an Ethiopian problem, and therefore no concern of theirs..." The recent change in attitude towards the E.L.F. on the part of the Ethiopian student will probably affect the Eritrean isolationism.

To sum up the evolution of student protest in Ethiopia: From a tiny loosely-organized group in the early 50's, with a heteroclitic array of complaints, the student body has now grown into a nation-wide, politically minded and determined force. Their interest in the affairs of the country, rather rhetorical at first, is now much more to the point and concentrates effectively on vital issues such as political liberty, land reform and unemployment. For a long time they had been an isolated minority of privileged youth for whom the populace had little sympathy; now they are apparently beginning to create contact with the urban masses at least. Finally from the narrow horizon of the University College the students' movement has grown to a full size union with international connections.

The escalation of the protest has not been only in terms of street disturbances, but more significantly in terms of radicalization. On December 14, 1960, the students gave their support to the revolt "provided this was not a military coup".[12] Today only a minority among them think about Ethiopian progress in terms of evolution rather than revolution. It is not clear, however, whether all the young radicals realize the implications of their stand as far as traditional Ethiopia is concerned, or whether they are aware of the amount of work and dedication involved in the transformation they advocate. One thing they seem to have understood: students may riot, but alone they do not make a revolution. It remains to be seen whether the students' protest could be the

catalyst which would radicalize the different brands of protest surveyed here.

III. CONFLUENCE OR DIVERGENCE OF PROTEST

All the manifestations of protest listed above have only one thing in common: they all reject the autocracy of the Emperor. But the motive and the extent of that rejection vary to a degree which mightprevent any effective coalition of the forces at work.

A. THE OLD:

Some forms of protest may be considered as reactionary manifestations of "tribal" pluralism. The revolt in Tigre was a desperate outburst of traditional rivalry of Tigre against triumphant Amhara. It is probable that some forces at work in the Eritrean rebellion are still inspired by that traditional spirit. The peasant rebellion in Gojjam was also definitely regionalist and regressive. In all those cases of revolt against Amhara central power, apparently steeped in ethnic antagonism, there is, however, an element of economic protest: the exploited against the exploiting, and therefore, apossibility of drawing the common denominator of these conflicts in terms of class analysis.

The case of the Bale uprising seems much clearer, and it may be taken as symptomatic of the latent tensions among all the Southern populations. The first result of a land reform, however moderate - such as the one envisaged in the bill now on the rack in Parliament - would be to weaken and even to upset the traditional Amhara domination over those populations and therefore might immediately endanger national unity. But if the Bale revolt can be assimilated in some ways to an anti-colonialist uprising, it is all the more difficult to see how it would serve the nationalist cause in Ethiopia.

The revolt in Eritrea and in Ogaden are avowed separatist movements. The revolt in Ogaden, however, has some affinity with the regionalist conservatism of Gojjam, if we judge it in the light of Muktal Dahir's declaration [13]. Behind both revolts stand the ethnic and religious grievances of the Muslims, who find a ready ally in the militant pan-Islamism of neighboring Arab nations.

But if

> ...*the Arab supporters and the Moslem leaders of Eritrea tend to make statements which make operations in the territory appear like an Islamic crusade*[14]

the Eritrea Liberation Front has also been anxious to profess its non-sectarianism in order to keep its Christian supporters and to avoid alienating the radicals:

> *After the Islamic summit in Rabat (Oct. 1969) the E.L.F. denied that it was among the nine movements which published a separate [pan-Islamic] statement... The denial said the movement's leaders "also strongly condemn support for our struggle on sectarian grounds. The struggle led by our front is a national struggle with humanitarian aspects. Moslems and Christians alike are participating in the struggle.*[15]

If the Bale peasantry (Islamized Galla) may be drawn one day to join forces with the Ogaden rebels on the ground of their common faith - a phenomenon akin to what the Gragn achieved in the XVI°c. - it is clear on the contrary that the Gojjami peasants would be the first to unite with the Shoans and the Tigre against any Islamic threat from Eritrea or from the South.

All the cases mentioned so far constitute pieces of a puzzle which remains difficult to assemble. They have a common hue: struggle against economic exploitation. But their angles of regionalism or religious distinctiveness prevent them from falling into place as one common design. The overall and major obstacle for all the above forms of protest to come together as one cohesive force is that they are still too deeply ingrained in the traditional pattern of protest and weighed down by conservatism, be it religious or ethnic.

B. THE NEW - THE STUDENTS:

1. The Students and the Eritrean Liberation Front

If we consider the students' movement in itself, that is, in the convictions and attitudes of the bulk of its members, we can say that it is essentially nationalist, or rather pan-Ethiopian, with a growing tendency toward radicalism. Inspired by the African upsurgence and proud to see their capital as the center of O.A.U., the students, until recently at least, had shown little sympathy for separatism under whatever guise it came.

But taken in the wider context of present-day protest, the students' movement has had to accomodate itself to the separatist drive of the E.L.F., its most powerful potential ally against the present regime. The relations "students/ E.L.F." follow a very intricate progression, whose main stages so far may be outlined as follows:
- From the beginning the students have approved of the E.L.F. in as far as it constitutes the major challenge to Haile Selassie's hegemony. Yet until less than a year ago most of them rejected and emphatically condemned the separatist stand of the rebels. This actually caused considerable friction among the students themselves and led, for instance, the Eritrean students in North America to form their own union, the Eritrean Youth League. As late as March 1970, a well-informed source could write:

> *Just how far radical students have formal links with the ELF is not clear. What they have in common is opposition to the present Ethiopian regime, which they condemn as feudal. The hijacking, in August 1969, of an Ethiopian plane which was forced to land in Kartoum, was engineered by six students from Haile Selassie University and an Ethiopian government official. Commenting on the incident the ELF said: 'The effect of our struggle for freedom has not been confined to the Eritrean people but has also been the driving force behind the Ethiopian people, so that they may rise and attack the dictatorial imperialist regime*[16].

At the time this could sound like boastful propaganda, but since then the situation has evolved considerably. The Ethiopian Students' Union in Europe - in West Berlin, August 1971 - followed by their counterpart in North America - at their 19th congress, Los Angeles, August 1971 - have passed almost identical resolutions approving self-determination for Eritrea "UP TO AND INCLUDING INDEPENDENCE". The European Union apparently executed their "about-face" in a crisp and determined style. In America on the contrary the resolution was adopted at the end of a discussion which could be called exhaustive in more than one sense, and which resulted in a painful split among the student leaders.

The Los Angeles resolution bore its first fruits five months later at the conference of Washington D.C. where the delegates of the E.L.F. sent to plead the cause of Eritrea to the United Nations met the executive council of ESUNA. The following joint communique was issued, on the 24th of December:

At the invitation of the executive council of ESUNA, the delegations of the peoples popular Liberation Forces (ELF) - comrades: Osman Saleh Sabbe, Woldeab Wolde Mariam and Taha Nur and the coordinating committee of Eritreans for Liberation in the United States and Canada met and discussed on issues relevant to the heroic struggles of the peoples of Eritrea and Ethiopia. The three parties made fruitful deliberations on the importance of coordinating the common struggle against the common enemy: Imperialism and Feudalism; and strengthening friendly relations and cooperation between the Eritrean fighters and the members of ESUNA and the Ethiopian Student movement. These talks that were held for the first time were conducted in the most cordial and friendly atmosphere which manifested the fraternal friendship and militant unity between the toiling masses of Eritrea and Ethiopia. The Executive Council of ESUNA highly praises the unflinching heroism and revolutionary spirit displayed by the Eritrean fighters in their just war against fascist feudal autocracy and imperialist plunder and exploitation; and warmly congratulates the revolutionary combatants for the glorious victories they have achieved. The Ethiopian student movement unequivocally supports the RIGHT of the peoples of Eritrea to self-determination including independence and the armed struggle the people wage for their national independence.

The P.P.L.F. and E.F.L. on their part recognize the inauguration of a new upsurge in the Ethiopian student movement and hail the emergent revolutionary forces within ESUNA and the Ethiopian student movement. They note the revolutionary agitational role played by the late president of ESUNA, comrade Mesfin Habtu in his sincere efforts to crush chauvinism in the ranks and leadership of the Ethiopian Student Movement here and in Europe. They also recall the courageous and vanguard role of the University Students' Union of Addis Ababa (USUAA) for initiating the publication of the "unpopular demand" of the just cause of all oppressed nationalities including Eritrea for the <u>right</u> of self-determination.

Based on the above spirit, the delegation of the peoples popular liberation forces declares that:

l) the interest of the toiling masses of Ethiopia and Eritrea are inseparable; their enemy the same - U.S. imperialism, Ethiopian feudalism and Israeli

zionism.

2) the just struggle of the Eritrean peoples is based on the principle of the Right of nations to self-determination, including national independence.

3) the major contradiction in the world today is between Imperialism and National Liberation struggles.

4) the Eritrean struggle is not based on sectarian, separatist, narrow-minded nationalism and religious parochialism.

5) the character of the Eritrean revolution is new democratic and the motive forces of the revolution are the laboring masses.

6) the Eritrean heroic combatants must agitate against the bourgeois ideology or national isolationism and [against the] whipping of hatred against the toiling masses of Ethiopia, especially against the toiling masses of the Amhara-Tigre nationality; and must vigilantly combat the narrow-minded nationalist ideology of the Eritrean feudalists and chiefs and freely propagate the principle of "voluntary integration," free, equal and fraternal unity with nations and nationalities of any other new-democratic and anti-imperialist states; and in the meantime to coordinate the struggle with that of the fighting nationalities, workers, peasants and students of Ethiopia.

7) the struggle is nothing else but anti-imperialist and anti-feudalist which means that the struggle is class based and will lead to a socialist revolution.[7]

At first sight, *vi verborum*, the document demonstrates a total agreement between students and Eritrean leaders. It must be stressed, however, that the meetings mentioned above took place in Europe or America, far from the home base of both parties, and it is not evident that the tendencies of the students here, both as regards their Marxist convictions and their condoning Eritrean separatism, are a faithful reflection of the students' feelings at home.

Moreover, the Washington text has probably a certain Ethiopian quality of "wax and gold" about it*. Because they

* *By this one does not mean to throw discredit on the mutual agreement or doubt the sincerity of the two parties. But for Ethiopians, the subtlety and complexity of the situation subsists and may be perceived beyond the sharpness of a text.*

have a common enemy, the autocracy of Haile Selassie, and because they need all the support they can summon from wherever it comes, the E.L.F. and the students agree to throw their lot together. The E.L.F., isolated in its long struggle, needs the sympathy and support of the Ethiopian radicals, and therefore, it chooses to present its struggle as "class based and leading to a socialist revolution." The students, enthusiastically dedicated to freedom, want to spread their struggle beyond the gates of the campus, and for the sake of a New Ethiopia, they are ready to admit the claim for independence on the part of the E.L.F., the only force in the field so far. It is a pragmatic alliance which suits the present situation and where each side keeps its own judgment on the matter. The problem of national unity is simply put aside until democracy is established. Which kind of Democracy, and over which kind of Ethiopia, this ultimate issue is covered up by the revolutionary phraseology which gives to both movements a common tinge of Marxist radicalism possibly as foreign to the majority of the students at home as it is to the majority of the freedom fighters in Eritrea, at least today.

2. The Students and the Peasant Masses

The major task undertaken by the students in 1965, that of awakening the peasantry to political life, seems hardly begun. It could be said of the overwhelming majority of the rural masses in Ethiopia that they are apolitical, parochial, unaware even of their potential strength as constituting 90% of the total population. This is a statistical figure, but not a psychological reality for the peasant whose political horizon hardly reaches beyond the realm of his daily toil. Today, in their endeavour to awaken and shape the political awareness of the peasantry, the students may be helped, in most cases, by their own rural background and by the network of intelligence created by the National Service. But the little influence the young intellectuals, often alienated from their traditional culture, may gradually acquire over the rural masses is largely counterbalanced by the prestige that the clergy and the *Tellik Sawotch* (*VIP's*) still enjoy in the countryside.'-Who are the students, anyway, but a handful of idle youths under the influence of foreign ideas, young men who have no land of their own, and are not always able to find a proper job, in spite of the superior education they claim?'

The politization of the rural masses - illiterate at more than 95% - would take decades of systematic and labori-

ous indoctrination in a country where no colonial rule forced the spread of nationalism, where on the contrary two millenia of peasant routine and over eight centuries of feudalism have piled up their thick layers of social stratification, where finally the suspicion of the central government is constantly on the lookout for any kind of political activism. So long as the land they till does not become their own *rest* the peasants will see no point in tearing asunder the traditional pattern in which they identify themselves as *gabarotch*. The conflict which raged in Addis Ababa around the land tenure bill has not yet touched the peasants as a whole. However, the day that bill is passed and the land reform - however moderate - begins to be enacted in the countryside, the land hunger of the peasants might act as an electric shock through the 90% of the Ethiopian population who are basically interested in the land on which they have slaved for generations. Will the students then be able to channel the upsurging forces towards the shaping of the new social order to which they want to consecrated their lives?

3. The Students and the Army

The army has proved that it could play a disruptive role in the existing Ethiopian order. In fact it is the only force which would be able to bring about a major change today. It is to be reckoned among "the New" not only because it is endowed with modern technology, but above all because, next to the bureacracy, it groups the most important contingent of educated men in the country, binding them together with a strong *esprit de corps*. It ranks among "the New" again because it is pan-Ethiopian, inspired by a sense of national unity and ready to crush any potential threat to that unity.

But neither the modernity and fitness of the army nor its pan-Ethiopian nationalism are enough to establish a common ground of *entente* between the military and the students. The army is thoroughly committed to maintaining the integrity of the territory, from Ogaden to Eritrea. The students, so far, had sacrificed their sympathy for the freedom fighters to their ideal of national unity. By deciding to support the E.L.F. in its drive for independence, they may have severed the link which their leaders of the first hour had fastened with Menghistu, on December 14, 1960.

However, this divergence on the issue of national integrity, dramatic as it may be, is only the surface crack revealing a deeper ideological chasm between the military and the students. The harsh repression of the army and

police against the students' disturbances is not merely a 'Sandhurst reaction' of standing unquestionably behind the authority. It is also the manifestation of the army's genuine commitment to law and order. This means for many officers and troops (all professionals) the survival of Ethiopian tradition and a rightist stand, proving that "new" does not necessarily imply "radical". While the students' body is rapidly evolving towards radicalism, the military, engaged in the repression both of political unrest and of armed rebellion, seems to have stiffened in a reactionary attitude, as if it were once more prompted by the instinct of self-preservation through which Ethiopia has survived.

One nagging question remains: Is "the military" really the monolithic institution that it appears to be? The growing proportion of younger officers who themselves were students not long ago may gradually erode the conservatism outwardly professed by the Old Guard and open new political perspectives. Will this evolution progress at the same pace and in the same direction as that of the civilian elite? Will the students' democratic ideals influence the younger generations of soldiers and transform the army into an instrument of change? When the hour of Haile Selassie's succession strikes, will the army favour, or even engineer any deep social and economic transformation? In whose hands will the soldiers, once more, entrust the destiny of Ethiopia?

Footnotes:

1. Quoted in R. Greenfield, *Ethiopia -a new political history*, (London, 1965), p. 303.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 283.
3. Quoted in R. Hess, *Ethiopia - the modernization of an autocracy*, (1971), p. 224
4. Ali Baghadadi: *Mohammad Speaks* - "Multi-national Ethiopia unites for liberty", Vol. 10, No. 52, (Chicago, Sept. 1971)
5. Quoted in R. Hess, *Ethiopia - the modernization of an autocracy*, p. 147.
6. R. Hess, *op. cit.* pp. 194-196.
7. Quoted in Greenfield, *op. cit.* p. 405.
8. Hess, *op. cit.* p. 156.
9. The literacy rate for Ethiopia in 1963 (*UNESCO*) was 6%. Without questioning the figure it could be pointed out that if the official gauge for a literacy credit, i.e. "schooling to the 4th grade" has been used in this estimate, this leaves out all the children (and the clergy)

who have had the rudiments of ge'ez and Amharic reading and writing in the Church schools (or of Arabic in the Coranic schools). 'They', however, do not consider themselves as illiterate.

10. Hess, *op. cit.* p. 156 and *passim.*
11. *Agence France Presse*, "Student Unrest", No. 1779, May 28, 1971.
12. Hess, *op. cit.* p. 164.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 224.
14. *Africa Confidential*, Vol. 11, No. 6 - March 13, 1970, p.2.
15. *Ibid.*, p.2.
16. *Ibid.*, p.3.
17. Unpublished Communique.

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GROUP AND A SINGLE by D. Rakgoathe