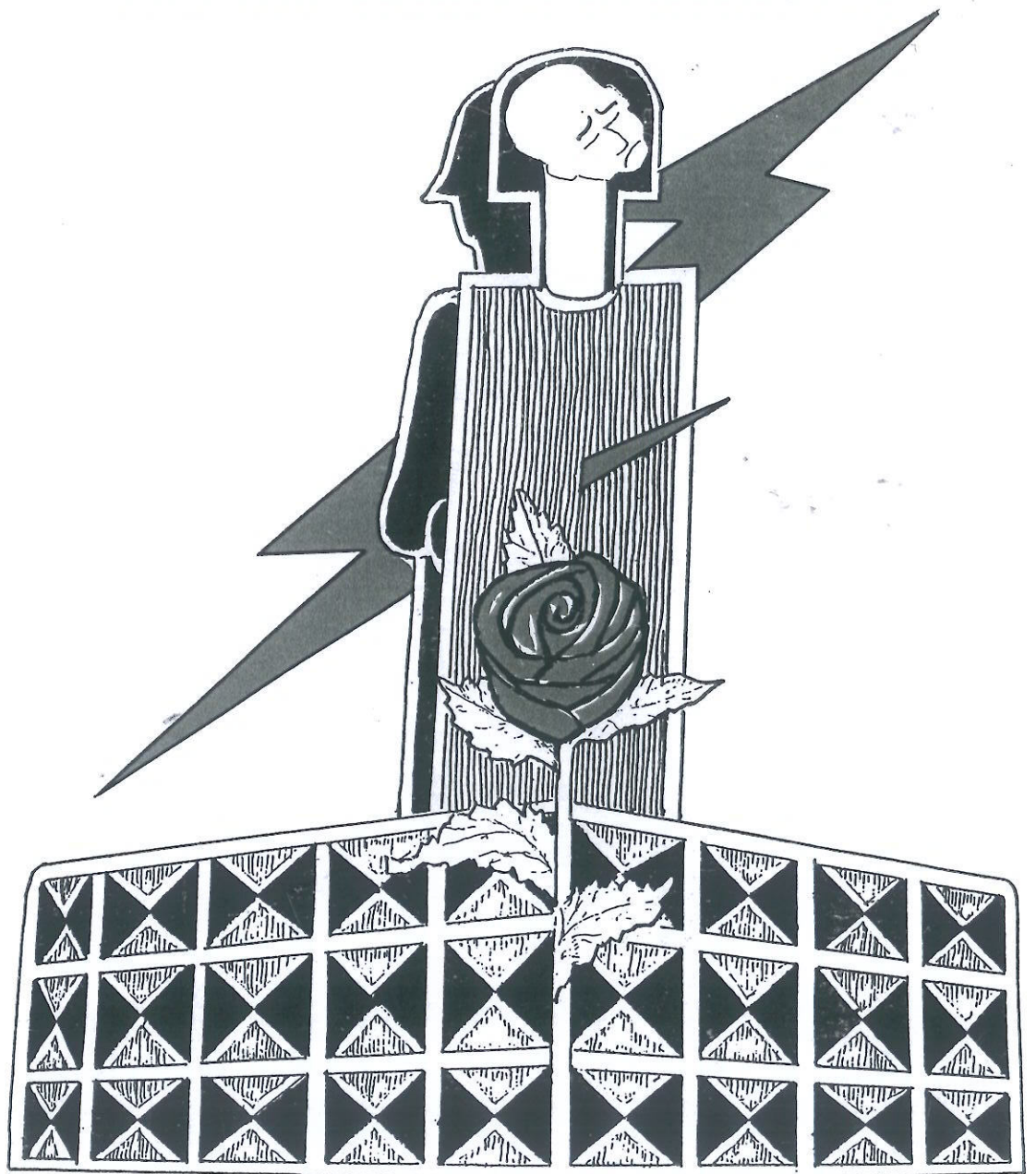


SECOND EDITION

TO KILL A GENERATION: THE RED TERROR IN ETHIOPIA



**To Kill A
Generation**

**The Red Terror
In Ethiopia**

by **Babile Tola**

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Author's Note

The full story of the terror and repression in Ethiopia cannot be told in a single book alone. Volumes are needed to document the various testimonies and to analyse the various aspects and effects of the terror which the Ethiopian regime likes to call "the red performance".

The author hopes that others, especially those who were the victims of the Terror and who now live abroad, would tell their stories and help to complete the picture of one of the most harrowing and tragic episodes in our country's history.

In order to write this book, I have talked to many of those who witnessed the Terror firsthand and whenever possible I have also consulted members of the EPRP who were the main targets of the Terror. Sources have been cited where possible; those who gave me their written testimonies did so with the rejoinder that they remain anonymous and I have respected their wish. Names cited fully are true ones, and as witnesses to the Terror sometimes forget the fathers' names of other victims, I have cited only their first names.

In attempting to write this book, I have been forced to deal briefly with some of the fundamental points of difference between the protagonists (i.e. the military regime, MEISON and the EPRP) as the brutality of the Terror can only be gauged in light of the situation which existed at the time and the nature of the conflicts. Evidently, those points of difference need a fuller and more detailed treatment than the one I have presented in this book.

Many people helped in the completion of this book by sharing their experiences with the author, by gathering testimonies, by reading the draft and giving valuable comments. None of them asked to be identified but I would still like to express my particular thanks to T.K., F.A., B.D., A. Nasser, G.T. and Y. Amha. To C. and T. who egged me on I also express my thanks. The book is for sure a result of a collective effort but all errors of interpretation and analysis are the responsibility of the writer alone.

Finally, I would like to dedicate this book to the victims and survivors of the Terror, to those who are continuing the struggle against the forces of terror, and to Amnesty International, whose concern for human rights in Ethiopia helped and encouraged those who fought and are fighting for such rights.

Babile Tola

Key to Abbreviations and Amharic Words

Derg	meant 'committee' in Amharic, but became an exclusive name of the Armed Forces, Police and Territorial Army Coordinating Committee. At present the English word 'committee' is used also in Amharic.
PMAC	Provisional Military Administrative Council or Derg
Meisone	the All-Ethiopian Socialist Movement
Woz League	Proletarian League (of Ethiopia)
Echa'at (or Icha'at)	Oppressed Ethiopians Revolutionary Struggle (Organization)
Malered	Marxist-Leninist Revolutionary Organization
COPWE	Commission of the Organization of the Party of Workers of Ethiopia
WPE	Workers' Party of Ethiopia (the unique ruling party)
EPRP	Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Party

EPRA	Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Army
EPRYL	Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Youth League
CELU	Confederation of Ethiopian Labour Unions (banned and dissolved)
AETU	All-Ethiopian Trade Unions (State-controlled)
Ellama	Ethiopian Workers Revolutionary Union (clandestine / pro-EPRP)
Seded	Abyotawi Seded in full... literally meant 'revolutionary prairie fire' but often referred to as Revolutionary Flame or Revolutionary Fire. The party of Mengistu prior to COPWE
Zematch	Student campaigners sent to the rural areas by the government
Zemetcha	Development through Educational Campaign
Kebelle	Urban Dwellers' Association
Keftegna	Higher Urban Dwellers' Association
gebbar	Tenant

GOH	<i>DAWN</i> , a monthly political magazine which appeared in Addis Abeba, in Amharic. The highly popular magazine was banned by the government which alleged that it was the "legal mouthpiece of the EPRP"
USUAA	University Students' Union of Addis Abeba
ESUNA	Ethiopian Students' Union in North America
EDU	Ethiopian Democratic Union
ELF	Eritrean Liberation Front
EPLF	Eritrean People's Liberation Front
EFLNA	Eritreans For Liberation in North America
TPLF	Tigrai People's Liberation Front
PCI	The Italian Communist Party
PCE	The Communist Party of Spain

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PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

The book was written with the hope that the passing of the Mengistu regime would be the end of the Red Terror and that people would say never again to such carnage and murder. Sadly enough, this was not to be. Mengistu is replaced by Meles, the Tigray people's Liberation Front (or EPRDF) is in power in the place of Mengistu's party. The totalitarian politics continues....

This preface is necessitated by the fact that the TPLF leaders, who were also involved in the Red Terror campaign against the EPRP, are now trying to revise history and, with the help of foreign supporters, to pull the wool over our eyes by staging a charade in the form of a publicized trial of the officials Mengistu regime. What is unpalatable is not only the fact that the TPLF leaders ordered their cadres to take an active part in the Red Terror in Tigray (thereby causing the deaths of scores of EPRP supporters and members) but also because they are trying to use the martyrs for their political ends. The tears shed by the TPLF leaders are crocodile tears. The repression against the EPRP continues and the Amharic translator of this book, Tsegaye Gebre Medhin, has been captured by the TPLF in June 1991 and has disappeared since.

There was a call for magnanimity which has been ridiculed by the TPLF leaders as a plea to let the criminals go scot free. Actually, the call was for the rejection of the rationale and "justifications" which led to the Red Terror, it was a call for tolerance, for avoiding vengeance and bloodletting. It was on our part a desire to see the lessons of the Red Terror result in its own burial, never to be resurrected by any power monger or anti-democratic clique. If the criminals are to be punished it would of course be proper that the judges themselves, the TPLF leaders, be also in the dock.

In actual fact, the perpetrators of the Red Terror are not all in the dock. Some notorious killers are fee and

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serving the present power holders, they owe their freedom to their ethnic background and political loyalty. Some others have reemerged as leaders of political organizations allied to the TPLF and are thus untouchables. Those who call for the trial of all the criminals would not be blamed if they find the TPLF engaged in a big cover up of "its own criminals" and crimes.

The book we wrote was only a partial and incomplete testimony. The main purpose was to register and to impress the need for a different way of resolving political conflicts. The TPLF tried to use even the book for its political purposes. That we differ with it all the way and that we are also opposed to the way the officials of the Mengistu regime are trying to "defend themselves" is included in the appendix of this second edition. If we have to rededicate this book and this second edition it can only be to its original translator into Amharic, Tsegay Gebre Medhin, who has disappeared in TPLF custody. Tsegaye first knew prison under the Haile Selassie regime and was a guerrilla leader for the whole seventeen years of the Mengistu dictatorship. That the TPLF had also to imprison and "disappear" him indicates that not much has changed in our Ethiopia.

Our book was written precisely to call for a change, to plead for an end to the policy and practice of massacring people to stay in power. It was to call for the non continuation of the Red Terror which, alas, is very much alive in different forms and intensity even now, We are not impressed by those who do body counts and tell us Meles Zenawi's government kills less than Mengistu's. The killings have to stop once and for all. This is what matters and not that the Terror has reduced its scale or has gone underground.

This second edition is published to warn again that the virus of the Red Terror has already infected the ruling TPLF and ugly features of the Red Terror are in evidence in many places in Ethiopia. The government rules by force, notwithstanding its demagogy. The victims are also more

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or less the same ones as before. Dissent leads to repression and the present rulers have new and powerful masters who defend them. The politics of fear and hate thrives... The rule by the gun, by terror, continues...

BABILE TOLA

1997

Preface

*"Great Prince," said Imlak,
"I shall speak the truth."
— Samuel Johnson: Rasselas,
The Prince of Abissinia, London, 1759*

Take the case of Y..., a young man in his late twenties now. He is paralysed from the waist down, he has lost one eye, and two fingers from his right hand have been amputated. He is haunted by recurring nightmares, often becomes hysterical, eats little and is a pathetic sight to behold.

In mid-1977, Y... was a strapping jovial youth with hopes of a long successful life. But, this was not to be. One evening in March, they came calling for him: six kebele guards led by a Meisone cadre. The apolitical Y... was frightened but he was confident that he would soon be released when his captors discovered that he was uninvolved in the on-going political and military confrontation. To his interrogators, Y... told them that he was uninvolved, that his arrest was a mistake, that he didn't know where his elder brother, who was an EPRP member, could be found.

What Y... didn't know was that his captors and interrogators knew that he was telling the truth. A day after his arrest, Y... was taken into a foul-smelling room where he came face to face with his elder brother. This one had been severely tortured and was almost unrecognizable. That day and several times afterwards, Y... was brutally tor-

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ured right in front of his elder brother. He screamed, fainted several times and agreed to confess to whatever crimes they wanted him to. But his torturers were not interested - their aim was to break the elder brother. And this one refused to confess despite pleas from Y....

A week later, their mother was brought in. A poor woman in her late fifties, she had suffered much to raise her two sons and send them to school. As a widow who had never remarried, she used to sell tella, the local beverage, to earn money. The sight of her two tortured sons drove the poor woman into cries of shock and sorrow. But, her ordeal was just about to begin. She was forced to strip naked in front of her two sons and six torturers. And she was tortured and humiliated right in front of her sons. The elder brother still refused to confess, not even when they tortured him also to stifle his cries of "fascist dogs" hurled at them.

Finally, the torturers cut off his penis, chopped it into tiny pieces and force-fed it to the mother.

The old woman subsequently lost her senses, became insane and killed herself on the day she was released from custody. Her elder son, the one who had refused to confess, was strangled by piano wire and his corpse was thrown on the street as part of the Red Terror scenario. Y... remained in prison for three years more and was released in mid-1980, a shell of his former self, a virtual vegetable and a financial and emotional burden on his uncle.

An isolated story? Not at all. More gruesome, even more shocking and "unbelievable" cases have been witnessed all over Ethiopia. All these make up the Terror, the extensive mass murder carried out by the military regime (DERG) from late 1976 to mid-1979. Thousands died such brutal deaths, numerous more were tortured and jailed. Such a statement does, however, sound hollow. It is dry statistics, too general. It fails to convey the cruel details of the Terror. Murder, tragically, is a common and ordinary word. It does still shock us when it happens but we have also become used to it. Feed a man his own flesh, pull out his nails, boil him in oil, stuff his mouth with a cloth soaked

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in urine and human excrement, use pincers to rip off his nose, smash a bottle in a woman's vagina, cut her nipples and breasts, brutalise loved ones in front of him or her and then, only then, cut his / her throat or strangle them with piano wire. This is no 'simple' murder. This was the "Red Terror".

The only historical parallel which can be drawn in the country's history is with the February 1937 "Graziani Massacre" in Addis Abeba. At the time, Marshal Graziani, Mussolini's Viceroy in Addis Abeba, escaped an assassination attempt when two patriotic young men, Abraha Deboch and Moges Asgedom, hurled a grenade at him. The city's poor, whom the Marshal had gathered to give "gifts", were massacred on the spot in revenge. And for three days after that, the Blackshirts were let loose in Addis Abeba and other towns to commit indiscriminate murder. Several thousand were killed including hundreds of the country's intellectuals. Ethiopians still observe this day of martyrs.

Many people nowadays, old and young, call the military regime fascist, and one of the nicknames of Lt. Colonel Mengistu is Graziani. But, the 1937 massacre is no rival of the Red Terror. By all indices of brutality, the number of people killed or the traumatic after-effect, the Red Terror emerges on top. A generation of young people has been literally wiped out. Children under ten and old men and women have perished. No town or city has been spared. That all this has been committed by a local government, a regime which claims to be "popular" has made the effect more traumatic and debilitating. The Red Terror emerges as one of the most horrible chapters in the history of Ethiopia.

It is this story we aim to tell in this book. The tragic story of a people who yearned for democracy and freedom but found terror and death instead. The Terror was a deliberate extermination policy carried out by a government which realized that it had failed to get the voluntary backing of the people. The Terror was employed as the

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most effective and rapid means of breaking political dissent and turning a struggling people into frightened, cowed and obedient zombies. This is the stark truth which emerges once we remove the jargon and demagogy of the regime and its sycophants. Knowing the true story of the Red Terror not only shows the brutal murder carried out against the people but it also highlights why Ethiopia is still beset by unending civil wars. The story is also an experience gained through costly sacrifice and would be of relevance to other peoples who may find themselves in similar situations, to those who want to avoid such episodes from marring their history.

And finally, the telling of the story is a conscious attempt to say to the victims of the Red Terror, to all those who died and who are still scarred, jailed and alive, that their sacrifice has not been forgotten. As the line in the famous poem written for the workers killed in Awash and Asbe Teferi puts it: the blood of the people makes more noise than thunder.

Part One

Prelude to Terror

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1

The Mighty Collect the Taxes

"Haile Sellasie ruled a country that knew only the cruelest methods of fighting for power (or of keeping it), in which free elections were replaced by poison and the dagger, discussions by shooting and the gallows."

From "The Emperor: Downfall of an Autocrat"
by R. Kapuscinski

Vintage Books, New York, 1984, p. 101

Violence has almost always been the media of government-people relations in Ethiopia. The country's history is filled with numerous pages and chapters of repressions and massacres perpetrated by those in power against the people. The rulers also fought among themselves, but in this quarrel of elephants the ones who got trampled were always the common people. Feudal Ethiopia worshipped and bowed to the gun, murder was routine, savagery was equated with decisiveness and none of this contradicted with the ruler's claim of adherence to Christian morality and laws.

Like many other countries, Ethiopia was forged by violence. Its pre-Menelik period (i.e., pre 1889) was characterised by incessant wars between feudal lords and chieftains, between pretenders to the throne. The wars were occasions of carnage laying waste to villages and property and costing the lives of thousands of peasants. It was almost an inscribed, or "natural" law that the feudal hordes, or armies, must sustain themselves by robbing the people, and in this category of victims fell all those whose villages were found far from the army's departure point. The only way to climb on top was by force and Emperor Tewodros epitomised the man who rose from below and

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fought his way to the throne. The mighty rule, the mighty collect taxes: this has been the Ethiopian law or norm for long.

Emperor Menelik, who played the major role in forging the present territory of Ethiopia, expanded to the south and other areas by subjecting the local people in these places to arrogant chauvinistic violence. Where the resistance was strong, so was the carnage. Where there was little or no resistance, the plunder showed no limits. Massacres were common, of Gurages, Wolaytas, of Oromos, etc. The killers, packs of uneducated marauders from the Amhara-Tigray areas, were lionised as heroes and considered as frontiersmen worthy of eulogizing songs and poems. The Emperor rewarded them by giving them acres of land in the subjugated territories and thus making them landlords over the local peasants now reduced to brutal serfdom. The legacy of injustice and hate of those days continues to spill over to this day.¹

The past rulers of Ethiopia almost always professed adherence to Christianity despite the fact that their specific religious practices continued to exhibit strong doses of non-Christian beliefs. However, their faith did at no point regulate their actions. The landlord who wails for being late for the Sunday Mass would kill, without compunction, a whole peasant family. In rural Ethiopia, people frown upon someone who breaks the Lent fasting period while many tolerate the one who kills a traveller in order to rob him of his belongings or weapon. In the 1950s, the son of one of the big feudal lords, Ras Mesfin, used peasants for target practice with live pistol bullets. In feudal circles, this killer, known as Jara, was admired for his "manliness" and "perfect shooting". Suffice it to say that the Kings who ordered the massacres were called the "Protectors of the Faith".

What we want to underline is the fact that murder or violence has been inculcated into the system, into the national psyche and socio-cultural heritage. This is not to imply that Ethiopians are inherently violent; on the con-

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trary, they are as peaceful as people anywhere. The point is that between the rulers and the people the relation has mainly been one based on force. Between the rich and the poor, between the husband and the wife, between parents and children, force characterised the relations. The Emperor (Haile Sallasié) used to have his errand ministers flogged in private just as parents are used to beating their children; not because the latter did something bad but just to "keep them in their place". Exercise of force, capriciously and arbitrarily, lets the weak know "who is the master, lest they forget it". And the weak are expected to accept this as their lot as custom and religion (and the law) dictate this. Haile Sallasié's Constitution stipulated that "the person of the King is sacred, His authority inviolable" and the bishops were ever alert to excommunicate whosoever dared to rise against the "elect of God".

Dialogue, persuasion, peaceful dissent and tolerance were all unknown. A ruler who softens the iron fist calls for his own demise. A kind father is deemed a weak one apt to spoil his children. The sword and the cane symbolised order, the only means to keep the hierarchical order. The family needs a strong father, the country needs an autocrat. A benevolent despot was viewed with suspicion in thoroughly feudal Ethiopia, the tyrant was expected and, yes, normal. Punishment had to be cruel by necessity. The precocious child at home is hung upside down from the ceiling above a fire in which red pepper powder gets sprinkled. Molten wax is poured over a rebel and he is set ablaze as the landlords watch with fascination and satisfaction.

Haile Sallasié, whom many Westerners called "modern and enlightened", ruled over such an Ethiopia. In fact, he could rule in the way he did only in such an Ethiopia. He proclaimed laws but these remained deadletters destined to assuage foreign observers who are always susceptible to being superficial in their judgement of backward countries. The 1955 Constitution guaranteed democratic rights including the freedom of speech but even a drunk's criti-

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cism of the government (synonymous with the Emperor) landed the careless man in jail for 5-7 years on charges of *lese majeste*. Actually, Haile Sellasie ruled with an iron fist despite the fact that he was adept at the policy of divide and rule and feudal intrigue. After all, didn't he intrigue his way to the throne by deposing Lij Ejusu and later poisoning, as is reported, Empress Zewditu to whom he was a regent?

In fact, the "enlightened" Emperor told Italian journalist Oriana Fallaci in 1973: "We were born of Royal blood, authority is ours by right. A King must never regret the use of force... We have never been afraid to be harsh. It is the king who knows what's best for the people, the people themselves don't know it". Imperial arrogance backed by and buttressing outright cruelty. To fail to be harsh is a sign of weakness, magnanimity breeds rebellion. The will of the governed is not invoked: who asks ignorant fools or just born babes for advice or consent? In one sweep, the people are deprived of the faculty of knowing what is good for themselves and thrown at the mercy of the God-ordained monarch. To rebel against such an authority is heresy, a sacrilege, and when it comes to punishing heretics the Ethiopian rulers had nothing to learn from the Spanish masters of the Inquisition.

During the Emperor's long reign, official violence was meted out to the people at large. Rebellions were brutally crushed (Gojjam, Bale, Tigray), peaceful demonstrators were clubbed, gassed or killed (the student demonstrations in the late sixties and early seventies), secret killings of opposition figures were carried out by special squads (Afagn Guads) both inside and outside the country (for example, captain Kebede in Khartoum and others in Mogadishou and Sanaa). The Eritrean guerrilla war opened the way for atrocities against villagers. The killings hardly ever made the headlines to seriously tarnish the image of the autocrat as a "benevolent ruler" and even "the father of Africa". In short, Haile Sellasie was more sophisticated but in no way different from the autocrats before him.

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Tewodros, Yohannes, Menelik: their reigns were years of killing sprees. None of them read Machiavelli like Haile Sellasie but they were, to varying degrees, soaked in feudal intrigue and believed in the credo of force. The peasant was to all a *gebbar*, the one who bows, who pays taxes, who serves, who dies... It is no exaggeration to say that they all, Haile Sellasie included, saw no appreciable difference between the peasant and the pack animals which he used to bring his produce to hand over to the landlord.

Torture was no stranger to the past monarches but Haile Sellasie refined it with the help and tuition of civilised America and Israel. Experts from these countries came and Ethiopians were dispatched to Tel Aviv and to the International Police Academy in Washington: crude methods were refined and made more barbarian. The students of such special skills continued to serve the present military regime of colonel Mengistu though it must be said that this time around their skill has improved thanks to Soviet, Cuban and East German tuition. The best of the two worlds, so to speak!

Haile Sellasie's prisoners and opponents found their fingers pulled out by pincers, their testicles ruined by sand or water filled bottles, their legs and arms paralysed. Beating the soles of the feet, submerging in filthy water, incarcerating in dark dungeons with heavy leg irons tied to the feet, starvation, iron chains tied to the mouth like reins and pulled back to break the teeth, sexual molestations, etc. The central prison, one of the pits of horrors, was called Alem Bekagne ("I have enough of the world!" literally: who says feudalists don't indulge in humour!) and was a stone's throw from the multi-storeyed old siege of the Economic Commission for Africa. (Alem Bekagne still stands!) Admittedly, Haile Sellasie used terror selectively but he used it nonetheless. Captured guerrillas in Eritrea were tortured and eliminated, peasants were butchered to make them reveal the whereabouts of armed rebels and in Bale the ears of children were chopped off to cow their parents. Perhaps, this can be said to be the work of soldiers

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on the rampage, but none of them were sanctioned or tried as no one considered their act a crime.

For Ethiopians, Haile Sellasie was a despot, to be feared and respected out of fear. When His Majesty's Rolls Royce appears on the streets, you stand where you are and bow low as the car passes you. Some foreigners saw in this a sign of love for the Emperor but in their haste to reach such conclusions they failed to see the armed guards riding behind the imperial car. He who does not stand and bow commits *lèse majesté* and gets punished: even a small boy or girl in Ethiopia knew this. Worse still, the people believed that the Emperor indulged in witchcraft and sacrificed smooth-skinned boys to a devil called Korit which was said to have its base in the Bishoftu lakes. Learned people from afar may say all this was nonsense, a product of the imagination of backward people. Perhaps those who have heard of Idi Amin and Bokassa may refrain from such comments. But Ethiopians knew that Empress Zewditu used to bathe in human blood to "prolong her life". Circumstantial evidences point to the fact that the Emperor was not beyond such practices. However, the point is that the people really believed in this and many parents pierced the ears of their boys as such boys were deemed unfit for Korit.

The Ethiopian people did not know Lenin's famous definition of the State but they knew quite well from experience that the State, *mengist*, means force. An alien and capriciously violent body way above the people: such was the State for the majority. Who rules? The one with the gun. Once on top the kings twist history to suit their purpose and new family trees are drawn to tie them up with the legendary union of Queen Sheba and King Solomon. The use of force to come to power, the use of even more violence to cling to power: such has been the history of kings in Ethiopia. In all this the people emerged like extras in a colossal war film, they are trampled upon, speared, maimed, shot and killed. Unacknowledged and unmourned. Victims from birth till death. And everything blamed on

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fate, the existing order of things sanctified as the wish and rule of God and change promised only in the hereafter. Blessed are the meek and so on and on.

This prevalent feature of the history and reality of Ethiopians is forgotten by those who assert that Ethiopians as a whole worship guns. The same could be said of other people, for example, of many Americans who are attached to guns and are committed members of the NRA. But this will be missing the point altogether. The Ethiopian, as an individual, is not violence-prone, but he lives in a society whose air reeks of violence. A society in which a man's worth is gauged by his strength. In this context, the gun symbolises virility, potency, worth, and it is a means of self-defence. He who can't afford a bolt rifle (or can't rob one) carries a stick, ostensibly to defend himself from snakes or dogs, but mainly to frighten or fight other weaponless human aggressors. The unarmed man is a victim of everybody, or to use the chauvinist language: a woman, with no means of even becoming a *shifta*, a bandit. The armed man has the choice of resisting or submitting; the choice may be slim but its existence, guaranteed by the possession of the gun, implies a difference.

In the folklore of Ethiopians, *shiftas* have a high place. In many cases, the *shifta* was a local peasant who had rebelled against authority. Such men were admired (of course, in private) and talked about. Many of the *shiftas* were no Robin Hoods: they stole from the poor and terrorised their fellow peasants. Still, their rebellion *vis a vis* the powers in place gave them an aura of super-potency which the ordinary man yearned for but was incapable of achieving. Ethiopian history has very few heroes who sacrificed themselves for the good of others. This was why the revolutionaries of the sixties and seventies emerged as strange creatures. For quite a long time the peasants were trying to figure out the answer to the question: what's their angle? What do they get out of it? In short, many of the heroes of feudal Ethiopia were murderous kings, savage landlords, rapacious rulers and common bandits.

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Perhaps, we should also mention here that the tradition is carried into the folklore of some of the modern guerrilla organizations who sing sweet love songs to their AK-47s. Admittedly, some of them infer their attachment to the rifle from Mao's dictum of political power emanating from the gun but one can't say this for all of them. The militarist bent exhibited by some of these organizations, their feudal-type relations with the peasants (of course covered by radical democratic jargons once again tailored for foreign consumption) and their arrogant swagger and blind belief in force suggest that things seem to have changed but they have actually remained the same. The dead weight of the past, the fetid culture and mores of the feudalists seem to dog the elements who swear they are dead-set against feudalism. Haile Sellasie is dead but Haile Sellasie lives. Or as some Ethiopians say: scratch an Ethiopian radical and you find a potential landlord.

All this is not in any way intended to make the crimes of the Derg appear less heinous in the eyes of the reader. On the contrary, the Derg emerges as a depraved and inhuman force precisely because it aborted a peoples' revolution aimed at putting an end to the legacy of violence and despotism. The February 1974 Revolution was a negation of the rule of violence and a clear yearning for the rule of law, for democracy, for peace, and above all for a redefinition of a human being. The people called for their rights, they demanded that all Ethiopians be respected irrespective of their social status, they castigated State violence and overall intolerance of dissent. In other words, the February Revolution stood against the rule of the gun, against terror and violence. The Derg, which took power forcefully, stood for the opposite; it championed the continuation of the old order's method of rule, albeit in new forms. The essence did not change, the Revolution was aborted, terror triumphed. So much changed and yet so little was altered in the order of things, in the relations between the people and the State.

In the early days of the February Revolution, the lost people, that is to say those locked for decades in dark

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dungeons and fetid prison cells, emerged. Emaciated from lack of food, sickly pale from lack of sunlight, half-blind, totally blind, paralysed or crippled, sane and insane they emerged to confront the society. The crimes of the feudal regime were laid bare for all to see and the people said "Down with the regime of injustice!". The revolution was fuelled on and the death-bell of the inhuman system was rung. Promises of reform did not succeed in stifling the people's anger or saving the monarchy. The Derg intervened at this point.

The people did not elect the military officers, no one gave them the mandate to rule the people. By forcefully appropriating power, they contravened the popular demand for peoples' power. By basing their rule on the gun, they perpetuated the old method. By ordering the people to halt their struggle, they echoed the old kings who blatantly said the kings rule and the people obey. To be sure the people did not articulate their demands in such a way as to satisfy a theses writer on the definition of a human being in an enlightened society. But they did call for democracy, for the respect of human rights, for equality, for an end to repressions, for the dismantling of the apparatus of terror and violence, and for popular power. The latter basic demand was incorporated in the popular demand for a provisional government. The Derg stood against all this. It took power by force (just like the kings) and it had to use force to cling to it (again just like the kings). For dissent, it prescribed repression and terror.

This is why in order to understand the viciousness of the "Red Terror", one has to examine the February Revolution objectively. In the Revolution, two concepts of life, two assessments of the past and the future clashed. One, that of the people and the radical intellectuals, negated the past violence, culture of force and sought to eradicate this system so as to build a future in which the common man and woman would govern themselves, would live without fear, respected as human beings. The other, that of the Derg, and its supporters, accepted the violence-imbued

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features of the past and relied on this to build its own vision of the future. The people sought peace and fundamental change but they had to fight for this. The Derg used its force to take power, to steal the fruit of the popular struggle, and it had no alternative, given its nature, but to rely on force to try to cling to its ill-gotten gain. In this respect, the "Red Terror" was logical and waiting to be born. It was just a matter of time; it had to happen.

But saying this does not diminish its barbarity one bit just as stating that violence has been endemic to Ethiopian society does not justify the massacre of Ethiopians by the regime in place.

2

The Fall of the Emperor: Whose Revolution?

"We are not worried (by rebellion), or not more than necessary. Such episodes occur constantly in a country's history. There's always something moving, brewing. There are ambitious people everywhere, wicked people. The only thing to do is to deal with them with courage and decision. One must beware of uncertainty, weakness or conflicting emotions: They lead to defeat. We have never allowed Ourselves to fall a prey to them. Force must be used against force....."

Emperor Haile Sellasie in an interview given to Oriana Fallaci, 1973

Something was indeed brewing in Ethiopia of late 1973 and the Emperor should have been forewarned not to treat it as routine. But he was a victim of his own ossified outlook, going senile and yet with an unreduced lust for absolute power which impeded him from trying to work out an orderly succession in time. The Emperor did not prepare for the continuation of his dynasty, he had little confidence in his son, the Crown Prince (who was anyway paralysed and being treated in London). The old king was also cynical and arrogantly confident that he could weather all storms, usual things, through the use of his authority and force. This miscalculation cost him the throne and his life.

Ethiopia was a country in which a revolution was long overdue. It was ruled by an autocrat and it was one of the poorest countries in the world. Political power was monopo-

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lised by Haile Sellasie, the parliament was a farce and a mere caricature of such a democratic institution. The senators were appointed by the Emperor (all were from the nobility or the aristocracy) and the parliament never in its history initiated and passed a single law other than the one to increase the salary of its members. The source of law was the Emperor himself. Democratic rights were curtailed, no political parties were allowed, dissent was criminal and opposition deemed equal to treason. Religious oppression and discrimination (of Moslems) was practiced and national domination was an actual policy. The mass media was state-owned and censorship was stringent.

At the top of the social hierarchy sat the Emperor and the royal family, the nobility, the aristocracy, the big bureaucrats and the top members of the clergy. Below were the mass of the people, in their majority landless serfs or poor peasants required by law to hand over two thirds of their produce to the landlords. The economy relied on agriculture which was mainly backward and at a subsistence level of production. The per capita income stood at US \$60, the infant mortality rate hovered at more than 60%, the illiteracy rate was 93%, life expectancy a mere 33 years, the rural areas saw no doctors, malaria immobilised 10% of the labour force and all this contrasted with the outright indecently luxurious way in which the rulers lived. This was the face of Ethiopia.²

Haile Sellasie, whose rule was projected as a modernising autocracy by some³, reigned over such an Ethiopia. If there was a time in which he had played a relatively progressive role, it was indeed short-lived; the drive towards a centralised state as opposed to dispersed centres of feudal power motivated his setting up a central army, a central administration apparatus, the opening of schools, etc. The autocrat benefitted from the backing of the West, especially of the USA which had a big and vital communications base at Kagnaw, in Asmara. Israel also stood by to help a committed ally and an instinctively anti-Arab king. The alliance gave the Emperor the chance to build a

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relatively modern army and security apparatus with which he guarded zealously his power and privileges. At another level, the alliance also proved that a capitalist super power can coexist smoothly with a backward and anti-democratic feudal power.

However, time does not stand still for anybody, even if one claims to be the Elect of God as the Emperor used to. The development of the society, albeit at a snail's pace, had its own dynamics and consequences. Ethiopia's opening up to the outside world had its effects and the wind of change blowing over Africa touched Ethiopia too, and the intellectuals, till then the Emperor's favourite children, grew restive. The seeds of unrest, at first timid and reformist, began to appear in the university campus in Addis Abeba. The contradictions between the bureaucrats in the State administration and the traditional rulers from the feudal nobility made the Emperor the peace maker and strengthened his absolute power.

In December 1960, the crack appeared in the form of an attempted coup d'etat by the Imperial Body Guard headed by Mengistu Newaye. The main protagonist of the coup was a US-educated intellectual, Girmame Newaye, who managed to convince his brother (the head of the Body Guard) as well as the chiefs of the dreaded security and the police. Girmame, who was opposed to the feudal order and the absolute monarchy, had radical nationalist views; the coup makers intended to set-up a liberal system under a constitutional monarch (the actual Crown Prince, son of Haile Sellasie). The coup was attempted while the Emperor was on a state visit to Brazil and it failed within three days as the army stayed loyal and defeated the coup makers. Allegations exist that US involvement in foiling the coup was decisive but the failure could be as well traced to technical ineptitude, poor planning and the hesitation of the coup makers at decisive points. Some members of the nobility and ministers were shot by the coup makers in the final days of the coup.

Haile Sellasie hanged the coup makers (even those who had committed suicide were hanged in public) and

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moved to reassert his authority. However, the whole incident had ushered in a new period in the history of the country. The façade of absolute authority was stained, the idea of complete obedience put into question. A vague alternative was made apparent to the people. The quiet dignity of Mengistu Neway gained the respect of the people and when he was hanged in public the people looked on quiet, sombre, reflective... The coup makers failed, they had not succeeded earlier even to pass their message properly to the people. But by their failure they planted the seed of change, of at least doubts, of the need to search for more effective ways of change.⁴

The University students were best placed to appreciate the whole thing. They had supported the coup and this had brought on them the wrath of the Emperor and the landlords. They were no longer "children" of the Emperor. In the campus, a radical group of students known as "the crocodiles" moved in the shadows preparing to challenge the status quo. In 1965, the students came out to stage a demonstration calling for land to the tiller - one of the most explosive slogans which could be raised in feudal Ethiopia. The demonstration was violently put down by the police and some student leaders were expelled from the University.⁵ However, the pattern was set and students came out each year with one explosive slogan after another to confront the police. Confrontations with the police sensitized the parents and urban populace, the involvement of high school students all over the country spread the message far and wide. By 1968, the students were calling for a radical overthrow of the system as a whole and the formation of a popular democratic republic. The Emperor and his entourage, as well as their American advisors, saw in all this "the spectre of communism". The repression intensified, student leaders were jailed or killed but the movement did not slacken.

The peasants, who constitute the majority of the people, were not passive either, though they lacked the vision and the consistency of the intellectuals. Despite the dead weight of centuries of feudal custom and fatalism, they

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erupted in spontaneous and semi-organized rebellions. In southern Ethiopia, where the oppression at the economic level was compounded by national and religious oppression by the Amhara-Tigrean culture, religion, etc., the revolt was determined, as it is apt to be when the land and national question are intertwined. In Bale, the peasant war against the government continued from 1961-1970. In 1968, peasants in Gojjam raised arms to fight against the government and its so-called agricultural income tax: the rebellion was put down after fierce fightings.⁶ In many other areas, there were minor and not so minor peasant revolts put down either by force or by the policy of divide and rule, of the carrot and the stick. However, it should be said that the peasant revolts, though they manifested the desire for change, remained restricted within the perimeters of the system they were fighting, they had no clear vision of their aims nor did they grasp the fact that their condition of servitude was ingrained in the system as a whole. In this lay their defeat, as is the case with all spontaneous peasant rebellions.

The workers were not quiet either. Miniscule in number (by 1974, the workers - including professionals - grouped in the Confederation of Ethiopian Labour Unions - CELU - numbered 100,000), they had waged an intermittent struggle over the years for union rights and economic gains. The first labour union was formed back in 1947 by workers of the Franco-Ethiopian Railway but years of struggle, with worker leaders jailed / killed and strikes brutally put down, passed before the government recognised their overall union rights and CELU got formed in 1963. The regime and its patron, the USA, did manage to control the top echelons of the Confederation which became affiliated with the ICFTU and the AFL-CIO. However, other leaders and base unions continued to struggle both to wrest the leadership from the "sold-out elements" symbolised by Beyene Solomon, Alem Abdi and Fitshat-sion Tekkie (president, vice president and secretary-general of CELU respectively) and to intensify their fight for

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the improvement of their working conditions, for the promulgation of a labour law guaranteeing them adequate minimum wages, social security benefits, etc. The majority of the companies were foreign-owned and in some of these, like the Wonji Sugar factory which was owned by the Dutch HVA, the white managers and supervisors were racists. In the IndoEthiopian textile factory, owned jointly by Indians and members of the Royal family and ministers, child labour was rampant, the working condition was right out of the time of the Industrial Revolution in Europe. The workers as a whole felt exploited and seethed and struggled. By 1973, secret contacts between unionised workers and radical students were becoming common.⁷

In April 1972, radical intellectuals who had realized the limitations of confined student movement actions gathered in a secret congress to form the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP). Steps were taken to train and arm a guerrilla force to launch armed struggle against the regime and plans were laid out to work within the existing mass movements and unions in a systematic way. The formation of the EPRP also dated the rupture within the radical intellectuals between those who argued it was not yet ripe to form a party or launch an armed struggle (these later became Meisone) and the others who believed that the time to fight in an organized manner, as a party, had come.⁸

And then there was the Eritrean guerrilla war, by far a relatively more organized movement even though the Eritrean Liberation Front adopted a political program, only in 1971, ten years after launching the armed struggle. Though it is beyond the scope of this book to delve into the nature of the Eritrean struggle, suffice it to say that the war had its impact on the imperial regime. Locally, the radical intellectuals saw in the struggle a confirmation of their position that guerrilla war can be launched and sustained; some also were naive enough to cloak the guerrillas with a mantle of radicalism they hardly deserved at the time. On the field, it was an unequal combat, the army of the king had the upper hand and the guerrillas were relegated to the

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barren lowlands. The ELF was not also able to transcend the Moslem and regionalist label attached to it and to attract many Christian Eritreans from the highlands. In fact, it was beset by internal feuds on religious and ethnic grounds and suffered a split in the early seventies. The ELF and the newly formed PLF had between them, in 1974, not more than 1000 armed guerrillas and they were busy killing each other in a useless war of rivalry. The wars impact on Ethiopia was political, both locally and also internationally as Arab states for a variety of reasons⁹ supported the guerrillas. The Ethiopian soldiers were dissatisfied with the endless conflict, they wanted increased pay for their war front duties and they suspected that they could have defeated the guerrillas had not the governor of Eritrea, Ras Asrate Kassa, continued to subvert their efforts so as to continue profiteering from the war.¹⁰

Guerrilla wars, spontaneous peasant revolts, workers flexing their organized muscles, intellectuals plotting in secret, rumours of conspiracies and coup plots by aristocrats or bureaucrats spreading and the country sinking further and further into the mire of poverty . . . surely something was moving, something was brewing in Ethiopia. In late 1973, Ethiopia's outward calm hid a tense and turbulent situation. The Emperor clung to his absolute power, his entourage wove plots and forged alliances to prepare for the "apres le roi" and the revolutionaries dug deeper into their mole-hill of clandestineness. No one could really foretell what was coming yet, in a way, both the rulers and the ruled expected something to happen.

And when the Revolution came, it caught all of them unawares. None were sufficiently prepared and no one, initially at least, surmised its depths and implications. Worse for the regime, the cunning Emperor seemed to have lost his foresight and he tragically considered the revolution knocking at his palace gate was nothing but the usual thing which happens, a routine problem he could easily overcome.

His mistake cost him his throne and his life and speeded up the demise of the system he had nurtured and

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built. For the revolutionaries and the people, the actors of the revolution, their lack of preparation cost them their revolution. As a consequence, Ethiopia still continues to be gripped by guerrilla wars, by dictatorship, by poverty, famine and death.

A revolution is not to be equated to a specific military assault against such and such a garrison. For the latter, the precise date can be fixed, exactly when the attack began, who started it and who ended it and when can be known. A people's revolution is different. Years of discontent feed its fire. It flares here, dies down there, flares again somewhere and the smoldering ashes, the accumulated years of bitter struggle, of frustrations, of defeats and partial victories, spark the conflagration.

So when did the 1974 Revolution actually start? Who started it? The questions are actually imprecise: the cause that provokes the eruption of the final denouement cannot be equated with the fundamental causes and contradictions which had been tearing apart the society. However, history is a field much abused by those in power and their acolytes; it is rewritten to justify the status quo or the claims of the new holders of power. For such people, and there were and are many of them, both in and out of Ethiopia, the February Revolution was begun by the military. For such people then, the Revolution began on January 12, 1974 when the soldiers in the military camp of Neghelle mutinied and arrested their commanding officers to register their protest for the lack of clean drinking water and decent food. Since the aim of those who attach great importance to the Neghelle mutiny is to "prove" that the military initiated the revolution, the fact that the mutiny ended within a very short period and that it had absolutely little impact on the populace are unmentioned facts.

Pro-Derg revisionist history notwithstanding, the momentous conflagration, which had been seething for years, unfolded as follows.¹¹

University students and teachers exposed to the public the famine that was hidden by the government and which was killing thousands of people in Wollo and Tigray.¹²

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Bank employees staged a strike and forced the government to accept their demands. Workers of the Awash and Wonji Sugar factory threatened to go on a strike unless their demands for increased pay and better working conditions were met. Teachers, supported by students, also threatened to strike if the controversial educational reform (Sectorial Review) got adopted. The mutiny in Neghelle, in the Southern province (now administrative region) of Sidamo, came on top of this.

The government added fuel to the fire by hiking the price of foodstuffs and benzene. On February 18, taxi drivers staged a demonstration in Addis Abeba. The demonstration was joined by striking teachers and students. Security forces tried to break the demonstration, a riot ensued, many people were killed. Addis Abeba was tense and troops assigned to guard vital areas and buildings. From this day till February 26, when the soldiers in Asmara mutinied, demonstrators and troops clashed daily in Addis, many were wounded or killed.

On February 24, the Emperor addressed the nation over the radio and TV; his speech combined his usual haughty intransigence with concessions. The Sectorial Review was "postponed", the price of fuel was reduced by ten cents a litre and a "price control" ordered for essential commodities. The government retreated in order to counter attack; troops were ordered to shoot on sight all "trouble makers". A government "Fact Sheet" appeared to state that 558 "hooligans" had been arrested during the week while 75 buses, 36 private cars, 26 government vehicles, 7 cars belonging to the diplomatic corps, 38 houses, two trains, etc. had been damaged by the demonstrators. Since the emphasis of the report was on property damages, for obvious reasons, the number of dead was put at only 3 with 22 others wounded. The "Fact Sheet" on the week's events put out by the Ministry of Information put the blame for the disturbances on "some taxi drivers", a "small number of school dropouts and failures", and on "idlers, hooligans and rumourmongers". However, the lid was off: neither

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the students nor the teachers were satisfied. The strikes continued.

On February 26, soldiers and NCOs in Asmara mutinied and in the coming days, as the Emperor grappled to defuse the problem by increasing the salary of the soldiers, the mutiny spread. Soldiers in Addis Abeba, the Air Force in Bishoftu (Debre Seit) joined the rebellion. Prime Minister Aklilu Habtewold resigned with his whole cabinet, the first time such a thing had ever occurred in the country. The developments after that have been well documented by various sources, but for our purpose here we would mention certain crucial points which are usually glossed over by pro-Derg historians.

- The struggle, which started with mainly economic demands and sectarian grievances, immediately became political; with land to the tiller, democratic rights and a popular government being the demands of a variety of sections.
- The Revolution involved a wide section of the population with the urban populace taking the overall active lead. Workers, students, intellectuals, civil servants, soldiers and NCOs, priests, women, moslems, the unemployed, etc.; all participated.
- Though a working on-the-ground alliance was struck between the radical section of the armed forces (the Army Aviation and Engineering Corps, the Air Force, etc.) and the civilian sector, the army was neither united nor in the forefront of the Revolution. At every critical juncture, the army balked and tried to retreat. The soldiers acted against striking workers and swore loyalty to the Emperor now and again not because they had a master plan to erode the monarch's power piecemeal¹⁹ but because they believed that they had gained enough concessions for themselves and the "disturbance" had to stop. Thus, the government of Endalkatchew Makonen was brought down by a combination of street demonstrations by students-workers-civil servants and by the first-ever general strike, called by CELU, which took place on March 7. The radical sectors

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of the army, the same ones who were later to be targets of the Derg's repression, backed the civilian demands and refusal to be thwarted by promises of constitutional reform.¹⁴

In the heat of the fast developing and explosive situation, many failed to see the crack between the radical section (both civilian and sectors of the armed forces) who wanted to "continue the revolution" and the bulk of the army which wanted to put a halt to the whole thing. In the war of leaflets at the time, this crack emerges in clear terms. Moreover, it was also at this time, during Endalkatchew's assumption of power, that the chasm within the radical intellectuals emerged for all to see. Those who were later to emerge as MEISONE backed the army and called for "giving the new government time to institute reforms" while those who were gathered around the EPRP stood for the continuation of the struggle to overthrow the decadent system and replace it by a popular and democratic one. In short, the image of radical officers leading the Revolution is as false as the assertion that the NCOs of soldiers did not play a part.

- And though the radical intellectual did play a prominent part in giving the struggle its depth and momentum, none of them were strongly organized enough to imprint themselves on the situation. The EPRP did cement its ties with the labour unions and the youth at this time but it was organizationally weak; its organ, *Democracia*, admittedly the most popular underground paper at the time, was identified as its organ only when it publicly declared itself on August 1975. The section which was later to form Meisone was still amorphous and the internal section echoed the positions of *Democracia* while the external one sang a different tune ("let's give the government time", etc.).
- The Derg, despite later accounts to the contrary, was not formed by the radical section of the armed forces movement. The majority of the officers and NCOs who had close links with the radical civilian opposition were relegated to the sub-Dergs or were in hiding. Thus, the

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Derg as a whole and objectively represented the bulk of army and that section of the population which said "stop!" or had belief in a "revolution guided from above". The so-called "change without bloodshed" theme of the time.

The question of "whose revolution?" can be firmly answered: the revolution belonged to the people, it was their achievement. The February Revolution was no military movement (except for those who see mutinies and ignore strikes), nor was it a creeping coup d'etat unless the way the coup de grace was given is taken as the substitute for the whole year long struggle of the people as a whole. Through the revolution, the people wanted radical changes, through the struggle they learnt political lessons, they combined their economic demands with basic political questions. When the government relented, when petrol prices got reduced or the new government promised constitutional reforms, they did not stop their struggle. Through their own struggle they had obtained the right to free speech, assembly, to strike, etc., - they wanted to guard these rights and expand them. Those who wanted them to stop cried that Ethiopians had gained freedom for the first time but did not seem to know what to do with it.¹⁵ But they knew what they wanted. The demand for a popular provisional government was forwarded at this time. "Feudalism-NO! Peoples' Democratic Republic-YES!" said the slogans of the period. The people liked the freedom they had obtained through their own struggle which had paralysed the State. They wanted to keep these rights, they wanted power too to guarantee these freedoms.

The same could not be said of the Derg and the movement it claimed to represent. On several occasions, the military tried to compromise with the ancient regime and to stifle the mass movement. To that end they toyed with the rejected idea of maintaining the monarchy. Theirs was a crudely nationalist and eclectic slogan - "Ethiopia Tikdem" (Ethiopia First) - which conveniently glossed over the vital issues of class differentiations and political

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power. The military was becoming aware of its muscles and as the possibility of its appropriating power loomed on the horizon, there was an increase in its drive to halt the civilian protest for fundamental change and power. To the military slogan of Ethiopia first, the people countered with the apt slogan of "The Ethiopian Masses First!". To all those who were trying to preach satisfaction with the reformist change at the top they countered with the demand for a provisional popular government to be formed by parties, mass organizations, civilians, soldiers, etc. A broad based popular government which would work temporarily paving the way for an election. Those who failed to see the essence of the conflict saw in the struggle a civilian versus military confrontation. It was in fact a conflict between the democratic and the dictatorship paths.

The rupture between the popular movement and the military was becoming clear. The gap led to realignments. A section of the armed forces (the Air Force, the Army Aviation, etc.) rallied to the civilian side while a section of the radical intellectuals rallied to the Derg. What was clear in those days, just before the overthrow of the Emperor, was that the popular movement was divided into two. The people justifiably considered the revolution as theirs and wanted to cap their victory with the formation of a popular and democratic system. The Derg, assuming the role of a self-proclaimed vanguard, wanted to be the guardian of "the revolution". The general slogans which had been echoed by almost all sectors started to be refined, the interpretations varied and the split became even more apparent. No one had denied the need for democracy but it became clear now that the way towards it or even what really was meant by it were not viewed in the same way by the various camps.

Some alleged of course, later on after the Derg takeover became a fait accompli, that the rupture came later when the civilians wanted to replace the Derg. Nothing could be farther from the truth: the division was there prior to the Derg takeover. The radical section of the popular

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movement, which had the most influence, was aware of the implications of the creature called the Derg right from the outset. The cry of warning was hurled long before September 12 as the following quote from an August 23, 1974 issue of *Democracia* clearly shows:

"...the Derg cannot fulfill the democratic demands of the people because what the people demanded is not to have a babysitter (guardian of power) but to elect their own representatives, to have control of these same representatives, to have freedom of speech, of the press and to organize political parties. A body (the Derg) which has undemocratic policies and working methods cannot guarantee democracy...

If demanding democracy is considered as turning back the wheels of history, then what the Derg is saying is that the solution is to move from the autocratic dictatorship to a military fascist one. In this case it (the Derg) has no other solution but to rely on its brute force."¹⁶

It couldn't be any more clear. The possibility of the monarchy being replaced by a military dictatorship was becoming a real one. The Ethiopian proverb says "what you fear happens, the child you hate inherits"; and this was precisely what happened on September 12, 1974 when the Emperor got overthrown and the Derg assumed power. The people were jubilant that the top symbol of the reactionary regime and system was finally overthrown (though the monarchy was not abolished at the time, contrary to the demand of the popular movement) but they were also wary of the future. Hence their jubilation was subdued.¹⁷ Actually, anyone who knows Ethiopians and Ethiopian history knows full well that when the chips are down the people never trusted the military. And it didn't take long for the peoples' worst fear to be realized, it was not long before they were told by the military rulers that demanding democratic rights and voicing protest amounted to a criminal action, to counter-revolution.

This is the background to the confrontation which led to the Terror. The Derg had no other choice but to resort

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to the use of force to stabilise itself. In this respect, the Terror was born with the Derg.

The "Kushuk Terrors": The New Dictatorship and the People

"Due to the absence of democratic rights... the revolution is in great peril... the course of the revolution is being deflected."

Resolution of the Extraordinary Congress of CELU, Sept. 18-21, 1975

"Ever since the midnight to dawn curfew was imposed in the major urban centre... Ethiopian nights have become peaceful and silence is truly 'golden'. In our case the curfew has been more effective than sound metres in Europe."

The Ethiopian Herald, Nov. 9, 1975

The Terror was officially launched by the Derg in 1976 when it declared open war against the EPRP. But what happened in between, from September 1974 to September 1976? Was it all peaceful? Did the opponents of the Derg resort to violent actions pushing it, as some allege, to retaliate? Who fired the first shot in what was to become known as the urban underground war?

The military regime, which now tries to complement its stern rule with pretenses of democratic procedures, flatly argues that it resorted to violence in order to counter the "white terror" of the EPRP. This argument of the regime has from time to time been echoed also by foreign writers inclined to superficial analysis or with a favourable bias towards the military rulers. Still others, in a manifes-

The "Kushuk Terrors"

tation of a twisted logic, have proposed that though the Derg resorted to violence, it had no choice since the opposition was cornering it and making it unable to rule. In other words, the Ethiopian people, and the EPRP specially, are said to have brought the wrath on themselves. "He who provokes a tiger..." or as an Ethiopian proverb puts it crudely: a restless finger will dip into excrement!"¹⁸

Ethiopians, who should know, talk of the small terrors and the big terror. The small terrors, or what some call the "kushuk terrors", came from the outset, right from the initial period of the Derg's rule. They paved the way for the big carnage and violent bloodletting which was to be known as the "Red Terror" and which was to be hailed by the regime as "the red performance". Between September 1974 and September 1976, there was no peace. A new war had started. The people did not raise arms during this time, they killed no official. Their main weapon was peaceful protest - demonstrations, petitions, protest resolutions, strikes and the like. They were merely trying to exercise the rights they had wrested from the feudal regime through their own struggle. They were also calling on the military regime to live up to its words of going back to the barracks by handing over power to the people. The people protested peacefully, the Derg reacted violently. These are the facts.

The Derg took over power on September 12, 1974. On the same day, it issued a proclamation which carried among other things, the following articles:

- art. 3(a): The Crown Prince, His Highness Merid Azmatch Asfa Wossen, will become King of Ethiopia.
- art. 8: It is hereby prohibited, for the duration of this proclamation, to oppose the aims of the philosophy of "Ethiopia Tikdem", to engage in any strike, hold unauthorised demonstrations or public meetings, or to engage in any act that may disturb public peace and security.

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art. 9: A special military tribunal shall be established to try those who contravene the orders enunciated in art. 8 of this proclamation... judgments handed down by the special military tribunal are not subject to appeal.

In other words, the Derg was not going back to the barracks, but telling the people to go back to their previous condition of servitude, muzzled and uncomplaining. As is to be expected, those who had spearheaded the February Revolution opposed this fervently. CELU held its congress from September 15-17 (1974) and passed resolutions calling for the respect of democratic rights and the formation of a provisional popular government. The same demands were echoed by teachers, students, by some officers and soldiers of the Body Guard, by members of the Air Force, the Army Aviation and Engineering Corps and by employees in the civil administration. The Derg had obviously no intention of handing over power, nor even of sharing it with anyone. Invoking its proclamation, it resorted to repression.

Labour and student union leaders were arrested or hunted. The Derg used units of the Fourth Division to attack the barracks of the Engineering Corps; five soldiers were killed and more than seven wounded. Scores were rounded up from the Army Aviation and the Body Guards, employees of the Finance Ministry and other institutions as well as no less than 30 intellectuals were jailed. On October 23, unemployed people who had gathered outside CELU headquarters "to register for work" were attacked by security forces though they had police permission (signed by the deputy chief of the CID, Colonel Bekele Teklu) to hold their gathering. Of the unemployed, the majority of whom were high school dropouts seeking jobs, one was killed and many others wounded.

Thus arrests gave way to shootings. The killings also spread to rural areas as peasants confronted the landlords

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backed by the police. Raising the decibel of violence even higher, the Derg arbitrarily executed 59 people on the night of November 23, 1974. In addition, the first chairman of the junta itself, Lt. General Aman Andom, was also killed along with his two aides. This first incident of mass execution highlighted the Derg's total rejection of due process of law and introduced its favourite tactic of lumping several prisoners (arrested for various reasons) together and executing them in toto as "counter revolutionaries".

The majority of those executed on November 23 were ministers and high officials of the fallen regime. None of them were tried; instead their names were read out in a hastily-called Derg meeting and the executions approved by a show of hands. It is reported for example, that Major General Isayas was in a coma and in the hospital and was taken unconscious to the execution ground. The arbitrariness of the selection can also be gauged from the fact that some of those who had worked closely with the Emperor and could be charged with concrete crimes were left untouched while the "small fish" who had the misfortune of not being particularly liked by the Derg officers were executed. The Derg labelled the unlawful execution a "political decision". Together with the dignitaries of the old regime, those officers who had been arrested in October for calling an end to the military rule and for the respect of democratic rights were also killed. Thus, Colonel Yigezu Yimenu and Captain Belaye Tsegaye from the Body Guards and NCO Bekele Wolde Giorgis from the Army Aviation were executed.

Immediately after these killings, the Derg dispatched more troops to Eritrea, thus opting for the use of force to settle the simmering guerrilla war there.¹⁹ This was not all: its Israeli-trained special commandos and assassin squads were let loose in the city of Asmara (Eritrea's capital) to strangle with piano wire youngsters chosen at random. Terror spread through the city and beyond, rumours of anti-Eritrean pogrom in Addis Abeba and elsewhere spread

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(some allege that these were fanned by the government while others contend it was done by the Eritrean fronts with a view of swelling their ranks). Numerous Eritreans fled into exile or to join the guerrillas.

On November 16, it should be mentioned, the Derg had issued a convenient piece of yet another proclamation. The proclamation came as an amendment to the existing Penal Code and aside from stipulating for the setting up of special court martials the articles made a wide variety of ill-defined offenses as crimes worthy of capital punishment. Thus, article 5 imposed the death penalty on "anyone who impairs the defensive power of the State". No one missed the point that this was directed at the democratic elements within the armed forces who were opposed to the Derg rule. Treason was also punishable by death but what constituted treason was left to the whims of the military courts assigned to try civilians and soldiers alike. As is to be expected, the proclamation was deemed retroactive, thus paving the way for the execution on November 23 of those arrested before the proclamation.

Actually, the special military tribunals were also to prove a sham. They became non-functional as summary executions and "special measures" or "political decisions" made even the semblance of trials superfluous. In cases where the harsh tribunals showed some "leniency" (a relative concept for sure), they were overruled by the Derg. A case in point is the fate of the six people executed in March 1975. The special military court sentenced Br. General Tadesse Birru, Lt. Colonel Hailu Regassa, Alula Bekele, Meles Tekle, Gideye Gebrewahid and Rezene Hagos to life imprisonment. Alula Bekele was a well-known landlord while Gen. Tadesse Birru was a well-known Oromo leader who had played a prominent role in the Metcha-Tulema movement of the mid-sixties (the movement struggled for the rights of Oromos). Meles, Gideye and Rezene were intellectuals opposed to the military regime; in fact, Meles was the editor of the university Students' Union (USUAA) paper, *Tagel* or

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Struggle, and he was arrested mainly because he had boldly argued with the Derg representatives who had come to address university students in mid-September. The Derg reviewed the judgment of the special tribunal and, revoking the life imprisonment, it sentenced all to death. Thus, the landlord who opposed the change was executed along with the two officers who didn't and the three intellectuals who had been struggling for land to the tiller even before the military had appeared on the political stage. The official statement declared that the executed were all "opponents of the land reform who had rebelled against the socialist philosophy of Ethiopia". Ironically, the intellectuals who had been targeted for castigating the regime's crude nationalism and lack of clarity and popular base were thus executed as anti-socialist by the same Derg which had riled against them for adhering "to a cheap foreign ideology". But this irony was to repeat itself so much and to become Ethiopia's reality.

Even a writer such as Fred Halliday, who seems to sympathise strongly with the Derg and most certainly has little sympathy for the Ethiopian opposition, could not wholly deny that the Derg's repression predated any military action on the part of the EPRP.

"The use of arrest, torture and execution of civilian opponents began with the clashes of May Day 1975, but this did not become a central part of P.M.A.C. policy until the end of 1976."²⁰

Was it not really a central part of the regime's policy even before 1976? Didn't the Derg resort to arrests and execution even before May 1975? In the previous pages, we have tried to show that the Derg started repression right from the outset. We can recapitulate and add some more:

- On October 7, 1974, the Derg ordered troops to assault the barracks of the Engineering Corps and Sergeant Meng-isteab Haile, Lance Corporal Makonen Kassa, L.C. Berhanu Mehari, Tassew Haile Michael and Wolde Michael

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Kebede were killed. Among the wounded figured Sgt. Major Yitayu Berokissa, Sergeant Bekele Tulu, L.C. Bekane Mouktar, L.C. Wolde Giorgis Tatu, L.C. Sintayehu Adege and NCO Endalkatchew. These and other arrested soldiers have "disappeared" since.

- On October 23, security forces opened fire on peacefully assembled unemployed people in Addis Abeba and killed one while wounding many.
- On November 23-24, sixty people were executed as a result of a political decision by the Derg.
- On March 13, 1975, four people including Lt. Colonel Amare Bashe were killed by security forces in the Wobera district, Selale province.
- On March 19, six people (General Tadesse Birru and the others mentioned previously) were executed.
- In April, the Second and Third Divisions of the army sent the Derg an ultimatum, calling on it to resign and hand over power to the people. A repression was unleashed in these Divisions, causing the deaths of no less than 35 officers and soldiers. Alleging a plot, the Derg arrested many others including Lt. Colonel Negusiie Haile and Captain Debessu Beyene.
- On April 30, it was reported that 30 peasants and peasant association leaders were killed in the Kaffa region (in Yebu and Limu) while nine others were killed in Ghimbi (Wollega region) and six more in Nopa (Illubabor region).

Around the same time, Dereje Legase, an intellectual, and eight other people were executed in Limu (Kaffa).

- In Betchena, a massacre led by Derg member (and presently WPE central committee member) Major Endale Tessema caused the death of more than 1000 peasants. The government used helicopters, mortars and troops ordered to kill all to subdue the peasants. Among the dead figured the very young like Menilik and Girma Gessese (brothers), the physically handicapped like Ato Woubet and Ato Adejem and the very old like the 95 year old blind man, Aba Umer. One woman was burned to death in her hut

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along with her seven children. Major Endalle is known from that time on as "the butcher of Bitchena".

In mid-February 1975, a state of emergency had been declared in Eritrea. Of course, the likes of Mr. Halliday may say that war is war or that since the Derg was engaged in a class struggle it had to kill its opponents. But what we have cited briefly above shows only the pattern in various places and instances; during this period numerous people were being arrested, the hunt was on to capture the EPRP leaders and to silence *Democracia*. In the police stations and special prisons, torture and secret executions were being reported. It was against this growing repression that the people were protesting at the time.

- During the May Day celebrations in Addis Abeba and other towns no less than 21 workers and students were shot dead by the soldiers and many others arrested.
- From May to June 1975, student unrest spread and their demonstrations were violently put down. The death of at least 11 students was reported at the time.
- On May 31, CELU opened a four day congress but the Derg, which opposed their resolutions calling for the respect of democratic rights, closed down CELU. Scores of workers' leaders were arrested and others killed in clashes in various areas.
- On June 7, 1975, Tobia Yitnegashu (former district administrator), Kifle Moges (public bar attendant), Worku Seyoum (trader), Zeru Haile, Idris Kheir Abdulkadir and NCO Getachew Fantai were officially executed. They were accused of "disturbing the peace and security of the people through mischievous propaganda and engaging in acts of lawlessness". As we would see later on, the accusations were totally false.
- On June 15-16, people in Wolayta who protested against brutalities by the security forces were repressed; dozens were killed and many more wounded and arrested.
- Between June 22 and July 8 alone, the government itself reported the killing by the security forces of no less

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than 65 persons in various localities. The dead were accused of having tried "to confuse the people by opposing the rural land reform proclamation".²¹

And so on and on. In Bonga alone, 150 peasants were reported dead during this same period (1975), victims of police violence. In Geletta /Felege Newaye (Gamo Goffa region) 80 people were killed in one single day. Peasants and intellectuals were killed in many rural areas and the whole incident was presented by the regime as "the elimination of counter-revolutionaries opposed to the land reform and the popular revolution". Opposition leaflets which appeared at the time documented the killings and though the Derg differed when it came to numbers the deaths were not denied.

On August 31, 1975, the EPRP publicly declared its existence by distributing its program (in three major Ethiopian languages) throughout the country. The distribution was extensive and went without a hitch; *Democracia* was officially identified as the organ of the party. The regime got even more jittery.

On September 12, 1975, during the "Revolution Day" celebrations, demonstrators openly carried placards denouncing the repression and calling for the respect of human and democratic rights.

Again in September, the Ethiopian Teachers' Association (ETA) held its general congress in Jimma (Kaffa) and passed resolutions which reechoed its June 1975 and earlier demands. Chiefly: an end to the repression, the release of political prisoners, the respect of democratic rights and the formation of a provisional popular government. The Derg castigated the teachers as "reactionaries", arrested the elected leaders and announced on September 23:

"A few teachers were caught red-handed while trying to distribute cheap subversive propaganda. The teachers were attempting to sabotage the ongoing revolution by trying to disrupt national unity and to divide

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the people on tribal and religious lines in pursuit of their own selfish interests."!

What was called cheap subversive propaganda was none other than the resolution of the congress signed by the participants. And the ETA, which had some 15 thousand members from all over Ethiopia, could not in any way have been accused of "tribal and religious" motives. However, as events were to prove again and again, the Derg was not averse to using all and sundry accusations in order to justify its brutal and illegal actions. Close to seventy-five teachers were jailed at the time and many of them perished during the nocturnal killings of the "Red Terror" years.

The turn of the workers came also. CELU was suspended in May 1975 but firm struggle by workers forced the government to lift the suspension. From September 18-21, 1975, CELU held an extraordinary congress in Addis Abeba attended by delegates from 183 member unions from all over the country. The congress passed a unanimous and historic resolution which called on the government to release all arrested labour union leaders and other political prisoners, to lift all restrictions on democratic rights, to accept the people's demands to organize freely and to form a provisional popular government, etc., and to impose price control, increase workers' wages and to adopt a progressive labour law. The resolution was signed by all the delegates.

On September 26, 1975, Ethiopian Air Lines labour union members who were distributing the resolution to workers were attacked by soldiers - eight workers were killed and scores of others wounded. The government alleged publicly that its troops were "forced to open fire" because the workers "were obstructing the arrest of a person who was distributing counter-revolutionary literature at the (EAL) establishment". Subsequent to the shooting of the EAL workers, a widespread arrest was launched against workers and labour union leaders who

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had participated in the congress. This led to unrest, strikes and further repression. Addis Abeba, Akaki, Dire Dawa and in other places... no less than 12 workers were shot dead. Around 150 workers and labour union leaders, including CELU chairman Marcos Hagos, were arrested.

We should perhaps interject here to narrate the treatment of the prisoners in the hands of the Derg. Marcos and the others were taken to the Derg siege where they were beaten and tortured under the supervision of Colonel Daniel Asfaw, at the time chief of the Derg Mereja (intelligence & operations). During one interrogation session, Marcos was bleeding so profusely that the colonel ordered him to sit on the floor so as not to "dirty" the chair. At one point, Mengistu came into the interrogation room, observed the questioning and left after stating to Marcos: "Atfina tefi inhonalen (We will be the destroyer and the destroyed)." The interrogation consisted of the repeated question: "are you a member of the EPRP?". Later on, the bloodied Marcos was paraded in front of the other arrested workers while Colonel Daniel taunted all by stating: "Look at your chairman! Is he the one who would be king!" Of the arrested, one engineer died during torture and the soldiers took out the corpse and brought in another prisoner from outside so as to round up the number. The new prisoner was referred to as the "engineer" and given the food which the relatives of the dead one continued to bring. When he was released seven months later, the relatives of the dead engineer knew that they were duped for long and that they would never see their kin. As expected, they mourned in private and kept quiet. Marcos Hagos was later transferred to another hellhole - the Maichew army barracks.

On September 30, 1975, in light of the spreading unrest, the Derg declared a state of emergency in and around Addis Abeba. Article 3 of the Emergency Declaration listed the following as Prohibited and Unlawful Actions:

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- a) Persons who assemble and demonstrate without permission and people who are found assembling, except on public and religious holidays;
- b) People who stop work or deliberately stage a go-slow action;
- c) People who resort to any kind of strike;
- d) People who utter unlawful words in public or any other place;
- e) People who prepare, write, keep and distribute or make other people know of unlawful pamphlets, placards or pictures;
- f) People who encourage, urge, threaten, issue orders, share their opinions or force other people to stop work;
- g) People who violate the curfew order;
- h) People who disturb or violate the orders of the security forces and who do not cooperate with them in their duties;
- i) People who force others to do unlawful acts;
- j) People who carry any kind of weapon, including bombs or knives, outside of their homes;
- k) People who are sent from work without a satisfactory reason;
- l) Generally, any person who disturbs the public peace.

In clearer terms, generally anyone who opposed or thought of opposing the Derg was thus deemed a criminal. How could a regime which governed with such laws "express the will and interest of the people"?

The Emergency officially continued till December 1975 though the above stipulations are for all practical purposes still in effect in Ethiopia. The Emergency law empowered security forces to "take appropriate and final

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measures against anyone who disturbs the public peace and security". Appropriate measures, like "revolutionary or free measures" of the latter days, meant nothing but summary execution. Indeed a policy of "shoot on sight" was followed by the soldiers as the 1977 Report on Ethiopia by Amnesty International confirmed. The death toll during this period was not negligible.

Actually, the draconian laws were made even more harsh months later by yet another Penal Code Amendment (July 5, 1976). The new articles increased the punishment for anyone who distributes "subversive literature" and the death penalty was imposed on any person "who establishes contact, sympathises with or assists anti-people and anti-revolution organizations within or outside the country". Peasants who refused to sell their grain to the State under its low and arbitrary prices were thus made liable to receive death sentences for "the crime" of "hoarding, overcharging or preventing grain and other commodities from reaching the public". The July law also stipulated that life imprisonment or death awaited anyone "who leaves the country or attempts to leave it illegally". Ethiopians call the Derg "the government of proclamations" and such are the laws they refer to determine the nature of the military regime.

The declaration of the Emergency heightened the repression. CELU was dissolved and its leaders attacked as "imperialist agents". All those who called for the replacement of the military regime by a provisional popular government were now labelled "enemies of the people and counter-revolutionaries".²² From Eritrea and elsewhere reports of atrocities against villagers were reported. Torture was becoming routine and brutal in the jails and prisons and the arrested began to "disappear". On December 6, the Derg proclaimed a new Labour Law, but the workers and their leaders dubbed it the new slavery law.²³ The confrontation continued. Aside from the cities, in the rural areas, the Derg itself reported that some 34 "counter-revolutionaries" were killed in Menz (Shoa), Arsi and Bale.

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By labelling the workers, students, intellectuals, the EPRP and all those who had fought against the feudal regime and who now refused to accept the authoritarian military rule as "enemies of the people" the Derg carried the conflict further into the realm of violence. One does not discuss with the enemies of the people given the Derg's insistence that "counter-revolutionaries" must be eliminated. The repression was intensified; in one day alone in the small town of Gore more than 40 were arrested. The number of arrested trade unionists rose to 500 while that of intellectuals and students almost doubled that. Numerous activists went underground or to the rural areas.

A new factor which emerged at the time was the strengthening of the Derg-Meisone alliance which was enshrined in the so-called Provisional Office for Mass Organization Affairs or POMOA. Under this cover, Meisone emerged as the advisor and right hand of the Derg and soon enough Meisone's example was followed by other miniscule Left groupings like the Proletarian League (Woz League) led by Senaye Likke, the ICHAAT led by Baro Tumsa and MALARED or the Marxist-Leninist Revolutionary Organization. POMOA was staffed by members of these groups though Meisone played the dominant party; their role was to play a politico-organizational task but in reality as people used to say, in dead seriousness, theirs was a task which came under the heading of "political police affairs". The whole bunch was aptly called "banda", the name given to traitors who fought alongside the Italian fascist army during the occupation of Ethiopia by Mussolini's hordes.

Advised by Meisone, the Derg issued on April 20 its so-called Program of the National Democratic Revolution. The occasion also served for discarding the hodgepodge of "Ethiopian socialism" for "scientific socialism". At least verbally, it must be added considering the fact that the opposition Left found the Derg's "Marxism-Leninism" unpalatable. More relevantly (from the point of view of the issue we are focusing on in this book), the intellectual allies

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of the Derg called on it to take decisive and urgent measures to clip the wings of the EPRP. Meisone chairman, Kebede Mengesha, a Sweden-educated intellectual who was himself to become the victim of the Derg later on, drafted and presented a memo to the Derg suggesting the need for "house to house searches" and "the flushing out of anarchists in Addis Abeba". "Anarchists" was the epithet given to the EPRP, along with trotskyite and a host of other labels. Senaye Likke of Woz League also supported the idea. Lists of "EPRP members and sympathisers" were drawn up by Meisone and Woz League

On March 3, 1976, the EPRP issued a public communique exposing the Derg's plan to unleash terror and to massacre EPRP militants and sympathisers.

The Derg unleashed the new wave of repression by sending two of the most psychopathic and feared majors to the South. Major Ali Mussa and Major Getachew Shibeshi, both of them close friends of Mengistu and still members of the top echelon of the ruling junta, went to Jimma (Kaffa), to Harar (Asbe Teferi, etc.) to Awash and Wolkite to supervise the execution of suspected EPRP members. The two majors confirmed to the people their worst fears about the violent nature of the Derg. They shot all and sundry, a father who came looking for his arrested son was shot, in dwelling places even the cats of suspects were shot by Major Ali. Traders and merchants, whose property was coveted by the majors and their cronies, were arrested in Harar / Asbe Teferi and shot as "anarchists". Arrested people were taken out of town and shot near a cliff, their bodies thrown down the gully. Some luckless shepherds who witnessed the execution by accident were also shot and thrown down the cliff.

Meanwhile in Addis Abeba, on April 22, workers, actors and singers of the National Theatre and municipal workers linked to the theatre and cinema staged a demonstration and practically tested the Derg-Meisone April 20th National Democratic Revolution Program which had stipulated democratic rights to the people. The workers

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were demanding the right to form unions and to have their working conditions improved. Armed troops and baton-wielding police attacked the peaceful demonstrators killing six (three died on the spot and the others died in the hospital later on) and arresting more than seventy. The Derg-Meisone promise of democratic rights was peacefully tested and proven to be hollow.

In April 1976, the Derg was also proceeding with its preparation of a "peasant march" on Eritrea. The idea was the brainchild of Meisone, but it appealed, as is to be expected, to the chauvinist gut instincts of the Derg. The plan was to mobilise thousands of peasants, forcefully or otherwise, from Gojjam, Tigray, Begemdir (Gondar) and Wollo and to send this ill-equipped "human wave" against the guerrillas. Negede Gobezie, the leader of Meisone who is presently in exile in Europe, went to Bonn (West Germany) to explain to assembled Ethiopian diplomatic personnel that they "should project the march as the spontaneous outburst of the people against secessionist rebels". The EPRP exposed this recipe for disaster and carnage; in the capital, Addis Abeba, and in several other towns public demonstrations were staged against the proposed march. Many demonstrators were killed, still more wounded and arrested.²⁴ The peasant march, code named the "Raza Project", proved to be a total failure as the poorly-armed peasants who had been told that they would find only a handful of ill-equipped Arabs and traitors were routed by the well-armed guerrillas.

May Day 1976 was also another day of widespread protest in Addis Abeba and other towns. The demonstrating workers, students, intellectuals, etc., carried placards calling for the respect of democratic rights, for an increase in the minimum wages of workers ("Our wages are 30 Birr while teff costs 60 Birr" — teff is the staple bread.), for the cessation of the killings in Eritrea and the resolution of the question through peaceful means, for an end to the banning of CELU, etc. In all the towns, soldiers and police attacked the demonstrators and an imprecise death toll of some 40

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people was reported at the time. Numerous people were arrested and many of these were to perish later in the nocturnal mass killings of the official terror.

On June 2, the Derg forcefully broke up the meetings of the industrial labour unions: scores were arrested. On July 5, the aforementioned Penal Code amendments were proclaimed, thus making even sympathising with parties like the EPRP a criminal offence punishable by death. In July, while the Majors Ali Mussa and Getachew Shibeshi continued with their murderous forays, a unit led by Major Takele Woldie massacred more than 200 peasants and *zematch* students in the Arero province of Sidamo. The crimes of the Derg troops so enraged the peasants that they rose up in rebellion and the Derg, in an effort to dampen the mass upheaval in the area, was forced to arrest Major Takele. He was hanged in public in the Soyoma Soro district on August 28, 1976 - sacrificed by the Derg it should be added. In Awash and Asbe Teferri, the Majors Ali and Getachew butchered so many workers that the martyrs have become enshrined through revolutionary songs and poems.

On July 13, the Derg announced the execution of 17 people in Addis Abeba. Among the dead figured Major Sisaye Habte (Derg member and head of the junta's foreign relations committee), Brig. General Getachew Nadew (chief administrator of Eritrea) and Mersiye Yihun, Dr. Abebe Asnake, Gizachew Walelign, Junior Technician Ayele Abozin, Betremariam Asnake and Shitaw Abebe. All were accused of "conducting anti-revolutionary and anti-democratic activities". Zewdu Tereffe was executed for "selling secret documents to an opposing party" while Menur Kalil Hassan, Sheikh Jemil Ibrahim Geda Gabi, Tesfakiros Wolde Sellasie, Haji Adem Mohammed, Mohammed Seyid Berhe and Bazzew Negash were executed for "economic sabotage" crimes. Demissie Kebede and Assefa Kassa were "found guilty of taking bribes". At the same time, Major Kiros Alemayehu, a Derg member, was arrested - he was later killed in prison and his death attributed to suicide.

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At this juncture it behooves us to deal with the question of the so-called charges. Many of the accused were not even tried, but did the so-called charges tally with the reality? The facts show that the charges read with the announcements of the executions were in almost all cases fabrications or distortions. For example, Meles Tekle, who had been sentenced to five years imprisonment during Haile Sellasie's time, was arrested by the Derg on the charge of "distributing counter-revolutionary literature". But he was sentenced to death for the "crimes" of opposing the land reform, socialism and for setting off bombs in the capital city.²⁵ Rezene Kidane was in Dessie (Wollo) and Gideye Gebre Wahid in Makalle (Tigray) when the said bombs exploded in Addis Abeba, but they were executed along with Meles for the same "crimes". It did not matter that they were initially arrested and charged with opposing the regime.

Idris Kheir Abdulkadir lived for long in Italy and was arrested while trying to enter Addis through the Bole International airport. Idris was not active in the Eritrean movement and had a history of mental disturbances. Still, he was executed along with others for the "crime" of "disrupting the peace and security of the Ethiopian people through mischievous propaganda directed against the rural land proclamation and of carrying out acts of lawlessness in various places"! To load the accusation even further, the government alleged that Idris was "a leader of a group of peoples of the so-called Eritrean liberation Front".

Workers who demanded better working conditions and democratic rights were called "imperialist agents", intellectuals who had for long struggled against tyranny were labelled "counter-revolutionaries". Major Sisaye opposed the Derg-Meisone alliance and the cozying up to Moscow; he was also opposed to the dictatorial moves of Mengistu. This caused his death. General Getachew brought to the Derg the demand by the troops in Eritrea for a peaceful solution to the conflict there. This made him in the eyes of the Derg a potential source of trouble. Zewdu

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Tereffe, accused of selling state secrets, had in fact been punished for selling secret documents to Somalia during the Emperor's time. He had been court-martialled (he was a major) and at the time of his arrest by the Derg he had been an unemployed civilian for a few years. The six accused of "economic sabotage" were presented as "profiteering merchants". However, one was merely a guard of a merchant's store, another was an old man who had rented a store to a merchant who was being sought later on for "hoarding", and one was the son of the merchant who had escaped arrest. The economic sabotage and hoarding also involved a meagre quantity of red pepper! Of the alleged "rich merchants" the four Moslems were so poor that a collection of funds was initiated by the Central Mosque to help their families.²⁶

The execution of innocent and inoffensive people defies rational logic, but for the perverted minds of the rulers it was logical through and through. The executions were intended to terrify the living. On July 5, a law was passed making hoarding a crime, a week later some people had to be killed on this same ground to drive the law home. It didn't matter if the accused were innocent or the transgression very minor. The iron fist of the State had to be felt. Whenever people grumbled, Haile Sellasie used to take out prisoners from death row and hang them in public. Such sudden reminders of the powers of the State were deemed as effective prophylactics for rebellions. The Derg officers, products of the old regime and system, also believed in this. The false accusations covered the real reason for which the Derg was killing its opponents, the mixing up of known reactionaries and known revolutionaries also confused the whole thing. Sixty dignitaries of the old regime killed on November 23, the newspapers and journalists write - the democrats killed with them are unmentioned, forgotten. Major Sisaye and Getchew Nadew killed, say the headlines - no one bothers about the others. Meles Teclé, the militant, is killed together with the widely known Alula Bekele, the feudalism, and all are accused of

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opposing the land reform. Those who don't know the militant's past take the whole thing as a "measure against feudalists". In this way, the deception is carried on. Who would bother to check if Demissie Kebede really took bribes? Since very few do bother, they would never know that Demissie was accused by a rival employee who had a Derg member as a relative and who wanted Demissie's position of sales clerk for the HVA sugar factory's distribution corporation. They would never find out that Demissie's fellow employees were utterly shocked by the arbitrary execution of this high school graduate.

False accusations and arbitrary arrests and killings characterised the Derg. Meisone fanned the same in its drive to punish those intellectuals and workers who had refused its recruitment drives. The prisons were filling up and blood was flowing. In July and August, arrested students and teachers in both Tigrai and Wollo were executed in secret - they were all accused of being EPRP members. In July, Meisone and Woz League leaders submitted to the Derg more lists of "EPRP leaders and members" and plans for the "all out drive" to liquidate the EPRP. By August 1976, there was intense repression not only in Addis Abeba but also in many parts of Shoa (especially in Haikotch and Butajira, Yifat and Tumuga and Chebo and Gurage), in Kaffa (Jimma and Agaro), in Sidamo (in Wolayita, Kembata and Derassa), in Wollega (Kelem province in particular), in Wollo and Tigrai, in Hararghe (especially in Harar, Dire Dawa, Alemaya, Gelemso and Asbe Teferi), etc. No region was unaffected, few towns were spared. The degree varied but the repression visited all corners of the country.

In July and August 1976, the situation was tense in Addis Abeba and other towns. In July 1976, the EPRP again issued a public communiqué denouncing the repression and revealing the Derg-Meisone war plans. It was also revealed that the Derg had put the Israeli-trained Flame Division (Nebelebal) on full alert and intended to use it in Addis Abeba. At this time, workers of the Lazaridis cotton

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factory and the Metahara sugar factory went on a strike. Soldiers in Eritrea once again called upon the Derg to end the Eritrean war through peaceful dialogue and to hand over power to the Ethiopian people. Underground leaflets by the Air Force ("Voice of the Air Force") and the army ("Oppressed Soldiers") denounced the junta. At Bishoftu / DebreZeit, the paratroopers rebelled and though their revolt was forcefully crushed by the Nebelebal unit many escaped with their arms. The soldiers in Jijiga expressed their support to the democratic demands of the opposition just as they had done so during May Day 1976.

The Derg was also busy. On July 16 alone, close to 1000 students were jailed. The witchhunt against worker activists and leaders was also stepped up. Aided by the Meisone-and-Woz list, the arrests spread. In Agaro (Kaffa), students and teachers were reported victims of a massacre. Government employees, especially those who worked in the land reform ministry, in the Swedish financed agricultural projects (WADU, CADU) and in EPID became particular targets. Many went underground; in their place the Derg-Meisone ordered troops arrested the relatives.

In short, by August 1976, the mask was off and the war was on. Repression had become synonymous with the Derg's rule so much so that the word Derg (which meant committee in Amharic) symbolised cruelty and arbitrariness. The people said "derg lewedaju Isat yizual beju (the Derg holds fire even for its friends)" - no one was safe. In 1975, the Derg killed left and right. In 1976, from January to August, the Derg killed incessantly as we had tried to highlight in the previous pages through an incomplete report. What changed in September 1976 was thus not the nature of the Derg. Only the degree of terror, the content of the repression assumed new features. The intensity and the brutality increased: this in essence was the only thing new about it. From the Derg takeover day up to September 1976, there was repression and terror in Ethiopia. Small in comparison to what was to come afterwards, but terror nonetheless. This is the brutal fact which the Derg

The "Kushuk Terrors"

and all its apologists try to gloss over in their attempt to accuse the opposition for resorting to self-defense after September 1976.

What Choice? What Intransigence?

There are choices and choices. A man on a tree with a fierce tiger above him and a hungry hyena below has choices. He can let himself be devoured or he can go up or down and fight to save himself from being devoured. After the fall of the Emperor, the Ethiopian people were left with a similar choice. They could accept the Derg's rule quietly or they could struggle against it.

Who wants to be devoured? The people chose to fight and for doing this they incurred not only the expected wrath of the Derg but the poison pen and vitriolic attacks of foreign experts like the Ottaways and Peter Schwab, who accused them of intransigence or of "practically asking the revolution to crush" them.²⁷ Of course, the accusers could claim that their attack concerned only the Left or the EPRP. But then who were these at the time? Who was opposed to the Derg at the time?

The rupture between the Derg and the workers-students-intellectuals was clear from the outset. Weren't the latter the ones who spearheaded the February Revolution and who can genuinely claim that they were revolutionary even during Haile Sellasie's time, unlike the belatedly-appearing officers? In terms of the political conflict, the people were the workers, students, intellectuals, etc. who pitted themselves against the military dictatorship.

In Ethiopia, as in some other such countries perhaps, political protests in the capital city have greater impact on the country as a whole, an impact which is far greater than

What Choice? What Intransigence?

the actual number of urban dwellers, workers or radical intellectuals. The Derg's rupture with the workers, students and intellectuals in the urban areas reverberated in the rural areas too. Protest by civil servants and democratic soldiers were echoed. Student campaigners (*Zematch*), in their majority sympathetic to *Democracia* (the EPRP), linked themselves to the peasantry to heat up the anti-feudal struggle and to link this with a struggle for meaningful freedom and power. In other words, what some foreign commentators called "the elite opposition" in the urban areas was no isolated elite but a voice of the majority. The land reform was popular and it neutralised some sections of the peasantry for a period. But the Derg and the peasants were not really in tune with one another. If the Derg had bonapartist pretensions (a debatable issue) this was only its own illusion. The Northern peasantry was more or less unaffected by the land reform and it didn't take long for the Southern one to see that feudalism was gone but the oppression had intensified.

The opposition to the Derg was peaceful. Even the political program of the EPRP (1975) carried in the foreword the rejoinder: "if the democratic rights of the working people are respected, it (the EPRP) will struggle for the realization of its final objectives in a democratic way; if the rights are denied, it will employ and adopt appropriate forms of struggle necessary to advance the revolution".²⁸ It was not the EPRP or the people who "provoked" the Derg to be anti-democratic, it was the junta itself which barred all avenues of peaceful political dissent. Workers whose union rights are curtailed, whose peaceful means of protest lead to killings and arrest have no other choice but to strike. The other "alternative" is of course, slavery, but the Ethiopian people, who had said "better death than slavery", could not be faulted for discarding it. The intransigence tag belongs to the dictatorial Derg. The people were not provocateurs, they were provoked into fighting, into choosing extra-legal means of combat in order to achieve their noble ends. Censorship was total, underground leaflets

To Kill A Generation

flourished. Parties were banned, parties went underground. Peaceful protests were forbidden, strikes spread. Arrests and executions became widespread, resort to self-defense became a necessity. The Derg wanted no tame opposition, it wanted no opposition. As events showed, it did not even spare its intellectual collaborators; the turning wheel of the military dictatorship was out to crush all dissent on its way. Those who saw the danger from the outset chose to block its progress. Those blinded into stupidity by their own ambitions failed to grasp the whole picture and stuck themselves to the Derg and got crushed by it in due time.

A government must derive its just powers from the consent of the governed and this is no EPRP quotation. When this consent is absent and the rule of terror and dictatorship prevail, the people will have no alternative but to resort to rebellions and arms. The Derg closed all avenues of peaceful opposition and even tried to project opposition as "unEthiopian" as if it was not such an opposition which toppled the Emperor and, unwittingly, paved the way for the Derg's own ascendancy. It could be said that the Derg did not want to repeat the mistakes of the Emperor in the February days but this also indicates that the Derg was as dictatorial as the old monarch.

After curtailing democratic rights and establishing a rule by draconian proclamations, the Derg set up POMOA, but this was no genuine alliance of political groups and parties. POMOA was intended by the Derg to be an ideological, political and organizational police force. The Derg also paid lip service to the united front between progressives but it didn't genuinely pave the way for such a nationwide democratic cooperation of the various forces.²⁹ It tried to buy the opposition through fringe benefits of bureaucratic posts - Meisone took the bait and the EPRP didn't. Those who fought against the Derg knew what they wanted (democracy and popular power) and they knew what was unwanted (dictatorship of any form). It was the Derg's misfortune that it had to deal with forces who had

What Choice? What Intransigence?

become even more conscious and wary after a historic revolutionary struggle.

Had the opposition immediately resorted to violence one would have been justified in admonishing it by pointing out that it should have tried the path of peaceful protest. But the opposition tried the path of peaceful dissent and it got in reply intensified repression. Who then is the provocateur? Who is the intransigent one? In fact, the whole issue indicates that the Derg was quite unpopular and knew it. For, had the Derg been popular, as some alleged at the time and do so even now, no amount of agitation by the opposition would have made the people rise against it. A people satisfied with the condition of its life does not rise in rebellion that easily. On the contrary, even the prospect of change makes the people wait; those who think that demagogues or the like can whip up the people into a situation of rebellion with ease do not know the difficulty of political agitation even in a situation in which the people are not that well disposed to the government.

The people could have been satisfied with their fate, applauded the military rule, supported the executions of "reactionaries" and could have gone on with their life of drudgery and servitude. But then, the same people who accuse them of provoking the Derg may have, in this case, called them ignorant fools who submit quietly to dictators. However, since Ethiopians were not struggling to convince foreigners or to get their approval such questions did not bug them. They wanted change and they went about getting it in the ways they thought proper.

The cost was undoubtedly high, but it's no cliché to say that freedom never comes cheap. Perhaps the opposition, the EPRP in particular, should have adopted tactics which exposed it less to the violent fits of the regime - this can be said and sustained. But there can be no valid argument which negates the exigency of fighting, of struggling. In fact, we are justified in suspecting those who look down on struggles for democracy in Ethiopia (in Africa as a whole for that matter), alleging that these struggles are "cosmopolitan" or "elitist", are at heart racists whether they know

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it or not.³⁰ The German Nazis killed hundreds of hostages for one of theirs killed by the Resistance but we have never read of a widespread condemnation of the Resistance to Nazi occupation. *TIME* magazine reportedly scoffed at "backward Ethiopians" trying to fight against "civilised Italy" of Mussolini, but those who deride struggles against fascist occupation end up by losing their own credentials. Let alone peaceful struggle, even when it comes to armed struggle, one finds the double standard. Are the Afghan mujahiddin provoking the Soviets by fighting? For sure, the Russians are wreaking havoc in that country and maybe they won't bomb villages to smithereens if the fighters drop their guns and stop the struggle. But from the point of view of Afghans, and of really freedom-loving people elsewhere, what kind of Afghanistan would that be? The Kenyans died in thousands for their independence and they did well even if they ended up by being not so free. The view from afar may show an alternative, but the observation from close quarters shows none but one when faced with a dictatorship - to struggle using all appropriate forms.

No amount of provocation can turn a democratic regime into a fascistic one. If this was the case, Europe of the 80s, especially Italy, Spain, etc. would have become fascist dictatorships. Popular dissent does not push a popular regime to unpopular measures, it should make it listen to the peoples' voice. The Derg was a dictatorship from the outset. It tolerated no peaceful protest or opposition. Its paternalism disguised a brutal dictatorship. Perhaps, the Derg was what Ethiopians deserved in the eyes of some foreigners. But unfortunately, the Ethiopians thought and believed that they deserved better. To realize their aims they raised no arms, but the Derg did to repress them. Who blames them if they refused to be wiped out quietly? Their struggle for democracy in fact emerges as one of the proud chapters of their history and as a consequence makes the Derg and its apologists appear as callous and brutal or mercenary and irresponsible respectively.

Notes

Part One

- 1 One has only to refer to the literature of the various groups which claim the name, the Oromo Liberation Front, to see the veracity of the assertion. In a publication of one of the OLF groups (OROMIA SPEAKS, vol.1, no.1, Jan. 1979, "publication of the Foreign Relations Bureau of the OLF") it is, for example, stated that the Red Terror itself was an Amhara plot of the Derg-Meisone-EPRP and EDU "to liquidate Oromo revolutionaries"!
- 2 For a general account of an historical nature, one can refer to:

Jean Doresse, *Ethiopia*. trans. New York: Putnam's, 1959.

J. S. Trimingham, *Islam in Ethiopia*. London: Oxford University Press, 1952.

Sven Rubenson, *The Survival of Ethiopian Independence*. London: Heinemann, 1976.

A. H. M. Jones & Elizabeth Monroe, *A History of Ethiopia*. Oxford 1978.

For a treatment of the Haile Sellasie period, the following books give a useful picture:

Richard Greenfield, *Ethiopia - A New Political History*. London: Pall Mall Press, 1965.

Christopher Clapham, *Haile Selassie's Government*. London: Longman, 1968

Patrick Gilkes, *The Dying Lion: Feudalism and Modernization in Ethiopia*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1975.

John Markakis, *Ethiopia - Anatomy of a Traditional Polity*. Clarendon: OUP, 1974.

Addis Hiwot, *Ethiopia: From Autocracy to Revolution*. Review of African Political Economy. London 1975.

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See also *The Historical Dictionary of Ethiopia* by Chris Pronty and Eugene Rosenfeld, The Scarecrow Press Inc., London, 1981.

- 3 R. L. Hess. *Ethiopia - The Modernisation of Autocracy*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1970.
- 4 A detailed account, or rather reportage, is given in Greenfield, (*Ethiopia - A New Political History*), Ch. V. See also Christopher Clapham, "The Ethiopia Coup d'Etat of December 1960", *Journal of Modern African Studies*, vol. 6, no. 4, 1968, pp. 495-507.
- 5 A detailed history of the Ethiopian Student Movement has yet to be written by the participants and leaders of the movement. However, there exists an extensive literature both in Amharic and in English in the various union publications (such as *Challenge, Struggle, Combat, Tatek, Tiglatchin, Foreword, WWFES Bulletin*, etc.).
See also: Legess Lemma, "The Ethiopian Student Movement 1960-1974", *North East African Studies*. vol. 1, no. 2, 1974. And R. R. Balsvik, *Haile Selassie's Students: The Intellectual and Social Background to Revolution, 1952-1977*. East Lansing, Michigan USA), 1985.
- 6 In 1968, University students staged a long strike supporting the Gojjam peasants though the strike was ostensibly triggered by a protest to the fashion show which was to be shown on the University campus.

It should be mentioned here also that in the early 1940's, there was a big rebellion in Tigray which was put down with the help of the British. Despite the British intervention, some allege that the rebellion, referred to as the Woyane, was initially instigated by the British themselves, who are said to have had plans of separating Tigray from Ethiopia and incorporating it into Eritrea (or at least the highland part of Eritrea) and forming an independent state under British domination. Present day Tigrean nationalists gathered in the TPLF consider the Woyane rebellion as a genuine popular revolt.

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- 7 A history of the Ethiopian working class has yet to be written. However, a general picture can be found in the post-1974 issues of *Voice of Labour*, published by CELU.

I have also referred to "General Notes on the Struggle of the Ethiopian Proletariat" (in Amharic), unpublished manuscript by the EPRP, 1984.

- 8 I am not aware of any published history of the EPRP. Some sources indicate that the Second Congress of the EPRP (March 1984) has issued a detailed paper entitled "An Objective Appraisal of the History of the EPRP 1972-1984" but I have not seen it.

Foreign reports on the EPRP, especially comments on the Party's formative periods, are, on the whole, speculative and uninformed. For example, EPRP sources acknowledge that during the 1972 founding congress, the name of the party was neither the EPRP nor the Ethiopian People's Liberation Organization (EPLO) which title was used solely for foreign relations purposes. The party's name was changed to the EPRP in the 1975 Party Conference in Addis Abeba prior to the August 31 declaration of the party. The Conference, held in secret in Addis Abeba, amended the party political program, abolished the post of secretary general of the party (replaced by secretary of the C.C.) and increased the number of the C.C. members by the process of cooptation.

- 9 Syria and Iraq consider Eritrea part of the "Arab nation" while conservative states like the Sudan and Saudi Arabia have put more emphasis on the religious question, on the false assumption that "Moslem Eritrea" is fighting against "Christian Ethiopia". This misconception, it must be said, has been fanned by some of the Eritrean fronts themselves; so much so that some Arab countries and organizations were not aware for long that Ethiopia itself had a very big percentage of Moslems.

- 10 There is no book which makes an objective appraisal of the Eritrean struggle and the role of the various fronts. However, for a partisan analysis on the struggle as a whole or one or the other fronts, the following can be cited:

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- Bereket H. Sellasie, *Conflict and Intervention in the Horn of Africa*. MR Press, New York, 1980.
- J. Firebrace & S. Holland, *Never Kneel Down*. Spokesman Press, UK, 1984.
- R. Sherman, *Eritrea-The Unfinished Revolution*. New York: Praeger Publishers, 1980.
- David Pool, *Eritrea-Africa's Longest War*. London: Anti Slavery Society, 1979.
- Lionel Cliffe and Basil Davidson (eds), *The Long Struggle of Eritrea*, Nottingham: Spokesman, 1988.
- James Petras, *The Eritrean Revolution and Contemporary World Politics*, Trenton: Africa Research and Publications Project, 1984.

The various Eritrean fronts also produce journals and pamphlets on their struggle. One of the leaders, Osman Saleh Sabbe, has written, among other titles, *A History of Eritrea* (Beirut 1974) and *The Root of the Eritrean Disagreement* (Beirut 1978).

For a critical appraisal, see the following:

- Proletarian Internationalism or Bourgeois Nationalism?*
by the Ethiopian Student Union in North America,
1976.
- Revolution or Capitulation* by Eritreans for Liberation
in North America, 1978
- Haki Yiwza et al., *Debate on the Eritrean Revolution*, in
ALTRAFRICA. September 1977, Roma.
- Emmanuel (Desta) Gebre Yesus, *Class Struggle and
the Problem in Eritrea*. Addis Abeba, 1979.
- Tesfatsion Medhane, *Eritrea - Dynamics of a National
Question*. B. Grüner, Amsterdam.
- Haggai Erlich, *The Struggle Over Eritrea 1962-1978:
War and Revolution in the Horn of Africa*. Stanford:
Hoover Institution Press, 1983.

See also: John Markakis: *National and Class Conflict
in the Horn of Africa*. London: Cambridge
University Press, 1987

- 11 For a detailed account of the period, see:

J. Markakis & Nega Ayele, *Class and Revolution in Ethiopia*. Nottingham: Spokesman, 1978.
Colin Legum, *Ethiopia - The Fall of Haile Sellasie's Empire*. London: Rex Collins, 1975.
René Lefort, *Ethiopia - An Heretical Revolution?* London: Zed Press, 1983.
David and Marina Ottaway, *Ethiopia - Empire in Revolution*. New York: Africana Publishing Co., 1978.
Fred Halliday & Maxine Molyneux, *The Ethiopian Revolution*. London: Verso, NLR, 1981.
Dawit W. Giorgis, *The Red Tears: War, Famine and Revolution in Ethiopia*. Trenton, N.J.: The Red Sea Press, 1989.

The Ottaways and Lefort give the military and Mengistu the leadership role in the February Revolution. Halliday and Molyneux also do the same through subtler arguments. Major Dawit concurs as is to be expected. Fred Halliday also justifies the Soviet intervention in Ethiopia and Afghanistan in his article, "How tight the bear hug?", *New African* magazine, London, April 1980, pp. 44-45.

- 12 In 1984, the military regime of Colonel Mengistu was in turn accused of trying to hide or minimise the extent of the famine that gripped the country since late 1983. Millions of dollars were spent to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the Emperor's downfall and the formation of the ruling party, the Workers Party of Ethiopia, while hundreds of people were dying daily (and unmentioned by the government-controlled media) in Wollo and Tigray. See Dawit: *The Red Tears*, for details.
- 13 Colin Legum, *op. cit.* Also: Raul Valdes Vivo, *Ethiopia - The Unknown Revolution*. Havana 1977.
- 14 The extent of the schism which developed within the armed forces could be gauged from the "leaflet war" which raged between the various units and sections of the armed forces.

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- 15 Charles Mohr, *New York Times*, April 10, 1974.
- 16 *Democracia*, vol. 1, no. 6, August 23, 1974.
- 17 Some like Colin Legum mistakenly tried to see in this the Ethiopian people's "attachment" to the monarchy.
- 18 For an illustration of the twisted logic which put the blame on the victims for the crimes of the government, see:

Marina and David Ottaway, *Empire in Revolution*
Halliday and Molyneux, *The Ehtiopian Revolution*
Peter Schwab. *Ethiopia: Politics, Economics and Society*. Colorado (USA), 1985.

Of the above three, Peter Schwab emerges as the most superficial and, as is to be expected, the most unabashed apologist of the military regime and its terror.

- 19 A convenient piece of posthumous history has been written and fanned (mainly by Bereket Habte Sellasie) about Aman Andom's alleged preferences for peaceful means of settling the Eritrean question. The facts seem, however, different from what Aman's friend wants us to believe.

Aman Andom was indeed popular in the army, but his popularity stemmed not from his democratic or peaceful inclinations but from his warlike positions. During the 1964 Ogaden war, he let his soldiers loose on the Somalis and would have marched and occupied Somali territory had not the more politically sensitive Emperor stopped him. Aman, as chairman of the PMAC, represented the biggest danger to the Eritrean fronts. As an Eritrean (he spoke Tigrigna, Tigre and Arabic, too), he was not hindered by the nationality-bias which could have been hurled by the fronts at another chairman. During his tour of Eritrea, he was enthusiastically welcomed by the Eritrean people and even certain Arab countries, including the Sudan, started to advise the fronts to "try to settle the issue peacefully with your brother". Individually, Aman was opposed to the independence of Eritrea and had no sympathy for the fronts (on both counts, his friend Dr. Bereket had the same view at the time). His plan was to isolate the fronts from the people, and it should be stated that

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had Aman lived and continued to be in power the fronts would have had a very difficult time indeed.

The Derg members did not trust Aman and he was impatient with them also. Aman was potentially a populist but politically right of centre, which in Ethiopian terms qualifies him as dictatorial. The Derg members did not fear that he would collaborate with the Eritrean fronts - they feared mainly that he would rally the soldiers and get rid of the Derg itself. To counter such a coup attempt, Mengistu and his cronies had his phones tapped and they also benefited from inside reports supplied by Shimeles Adugna (still a government official / minister) who was close to Aman. In the power struggle between the officers of the Derg and Aman Andom, the Eritrean question floated in the background as Aman was projecting himself as the indispensable factor to solve the question. Aside from this, there is no evidence, be it in Aman's military background or political views, to suggest the label of "the man of peace" attached to him by Bereket and others.

Like Aman, Bereket's history is also truncated. During the Emperor's days, Bereket was opposed to the Eritrean fronts and their program. His attempts to get closer to the Ethiopian Left were rebuffed and I know from a reliable source that those who were to form Meisone considered Bereket a "CIA agent"; an accusation which has been reechoed in the late seventies by the EFLNA group in the USA. When the Derg assumed power, Bereket was a member of the Inquiry Commission investigating the ministers of the imperial regime. As an attorney general and investigator he was so harsh that many members of the Derg in fact admired his zeal while he was feared and hated by the relatives of the accused. Bereket fled into exile as a result of the precarious position he found himself in because of his close association with Aman (some allege that he was Aman's advisor at the time). At present, Bereket supports the Eritrean front (EPLF) with the zeal of a latter-day convert and true believer. Need it be added that he has a rabid hatred for the Ethiopian opposition and this emerges in his articles and aforementioned book?

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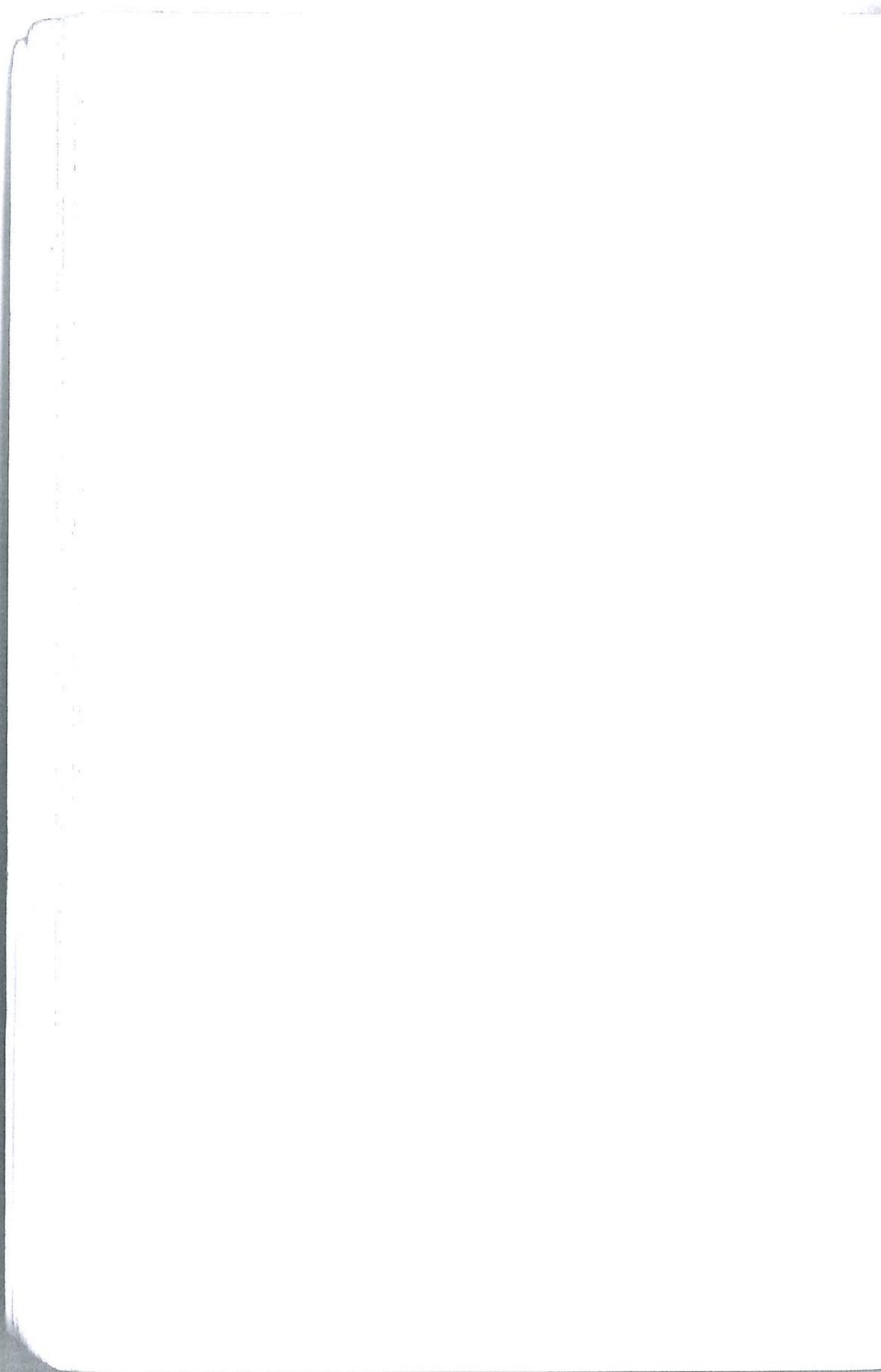
- 20 *The Ethiopian Revolution*, Ottaway, p. 22; see also: Halliday and Molyneux. "Ethiopia's Revolution From Above", *Merip Reports*, no. 106, June 1982.
- 21 *The Ethiopian Revolution*, magazine published by the PMAC, September 1977. This magazine, in its chronology of events, makes no mention of the EPRP members executed officially in November 1976 and other times.
- 22 *The Ethiopian Herald*, February 27, 1976.
- 23 For a detailed treatment of the Derg's Labour Law see *Democracia*, vol. 2, no. 30, 1975.
- 24 Such support given by Ethiopian democrats to the Eritrean struggle is often unmentioned by the Eritrean fronts themselves. In fact, the EPRP jointly fought with the ELF against the peasant army and EPRP cells in Asmara worked with the EPLF to carry out anti-war agitation amidst the soldiers. While the Derg negatively acknowledges the impact on the troops of the EPRP agitation, the fronts are keen to avoid any mention of it.
- 25 The bombs were actually planted in the Addis Municipality and the Wabi Shebelle Hotel by the urban commandos (fedayeen) of the ELF.
- 26 For a detailed account, see ABYOT, information bulletin of the EPRP in English, vol. 1, no. 6, August 1976.
The full report of the Tadesse Birru-Melles Tekle executions is carried by *Democracia*, vol. 2, no. 3, March 1976.
- 27 Schwab, *op. cit.*, page 41.
- 28 EPRP Political Program, 1975, page XI in the English version
- 29 For EPRP's response to the Derg's united front call, see *Democracia*, Special Issue, vol. 3, 1976.
The EPRP accepted in principle the need for "a united front of democratic and progressive forces" but it insisted

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that such a front can be viable only if democratic rights are respected, political prisoners released, the repression halted etc., to pave the way for dialogue, and also if the various parties and organizations, fronts, mass organizations, etc., are also allowed to be part of the united front process. EPRP's conditions were rejected by the Derg.

It should be mentioned here that EPRP's reasoned position was condemned by ultra-leftist elements who declared subsequently that they have formed an "Ethiopian Communist Party" which accepts "Mao Tse-tung Thought". The ECP had no significant following or impact in Ethiopia and it disintegrated within a short time. Three of the ECP leaders who fled into exile published in 1979 a "self-criticism" in which they condemned "Mao's Thought" as "reactionary and unMarxist".

- 30 For the elitist tag see Marina Ottaway's "Social Classes and Corporate Interests in the Ethiopian Revolution", *Journal of Modern African Studies*, vol. 14, no. 3, 1976.



Part Two

The Official Terror

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1

Phase One: The Target is Declared

*"What is needed now is not democratic rights
but DM-4 bullets."
Meisone slogan, August 1976*

*"Underground terrorist organizations closely linked with
imperialist intelligence services are trying to create an
atmosphere of fear and uncertainty in Addis Abeba
and other cities."
New Times, Moscow, 1976*

*"The EPRP was in fact counterrevolutionary and forced the
Dergue into the violent position that it took. That violence
clarified the determination of the Dergue and marked an
important stage in the development of the Revolution."
Peter Schwab, *ibid*, p.42*

September 11, or Meskerem 1 in the Ethiopian calendar, is New Year's Day in Ethiopia. September 11, 1976 ushered the new Ethiopian year 1969 but the day brought no good tidings to the people. Wishes of a happy new year sounded incongruous but they were perhaps more sincerely felt than ever before. And for a reason.

On this first day of the Ethiopian New Year, the military government officially broadcast a statement designating the EPRP by name as public enemy number one. The statement piled on the EPRP accusations ranging from

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the outrageous to the ridiculous. The fall in agricultural production, the rotting of crops, peasant rebellions, increase in commodity prices, lack of spare parts, machinery breakdown in factories, the worsening of the living standard of workers, strikes by workers, students and teachers, demonstrations, alleged refusal by European dock workers to load relief supplies destined for Ethiopia, the spread of prostitution and a host of other problems were presented as the works of the EPRP.

The declaration of war caught few people by surprise. The repression had been stepped up in July and August and the EPRP had itself declared that the Derg-Meisone were preparing war against the party. To be sure the propaganda barrage was well-orchestrated. A film which had been prepared to substantiate "sabotage" accusations against a former minister of National Resources Development was shown instead on TV to "prove EPRP's economic crimes" - only the chamber of commerce members who had earlier seen the film would note the contradiction and that did not matter.¹ Meisone and the other Derg-allied groups unleashed themselves to portray the EPRP as anarchist, trotskyite, CIA agent, feudal, fascist, supporter of Ethiopia's enemies, etc. No insult was deemed unworthy, no accusation left unmentioned. For the ills and the problems of the regime, a new scapegoat seemed to have been found. "The party of feudalists and aristocrats!" Meisone fumed, despite the fact that its central committee was the one filled by the sons and daughters of the aristocrats, if at all this mattered actually. Identifying the EPRP as the counter-revolution justified the repression that was being declared at an intensified level. "There is no middle ground," said the Derg and Meisone, and 'mehal sefari', (neutral) became itself an insult word, a criminal offense. "He who is not with us is with the EPRP," the Derg and Meisone seemed to say, and as many apolitical intellectuals were to find out later on, he who was not with them was slated for extinction.²

Phase one of the official terror was thus begun in September 1976. Within a year, by February 1977, the

The Target is Declared

Terror was to change colour through its intensity and barbarity to become the Red Terror proper. Between the September Terror and that which followed, the so-called Red one, there was no qualitative difference - the only change really was in numbers. The declaration of the anti-EPRP war on an official level did step up the level of the previous repression and it did introduce new components which the Red Terror inherited and expanded. But for the Meisone-advised Derg, the difference was serious. By labelling its terror "Red" and the self-defense acts of its opponents the "white terror" it was consciously passing a message across by referring to the Bolshevik experience and equating itself with the forces of the revolution there. By this account, its enemies then emerged in the media as the trotskyites and Denikins, the white guards and the Kolchaks, etc.

Following the declaration of war against the EPRP, workers of the Pepsi and Coca-Cola factories of Mosvold, Addis Tyre, garment and other factories, employees of the banks, the airlines (EAL), telecommunications, etc., students and intellectuals were rounded up. The Israeli trained Nebelbal unit was also brought to Addis Abeba to help in the arrests and repression. The *kebelles* (Urban Dwellers Associations), which had been purged, were empowered to set up judicial tribunals and to administer immediate justice; the *kebelles* opened up their own prisons and torture centres. The September 12 celebrations (fall of the monarch) were also used to denounce the EPRP further; spontaneous demonstrations of dissent were violently put down. An unannounced house to house search was launched in Addis during which 14 people were reported killed; the troops also raped and looted while rounding up many youths and relatives of those suspects who had disappeared.

A mass grave holding the mutilated corpses of 22 people was uncovered in Sebata, some kilometres outside of Addis Abeba. Hyenas had dug out the corpses from the shallow grave and it was possible to see that the dead (two

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of them female) had been tortured before being executed with their hands tied behind their backs. A similar mass grave containing 30 bodies was also found near Kera, in Addis Abeba. The discovery of the mass graves substantiated the spreading report that nocturnal executions of prisoners were going on in secret. People residing in the outskirts of Addis talked about hearing excavators (caterpillars), repeated shots, screams and cries.

A week after the declaration of war, Addis Abeba and other towns were gripped by terror. Hundreds were killed, especially in Addis Abeba, Nazareth, Dire Dawa, etc. Thousands were arrested. Every night, batches of prisoners, almost all of them tortured, were taken to the outskirts of the cities and shot to death and dumped into mass graves. And even at this early period the terror was arbitrary: anyone who had opposed the regime, anyone who had opposed Meisone, intellectuals who had been lukewarm to Meisone, and especially anyone young who couldn't prove loyalty to the Derg and Meisone became the targets. Since the EPRP was supported by the majority of the youth, the teachers, workers, etc., it appeared as if a decision had been made to wipe out all these. Events were to prove the sad truth of such fears.

On September 19, workers of the Public Sector went on a strike protesting against the repression and their own worsening conditions of work. From September 21-23, people in the various kebelles of Addis staged protest demonstrations against the repression. The demonstrations were put down violently and no less than 30 were reported killed. From September 21 to the first day of October, more that 200 people were killed by the soldiers and that many corpses were piled high in the central morgue of the Menelik hospital.

It is evident thus that the Derg was responsible for the Terror. The Terror was unleashed not to retaliate against armed actions by the EPRP but to wipe out the EPRP and all dissent. Neither the EPRP nor any dissenter had fired a single bullet in the cities at the time or before the Derg

The Target is Declared

declared its anti-EPRP war. The attempt on Mengistu's life, which occurred on September 23 and is attributed to the EPRP, took place twenty-three days after the launching of the official terror, after weeks of daily and nocturnal killings. It is apparent that the Derg cannot invoke self-defense arguments to justify its killings, while the EPRP can in all fairness. In fact, the political bureau of the EPRP issued its policy statement (entitled "The Derg Has Declared War on Us") on the need to resort to "urban armed self-defense" in October. And the first victim of this policy, the Meisone leader Fikre Merid, was killed on October 2 - a month after the daily bloody murders were undertaken by the Derg and Meisone.³

On another level, it is possible even to sum up all the consequent events and assert that the killings by the EPRP were miniscule compared to the mass murder undertaken by the Derg. This is not to condone one violence and to condemn another, but even if one ignores the facts and takes the Derg allegation of self-defense or retaliation as valid, its terror emerges as an outright overkill.⁴ But this was not the case, as the facts show that the Derg itself launched the terror first and cornered the EPRP, forcing it to resort to armed actions under unfavourable urban conditions. Throughout the repression, the Derg's cruelty and violence was unparalleled and primitive.

The Derg declared the EPRP the enemy of the people and proceeded to wipe it out. To peaceful dissent it replied with murder and savage torture. It is this fact, the fact that the Derg started the terror campaign against the EPRP, which the apologists for the military regime try to hide in an effort to blame the EPRP for "provoking" the Derg to "resort to violence"! Provocation indeed!

Why September 1976?

"Our enemies planned to eat us for lunch but we ate them for breakfast!"

Mengistu Haile Mariam, 1978

The open declaration of war against the EPRP in September 1976 had its reasons. Mengistu's above-quoted statement could sum it up, but it is necessary to delve deeper and bring out the main points which made the Derg rush towards an escalation of the violence.

In general, it can be said that the Derg declared war on the EPRP because in the political struggle the latter was defeating it resoundingly. Despite the Derg's radical laws and proclaimed adherence to scientific socialism, the radical opposition was neither duped nor pushed to abandon its skepticism and demands for a change in government. The more the regime moved to verbally outmanoeuvre the Left, the more the latter stuck to its positions.

The timing of the declaration of war could be explained by the following reasons:

- 1.) The growing opposition to the military rule was, for various reasons, making the EPRP more and more popular. It was becoming obvious that an increasing number of people were rallying to the Party and the number of its members and sympathisers was growing "alarmingly" as far as the Derg and Meisone were concerned.⁵ Attempts by Meisone to politically counter the EPRP influence were, by all accounts, unsuccessful. The

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“wiyiyit medrek” or discussion forum launched in the newspapers and offices gave the EPRP ample chance to carry out broad agitation and propagation of its views. Senaye Likke of Woz League was able to convince Mengistu that the forum should be curtailed as the EPRP was benefitting from it. The regime suffered from lack of credibility, it lamented publicly that no one read its newspapers or listened to the radio.⁶

Mengistu and his close friends saw the dangers posed by the EPRP and the opposition led by it. So, when Meisone and Woz League started to advise “fast and decisive action” against the EPRP they were all ears.

2.) More ominously, from the point of view of Mengistu, the unrest was spreading within the armed forces. After the unrest in the Air Force and the rebellion of the paratroopers, Major Mengistu himself visited the military camps and talked to officers and soldiers. He was alarmed at the extent of the building opposition to the Derg rule and the growing sympathy of the officers and soldiers to positions expressed in EPRP’s *Democracia*. However, Mengistu tried to counter this by resorting to populism (sleeping in the barracks, resorting to demagogy - “we are one”, “we will resign if you so desire”, etc. - and even shedding tears to prove his “sincerity”) and to outright lies (“we have evidences proving the EPRP’s signature to a Somali-Eritrean plan to dismember Ethiopia”, “EPRP has promised to help Somalia by dividing and sabotaging the Ethiopian army”, etc.).

To check the unrest in the military, to prevent the EPRP-led civilian opposition from linking up and effectively coordinating with the dissidence in the army units, the Derg felt the urgency of “wiping out the EPRP”.

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3.) By July 1976, the Derg was also in ferment with an internal crisis pitting the majority against Mengistu and his few cronies; the latter held the edge by being more decisive and organised within a secret group, Seded.

Emboldened by the unrest in the armed forces, the Derg members gathered and decided to set up a commission which would restructure the Derg itself. It was not lost on Mengistu or Meisone that the main aim of the "restructuring" was to curb Mengistu's dictatorial powers. The 17-odd man committee did just that by recommending measures which would strengthen the "democratic and collective working of the Derg". Teferi Benti, the chairman, Major Moges and others who were not within the inner group of Mengistu, emerged as heads of powerful committees. Mengistu "withdrew" to the background. The Derg set up a committee to investigate the "excesses" of Meisone and the so called POMOA.

For Mengistu and Meisone, time was running out. Power was to slip away from their hands and they blamed the EPRP for all this. Mengistu and his cronies (such as Legesse Asfaw, Tesfaye Wolde Sellasie, Teca Tulu, Getachew Shibeshi, Ali Mussa, Seyoum Makonen and Daniel Asfaw) started to assemble secretly in earnest. These hard-core Mengistu loyalists and Meisone (and Woz League) were scared that the Derg members may make peace with the EPRP. To forestall this, they manoeuvred to strike at the EPRP. They presented their plan to the Derg members and it was learnt that Meisone leaders and Mengistu explained what was intended as a "quick surgical action" to bring "peace to Addis Abeba". The majority of the Derg members may have believed this and yet again they may have thought that reducing the influence of the EPRP would be to

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their advantage in the end. Tefferi Benti, Alemayehu Haile and the other officers, who were to be killed in Mengistu's palace coup in February 1977 for having called for a united front with the EPRP, were not actually EPRP sympathisers or members as alleged by Mengistu and Meisone. Thus, when Mengistu and Meisone presented to them the need to declare war on the EPRP, they agreed. By the time they realized that the quick action meant mass murder and that the neutralisation of the EPRP meant the reemergence of the Mengistu-Meisone domination, it was too late. Their hesitation cost them their lives and ironically they were killed and later accused of having been EPRP members.⁷

Hence, as far as the Derg and Meisone were concerned, September 1976 was high time the EPRP got "checked" given the determination of the Derg not to share power one bit or to accede to the demands of the opposition. The more the agitation continued, the more it spread to the armed forces and even to within the Derg itself. The repression was anyway in force against the EPRP and the opposition as a whole, what was needed now was to officialise and step it up. September 1976 did just that.

3

The Instruments of Terror

*"Do you prefer to be eaten by a hyena or a tiger?"
"No difference. Both have sharp teeth."
an Ethiopian Proverb*

The repressive apparatus of the Derg had sharp teeth indeed, but in a way it mattered somewhat which animal trapped you. For example, the ordinary police were mild as compared to the Security and the latter was "better" than the Meisone controlled kebelles. Let us look at the instruments of the Terror campaign in more detail.

The Army: Regular soldiers or the army per se were used in the initial period (in 1976-77) when the Nebelbal unit, known for its cruelties, was brought into Addis Abeba. However, aside from incidents involving mass demonstrations, the regular army was a minor player in the terror scenario which the Derg's mass media called "the red performance" ("keye tiryit").

The Police: These played a very minor role indeed. Their members were considered unreliable and tainted by the EPRP. Their functions were actually taken by the new repressive organs formed by the Derg and Meisone.

The Security ("tsetita" or "hizb dehninet"): Headed by Derg member, Teca Tulu, the Security played a considerable role in the whole terror campaign. In Addis Abeba, their headquarter at the Third Police Station was the site of the most barbaric tortures and killings. The notorious Sergeant Teshome and a host of other brutal torturers and assassins worked in this compound. The Security force

The Instruments of Terror

was a real murder machine in the service of the Terror launched by Mengistu and Meisone.

The Military Secret Police: These comprised of the agents of the Military Intelligence and the special Derg "Mereja" (intelligence and operations) which was headed at first by the notorious Colonel Daniel Asfaw and later by Major Getachew Shibeshi. Like the Security police, they had their own prisons and torturers, and carried out executions. The murder squads reported through the Mereja head directly to Mengistu himself.

The Kebele Squads: The kebelles, or urban dweller's associations, were formed to stem the demand for local self-administration, a popular slogan of the radical opposition. However, it was not long before these associations turned into repressive organs. Elections of kebele leaders were caricatures of free elections; regular purges were undertaken to cleanse the kebelles of "EPRP elements". By the time the anti-EPRP war got declared, the 294 Kebelles in Addis Abeba were in their majority controlled by Mengistu and Meisone. The 294 kebelles were organized in 25 Higher Urban Association called Keftegnas. The highest body, which is the Association's Central Committee, "elects" the Mayor from within itself and it is thus that Dr. Alemu Abebe, the man who played a central role in the planning and execution of the "Red Terror" and was at the time a central committee member of Meisone, became the mayor of Addis Abeba.⁸

The kebelles had their own squads called Abyot-Tibeka-guad or Revolutionary Defense Squads. At first these were armed with Lee Enfield 303 rifles and later on given AK-47s. In their majority, the kebele leaders were made up of ex-army men, retired soldiers, unemployed and lumpen elements. But there were also intellectuals like the Cornell (NY) educated Asazine Bayisa who had a penchant for torturing prisoners under ten years of age and Girma Kebede, a university graduate, who murdered around 30 people including an eight-month pregnant woman worker, Daro Negash. Over this riff-raff of disgruntled

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clerks, retired soldiers, hardened lumpens and psychotic intellectuals presided the self-styled Marxist Leninists of Meisone. The kebele leaders and guards were given "political education" by Meisone and in 1976 and 1977 many of them were more pro-Meisone than anything else.

The kebelles monitored and controlled the lives of the dwellers in their area. Their presence was pervasive and their power extensive. They had their own jails and in these the worst tortures and many savage killings took place. The kebele guards were keen on arresting women and young girls; rape of even underage girls was quite common.⁹ They played a major role in the whole terror campaign and were in a way the campaign's vanguard force which also made them targets of EPRP's retaliation measures. Between kebelles there was competition (perhaps Meisone's contribution to "socialist competition"!) and a kebele which had a low record of arrests and executions was ridiculed, criticised or even viewed with suspicion¹⁰ which meant that each kebele was vying to outdo its rivals by arresting more and killing more "anarchists". Thus, one can imagine the scenario in which irresponsible elements have been given arms and urged to kill as they pleased (no questions asked). Quantity mattered, it was a sort of body count à la Vietnam, the more they killed the better. In the competition, individual "stars" emerged ranging from ordinary lumpens to intellectuals like the ones mentioned before and Abdullahi Yusuf (a West German educated Meisone leader who tortured and slaughtered many workers in Harar / Dire Dawa) and Makonen Teclu, a former student activist who, himself an Eritrean, focused on killing EPRP members from there. There were also women killers like Yeshewalul who murdered scores of people. In short, the kebele was on the whole a killing machine in which murderers thrived or savage killers were produced. To justify the murders via slick Marxist jargons, Meisone presented itself. If the foreign-educated Meisone leaders and members raped, tortured and killed who could blame the local uneducated goons?

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Kebelle nowadays means horrible things to Ethiopians and to be called a "kebeltegna" (a loyal adherent of the kebele) is a grave insult.

Underground Squads: There were the squads of Seded and that of Meisone. The Seded squads (Seded meaning raging fire referred to the Mengistu secret group called *Abyotawi Seded* or Revolutionary Fire) were on the whole military and at first headed by colonel Daniel and later by Legesse Asfaw, a Derg member who is a killer in his own right. Meisone had also its own squads for special functions in which the kebelles were not considered fit to participate. Prior to Mengistu's full assumption of power via the February 1977 palace coup, Seded squads executed officials considered dangerous to Mengistu's plans. The killings were at times attributed to the EPRP.¹¹

The Seded-Meisone underground killer squads played a prominent role in the terror campaign.

In the regional and provincial towns the same scene was repeated with the addition of Derg or Meisone controlled peasant associations (purged and "purified" like the kebelles) which were active dealers of death.

As the terror campaign progressed, the cream of the various organs and gangs were selected on the basis of brutality and savagery and grouped in special murder squads (like the Madebo Unit let loose on Addis Abeba) and given extra powers to commit sadistic violence and murders.¹²

The whole picture reveals that the Derg was alien to the rule of law. To combat its opponents it did not resort to legal organs (courts, etc.) but to extra-legal organs, set up with the sole purpose of killing. The kebelles and the squads arrested and killed as they wished, no trial, no questions. The door was opened for private vendettas and kebele guards moonlighted as assassins for hire and they also killed their personal enemies and rivals. If the kebelles killed by mistake, there was no way of redressing the loss, nor were they punished. Killing the innocent was not accidental, it was expected and part of the whole terror

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plan. After all, as the Meisone cadres used to repeat at the time, the aim of terror is to terrify and being selective defeats (or so it seemed to them) this purpose. Later on, the Derg came up with the *netsa irmija* program - *netsa irmija* meant literally free measure and actually the right to kill at will on the spot without charges or interrogation. In the Derg's vocabulary *irmija* (measure) came to mean nothing else but liquidation and murder - revolutionary measure, decisive measure, final measure, free measure... They all meant death, execution, physical liquidation.

The State itself exalted terror, it sung eulogies to acts of plain murder and the criminals below obliged with glee killing and slaughtering thousands and wiping out almost a generation of the country's finest sons and daughters. The Terror was an orgy of violence, the grand masters were the Derg and Meisone and the victims were the people and in the long run the country as a whole.

From Phase One to the "Red Terror"

*"I consider Mengistu to be a true revolutionary and the
revolution now taking place in the
country is a true revolution."*

Fidel Castro (quoted in Afrique-Asie, Paris, May 16, 1977)

Castro's true revolution led by the true revolutionary progressed over the corpses of thousands, many of whom have had strong sympathies for the Cuban revolution against the Batista dictatorship.

The transition from phase one of the Terror (September 1976 -) to the "Red Terror" proper (launched on February 1977) took five months; they were five bloody months of widespread terror.

The secret executions in October were followed up in November by the publicly announced execution of 50 EPRP members. On November 2, some 23 EPRP members were executed, the majority of them intellectuals arrested during September. Still, they were accused of taking part in the urban armed actions though such actions on the part of the EPRP began in October. All 23 were brutally tortured while in custody and almost all of them had a militant history of active participation in the Ethiopian student movement both inside and abroad. The twenty-seven executed on November 18 were also accused of taking part in armed actions since October 1976 but once again the false charges proved the perfidy and brutality of the regime. Of the 27, a few were arrested in July-August, some in early September (Pagume) and the majority right

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after the declaration of war against the EPRP on September 11.¹³

And though the Derg radio announced that the executed had been tried, sentenced and their sentences confirmed by the Chairman of the Derg (Teferi Benti), this was not true. The case was actually presented to the assembled Derg members by Mengistu (a lt. colonel since Nov. 12), Fikre Sellasie Wogderes, Legesse Asfaw and Teca Tulu. No charges in the legal sense, no lawyers, no counter-arguments; the accused were not present, of course. Mengistu read a list of accusations against the twenty-seven and demanded the death sentence. A vote was taken: 45 voted for and 40 against the execution. The accused, some of them almost lifeless from torture, were thus executed. Another point that should also be mentioned here is that Mengistu and his cronies informed the other Derg members that the twenty-seven were all above the age of twenty-one. (Actually, the Derg members never got to know before their vote who the accused were except that they were 27 in number). However, of the 27, only three were above 21 while the majority were between 15-17 years of age. The youngest, Babile H. Sellasie, was only 14!

It should be mentioned that from this experience Mengistu and Meisone drew the conclusion that the surest way to kill more anarchists was to do it secretly in the dead of the night or right at the time of arrest without going through the procedure of a quasi trial and voting by the Derg.

From October '76 to February 1977, the killings went on and since by October 9 the kebelles had been given additional powers the executions increased. The cities and towns became virtual battlegrounds as the violence escalated; in October as a whole the EPRP "self defense squads" killed between 12-14 government officials, security agents and others deemed "linked to the terror". In the same period, the Derg killed thousands.¹⁴ In one peaceful demonstration alone, in Gondar city, no less than 54 people

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were shot dead for protesting against the Derg repression. According to one estimate made by a security official (who talked to the author), in October the night executions went on at a minimum rate of 40 a night.

The repression focused on the youth as they were considered in their majority to be supporters of the EPRP. The Terror also singled out worker's leaders, activists in the civil administration, in the mass associations, in the kebelles. On the part of the military it was a deliberate policy to decapitate the popular movement by depriving it of leaders, by silencing its articulate voices and organisers. In this way any youngster or intellectual was slated for execution unless he could prove loyalty to the regime or membership in Meisone or the other pro-Derg groups. Meisone squads used the opportunity to liquidate those intellectuals who had refused to be their members though these were not members of the EPRP (and Meisone knew it!)

Terror gripped Addis Abeba and other towns; parents were thrown into turmoil as they saw their offsprings fall victims of indiscriminate shootings. Perhaps, to be fair, it must be said that the Derg and Meisone members were also gripped by fear, going armed to their offices, changing their dwellings, etc.; afraid they may be killed by the EPRP. But it was the "fright" of the mass killer on their part. The whole situation was further complicated by the spreading war in the Ogaden and the deteriorating security situation in Eritrea where the guerrillas were making significant advances. Those in the Derg, who had initiated in July the internal reorganisation and the curbing of Mengistu's powers, started to have second thoughts as to where the Mengistu-Meisone freelance actions were taking them. Many of them were incensed at having been duped by Mengistu to vote for the execution of 14 year olds like Babile Haile Sellasie. They also resented the growing powers of Meisone and its unchecked killings of opponents.

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To redress the situation, they started to move but they were, as usual, hesitant. But Mengistu and his close friends within Seded were not. They believed that the time had come to deal with the "waverers" within the Derg whom they now started to identify as "EPRP members and supporters". Mengistu's secret group held secret meetings to chart out its plan of action; a decisive move was advocated by Meisone and Senaye Likke of Woz League too. Officers within the underground "Oppressed Soldiers Organization" got wind of the secret meetings and exposed the plan publicly in their paper.¹⁵ However, the Teferi Benti took no preventive action. In fact it is said that both Teferi Benti and Major Moges confronted Mengistu individually and he swore to them that "it is all an anarchist lie to divide us" and that he was "your friend forever and I would jump to the grave ahead of you". It seems the two were mollified by the colonel's words.

The Teferi Benti group insisted on the cessation of the secret executions, the curbing of Meisone's "murderous actions" and powers, and the adoption of a united front policy which would bring the EPRP in. According to the Teferis, the main enemies of the moment were the right-wing Ethiopian Democratic Union, which was backed by the Sudan and gaining ground in Gondar region, and Somalia, whose regular troops were now appearing alongside Ogaden guerillas. For Mengistu and Meisone, this was a dangerous collaborationist talk. As a Meisone leader was to put in a public rally at Revolution Square on January 29: "in order to attack the faraway enemy one must deal first with the nearby enemy". In other words, the liquidation of the EPRP was presented as "dialectically linked" and as a necessary condition for defeating the Somali aggression.¹⁶

Though they had the power to move against Mengistu at the time, the Teferi-Moges group hesitated. Mengistu's Seded squads in the meantime killed Major Michael Asgedom, who was opposed to Mengistu and who was a member of the restructured Standing Committee of the Derg. At one point, Major Moges and Captain Alemayelu

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escaped a planned assassination attempt by Seded squads as they were tipped beforehand. In short, it should have been and was quite obvious to the Teferi-Moges group that Mengistu and Meisone were out to liquidate them. But they curiously stuck to slow legal moves to counter both Mengistu and Meisone who had no respect for their legality. In fact, the bizarre attitude of the Teferi group could be gauged from the fact that Teferi Benti took holy communion with his wife (a thing done in many cases when the married couple approach their twilight years and fear death) - it could be said he expected to die but took no action to prevent it.¹⁷

On January 29, Teferi Benti addressed a massive rally at Revolution Square in Addis Abeba. It was a rally from which Mengistu was conspicuously absent. Teferi Benti called for "the united front of all progressive forces" and his speech, which pointedly omitted all attacks against "anarchists", was interpreted as a call to the EPRP. Meisone leaders fumed against this publicly and shrilly warned against the "danger of ignoring the EPRP menace". And they were not limited to verbal attacks: on February 2, a special Meisone squad led by central committee member Negede Gobezie (who now lives in exile in Western Europe) erupted into the meeting hall of the university students at Sidist Kilo (Main Campus) and shot several students and wounded many others. Mengistu's Seded squads were also busy killing people in the capital though many of these were attributed to the EPRP by the state controlled radio.

On February 3, Teferi Benti and the others gathered to discuss the deteriorating security situation in the capital. Foolishly, they thus fell into the trap laid for them by Mengistu and his friends. Teferi Benti had not even attached due importance to the fact that the guards at his office door were changed. Anyway, while Mengistu waited outside (inside an armoured car), his Seded squads arrested Teferi Benti, Moges W. Michael, Asrat Desta, Hirouy H. Sellasie, Alemayehu Haile, Teferi Deneke and Hailu Be-

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laye. Captain Yohannes, who had been urging the Teferi Benti to take decisive action against the Mengistu group, suspected something was afoot when he spotted new guards at Teferi's office door. Carrying his Thompson machine gun, he searched for Mengistu but found Senaye Likke and Daniel Asfaw instead: he shot them both and was killed later on in a violent shootout after killing some twelve Mengistu loyalists.

Mengistu ordered the immediate execution of Teferi Benti, Moges, etc., and this was done. The coup was successful and Mengistu emerged on top. The Soviet Union immediately recognised Mengistu and hailed his action as a "revolutionary measure against counter-revolutionaries". Mengistu himself accused the executed Derg members of being in collusion with the EPRP and reactionaries and said they were planning a coup against the revolution. On February 4, the kebelles ordered people out for yet another demonstration - this time to be addressed by Mengistu and triumphant Meisone leaders in the POMOA.

"The Revolution has moved from the defensive to the offensive," Mengistu cried. "We shall carry terror into the camp of the anarchists," he vowed. "Red Terror", they all cried. It was an open call for the escalation of the violence and the repression to new savage heights. And the "Red Terror" was born. Or reborn.

The terror was born with the Derg, it reached its teens in 1976 and by February 1977 it had matured to the full. Again we hear sanctimonious noises of apologists who declare that the Derg wouldn't have escalated the violence had not the EPRP resisted it or moved to urban armed actions. For the Derg and its committed apologists, the whole thing is presented as a legitimate defense by the "revolution" against the "white terror" of the EPRP. For the others who are more subtle in their defense of the Derg it seems "an inescapable conclusion that, however prone to such actions the PMAC may have been, it was the EPRP's terrorist policies that encouraged the new phase of the

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PMAC repression"!¹⁸ Once again, it is being stated that the Derg was "provoked". And the cry of the victims is thus silenced and they are blamed for being provocative and bringing the repression on themselves. It is, to say the least, a manifestation of a curiously twisted logic.

As we have tried to highlight in the previous pages, the Derg resorted to repression right from the outset. It declared open war on the EPRP, on the trade unions, on students, on intellectuals and on all peaceful dissenters even before they had in any way challenged it in a violent or armed manner. In September alone, before the EPRP had fired a single shot in Addis Abeba, the Derg-Meisone terror massacred hundreds of militants whose bodies were dumped in mass graves (some of the corpses were uncovered by hyenas as we reported earlier). For the Opposition, it was clear that they were going to be executed en masse, without pity and illegally. Once again, the choice was either to die "peacefully" (quietly and without resistance) or to resist.

Furthermore, in the period before the "Red Terror", thousands were killed by the regime, more were in jail being tortured and awaiting a sure death. The EPRP's armed actions were by no means to be compared to these mass killings though one can always argue that resorting to urban armed action was an error on its part. However, it would be ridiculous to assert that these selective actions pushed the Derg to barbaric heights of violence. The Derg was not only "prone to violence" - it had proved its savagery in no uncertain terms. It was not the violence of the EPRP which pushed Mengistu and his clique to wipe out the Derg members who wanted to check the terror. It was their own ambition and determination to settle the whole issue through mass murder. The Teferi Bentis were an obstacle in Mengistu's path to absolute power and in his drive to "destroy the EPRP". He got rid of them in the only way he knew how and is good at - through execution. Once they were out of the way, the road was clear for him and Meisone to proceed on their bloody path, a path charted

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prior to September 1976 and officially consecrated at this time. Had the EPRP desisted from resistance, would the violence have been absent on the part of the Derg? Had this been the case, there was no need to declare war on the EPRP in September 1976. This is indisputable and the resort to emotional tags like "terrorist" would not in any way lessen the Derg's crimes or reduce its main culpability. In the final analysis, one is tempted to ask the foreign learned souls who condone the Derg actions while castigating the EPRP: How does one combat State terrorism? How does one respond to the nocturnal knock at the door when opening it means a sure death? How does one get arrested when arrest means guilt, torture and execution? How does one reason with killers lost to all rational thinking and humanity?

Violence and terror were the Derg's only means of stabilising its power. The "Red Terror" was predictable. It could have been avoided in a way only if the EPRP and the people had stopped opposing the regime and bowed to it. And this was the "choice" of the slave rejected by those concerned.

The Protagonists

"Mengistu, like Lenin, was willing to force the population to accept socialism, believed in a leadership cadre and was absolutely unwilling to await the democratic revolution that would evolve from a protracted people's struggle. Mengistu thus moved to consolidate his power, and to eliminate his enemies within the Derg (and the) PMAC..."
Peter Schwab (1981), in Marxist Governments, A World Survey, Vol. 2, London, pp. 303-304

"What looks surprising is why (anyone) should have given the EPRP the time of day. They were for the most part foreign educated leftists from the middle class... They insisted on having no truck with (the Dergue)... They failed to grasp the significance of developments within their society which had found expression in the armed forces."
Richard Gott, in the Guardian Weekly, Feb. 14, 1982

"Meisone is a right-roader, defeatist power-crazed organization."
The Derg, 1977

Shibir is an Amharic word which means chaos. In using the word to mean terror the Derg was perhaps inadvertently indicating what it had in mind. *Keye Shibir* meant the Red Terror: the "Red Terror" to counter the "white terror". The jargons used at the time, which ended up by confusing many as to what exactly was the difference

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between the protagonists, calls on us to digress somewhat to touch upon the protagonists of post-revolutionary Ethiopia so as to delineate their differences covered up by the newspeak of the revolution.

Quite a few writers (Bereket, Addis Hiwet, etc.) have accused the EPRP and Meisone of confusing, by pushing and pulling, the military officers who held power. A veteran Ethiopian exile with faded memories as his only link to the Ethiopian reality has even gone as far as presenting Meisone and the EPRP as "the two-headed hydra" confronting the Ethiopian revolution (the Derg being St. George!).¹⁹ In the previous pages, we have tried in a general way to show the fallacy of such assertions. Even Meisone, which had quite an influence on the Derg, cannot be accused of turning an inherently democratic Derg into a repressive one. The fault of Meisone lay in its mistaken policy of forging an alliance with the Derg to destroy the opposition. Between the Derg and Meisone, one cannot talk of Dr. Frankenstein and the monster: the inherent monstrosity of the Derg was fed by the opportunism of Meisone to produce something barbaric and ruthless. And in the end, the stronger monster, the Derg, consumed the disadvantaged one, Meisone.

There is no doubt, nonetheless, that the Left as a whole did influence the military officers. The vocabulary and jargons of the revolution, which the Derg was to use ad nauseam, were supplied by, or to be more precise, taken from, the Left. Even the radical land nationalisation law, for which the Derg tried to take exclusive credit, was drafted by intellectuals linked to one or the other Left organizations, including Meisone and the EPRP. In general, the Derg was influenced by the Left, or again to be more precise, preoccupied by the Left. It was forced to swallow back its earlier diatribes against Marxism ("a cheap foreign ideology") and, much to its earlier expressed chagrin, compelled to "go and wake Lenin from his grave" (and to build him a statue, we might add now) because it wanted to outmanoeuvre the Left and to defuse the grow-

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ing opposition against it. "If you behave well, we will proclaim communism for you," one Derg member is reported to have told Zematch students in 1976. Michael Gebre Negus, a former member of the Derg, is said to have revealed that Derg meetings in 1974-75 had no agendas and were preoccupied with what *Democracia* had written over the week.

Despite what happened, no one can blame the EPRP and Meisone for professing what they believed in. That the Derg appropriated their slogans is not their fault. The mistake of Meisone in the affair emerges in its collaboration with the robbers and their plan of demagogic and violent deception. The Left can of course be blamed for its lack of depth and rigidity and the factionalism such positions entail. Without attempting a detailed historical overview of the Left in Ethiopia, we can still assert that the Left had not sufficiently digested the experiences of other revolutions and it was also influenced by eclecticism. Let alone the parties, even student organizations accused factions of being "Mensheviks and "cadets". It is no wonder then that to justify the terror, Meisone and the Derg referred to the Bolshevik experience designating themselves as the true heirs of Lenin and Stalin(!) while the opposition was labelled as counter-revolutionary like the Mensheviks, the trotskyites, the Zinovievites, the fifth columnists in the Spanish civil war, etc. The labels, when translated into Amharic or presented direct to the Ethiopian public, had absolutely no meaning. Even the word anarchist (used untranslated) invoked nothing to the population aside from the initiated few.

It is of no use also to wail against the EPRP and Meisone for not forging unity. Their split predates the February Revolution and their differences were basic. This is why their attempts at coming together (prior to 1974 and in 1975 in Addis Abeba) failed. A closer look into the protagonists is thus called for if only to dispel the confused and erroneous reports carried by many about the Derg, Meisone and the EPRP.²⁰

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The Derg: Myths are sometimes easily born and there has never been a lack of mythmakers. "The only democratically elected body" (Schwab), "the one with the political capacity to carry on the revolution from above" (Halliday & Molyneux), "the only force which could smash feudalism and accomplish the revolution" (Korlikov) - add to these the same type of gratuitous declarations by Lefort, the Ottaways, Vivo, A.J. Steiner and a host of leaders from Western and Eastern European Communist Parties, and you get the picture of a Derg which emerges with lily-white historical and actual democratic and revolutionary credentials. As is to be expected, the myth also touches the diminutive colonel who has emerged as the undisputed dictator and has in the process made the Derg a fiction which exists by name only. If only the reality was unknown, the mythmakers would have had a field day.

The 120 man body which gained international fame as the Derg was not in fact the first coordinating committee set up within the armed forces. In March 1974, Endalkatchew Makonen, the new prime minister, was instrumental in the formation of a coordinating committee chaired by his close friend, the paratroops' colonel Alem Zewd Tessema. Another important officer in the committee was Tebebe Menkir, while Alem Zewd's deputy was junior Aircraftsman Girma Fessiha; the committee had less than 40 members. Alem Zewd's committee was set up to strengthen Endalkatchew's hand over the army. It did not function for long. In fact, by April, a National Security Commission was set up under the Minister of Defense, Abiye Abebe (an aristocrat and a general). The NSC had some 30 members and it was composed of army officers, (Major Sisaye Habte, who was to be Derg member, and Fanta Belaye were also members), and some civilians from the Security Department and the Ministry of Education. The task of the NSC was to watch over the army and to defuse radical dissent while at the same time acting to break the student demonstrations and the strikes in the public sector.

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In order to grasp the situation which led to the formation of the Derg it is necessary to realise that at this time, when the NSC was formed, the soldiers were relatively calm (after getting a salary increase) while the street demonstrations by students were intensifying and strikes by workers and government employees continuing. The strikers and demonstrators accused the soldiers of "betrayal" while Endalkatchew toured the army camps and distributed bribe money to selected officers in an effort to control the army. Radical officers were alarmed by Endalkatchew's moves and the NSC's growing powers. Actually, the NSC resorted to strong arm tactics to break strikes and asked Endalkatchew to declare a state of emergency so as to control the situation "more firmly". Officers who suspected Endalkatchew's moves were also meeting in secret: Major Tefferi Tekle Haimanot (who later joined the EDU and died in combat) and other Harar Academy graduates were, for example, holding secret meetings in wooded areas in the outskirts of Addis Abeba.

The catalyst was provided by the Emperor himself. Major General Assefa Demissie telephoned from the Palace to the Minister of Defense on a fateful Friday in late June. The call was taken up by colonel Imbibal Ayele (presently central committee member of the WPE) and he received the Emperor's message to the Minister of Defense who was out at the time. The Emperor wanted to receive and talk to the "Congo Veterans". The Congo Veterans were soldiers and officers who had served in the Congo as part of the UN contingent and who were demanding to be paid their UN-given salary. The message was passed and the veterans went en masse to the palace led by RSM Basha Tsehaye. At the palace, they were met by the Emperor who was in an obvious bad mood and who dismissed them summarily saying "your case is being studied by a committee. So wait." The veterans cried the customary "long live the Emperor" but it was a lukewarm performance and as they left the palace some of them riled against RSM Basha for ordering them to hail the Emperor while he "had done

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nothing for them". The veterans wanted to go and see the prime minister but the RSM refused. So, led by his deputy, they went to Endalkatchew who received them warmly and promised them immediate action. Singing his praise, the veterans proceeded to the headquarters of the Fourth Division.

The veterans were intending to set up a coordinating committee and it is unlikely that Endalkatchew did not know of their intentions. The prime minister had earlier tried to strengthen his hand by forming the Alem Zewd committee; using the committee he wanted to arrest and neutralise some twelve dignitaries (like Ras Mesfin, for example) who had strong influence on the Emperor. The veterans also believed that the Emperor's inactivity as regards their case stemmed from bad advice by these same dignitaries. Thus, it is very likely that the prime minister could have seen the formation of a new committee as a prop to his plans. In any case, the veterans went to the Fourth Division and called on the soldiers there to form a coordinating body with them. Major Atnafu Abate, who was playing tennis in the Division's court at the time, was elected to represent the Division. The veterans chose their own representatives. It should be mentioned at this point that many officers in the Fourth Division were alarmed by the developing division within the armed forces and were preoccupied by a possible conflict between the various sections and units of the army. In fact, this fear lay behind the formation of the Derg, a coordinating committee was deemed necessary to prevent "soldiers fighting soldiers".

The situation was radicalised by Major Teferra, who was a personal friend of Atnafu and who claimed to have his own "communist cell", and who advised Atnafu and the others to arm themselves, occupy the radio station and to invite all units to send three representatives (one soldier, one NCO, and one officer not to be above the rank of major). The radio station was promptly occupied and that same night the committee members went from unit to unit asking them to send their representatives. The police

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central HQ at Mexico Square did while the others (Body guards, Army Engineering, the Fetno Derash or Flying Squad, etc.) refused. The Atnafus were desperate and isolated but Endalkatchew did not make any move. Observers who followed the situation at the time allege that he was in a position to move against the Atnafus till Sunday. For, by Sunday, the units in and around Addis Abeba sent three representatives each to the committee chaired by Atnafu. By Sunday afternoon, the soldiers started to arrest high officers and Divisional commanders.

The Derg was born but it still did not include representatives from the other far away units and divisions, especially from the Second and Third Divisions in Eritrea and the Ogaden. For all practical purposes, the Derg was composed of unit in Addis Abeba and the surroundings. Even the Congo veterans were ousted on the grounds that the assembly hall in the Fourth Division headquarters (the Justice Hall or Hig Adarash) was small and only the three elected by their unit could and should be present. One source alleges that Atnafu and the others from the Fourth Division were reelected at this time since they were merely incorporated by the veterans and not elected by their units. In any case, when the veterans were eased out, Atnafu and his friends stayed.

Endalkatchew began negotiations with the Atnafus. In the Fourth Division office where the talks took place, Atnafu sat under a banner which proclaimed: "We are loyal to our Emperor and the country".

How did Mengistu and the others come into the picture? Girma Feleke, deputy commander of the Third Division and placed there by his friend the prime minister, called the officers to a meeting and informed them of the developments in Addis Abeba. The meeting took place in Harar and the assembled decided to send representatives "to check the situation and to report back". And when it came to picking the delegates, the officers decided on Major Mengistu and a few others who had earlier accused General Haile Baikedagn, a former commander of the

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Third Division, of embezzlement. The case had even been reported in Addis Zemen newspaper and the main accuser was Major Mengistu, who had a long history of quarrels with the General. By sending the officers, Girma Feleke also thought that he was preempting a general election by the soldiers of the Division who could have elected, in his opinion, more "radical and anti-Endalkatchew" delegates.

When Mengistu, Legesse Asfaw, Birhanu Bayih (sent by the Harar Academy) arrived in Addis, the Atnafus were jubilant. They immediately announced that the Third Division had sent representatives to the committee; they felt their isolation was over. In euphoria, they proposed that one of the Third Division officers be elected chairman of the Derg and since the committee was dominated by Holetta graduates, the fast talker Mengistu became chairman and Atnafu took the vice chairmanship. The Second Division also sent representatives. Meanwhile in Harar, the officers, NCOs and soldiers were incensed. Major Teferra Woldeab had also come over and was agitating the troops to oppose the presence of the Mengistus in the Derg since they had not been elected by the majority of the Division members. The officers were also opposed since they had sent the Mengistus to "check and report back" and not "to be members of the Derg". The Third Division recalled the Mengistus. These ones refused and ordered the arrest of Major Teferra. No one dared to arrest him in Harar but the major got overconfident and moved to Dire Dawa where he was arrested and sent back to Addis. Major Teferra came out of prison in 1985.

This was the democratic election about which the Derg apologists are ecstatic. Even those who elected did so not for a governing body but for a coordinating body "which would impede conflicts between the various units of the armed forces". Those officers and NCOs who were present in the camps at the time of "elections" got elected; some were sent to Addis because their units thought that this was the best way to get rid of them, others chose known trouble makers. None thought or knew that these same people

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would be the rulers. By the time they realized this, many of the units called back the representatives, but these refused to come back. Furthermore, they even dissolved the sub-Dergs and institutionalised themselves. As a footnote, let it be said that the Derg dismissed the claims of the Congo veterans and they never got their UN-given pay.

As a body, the Derg was a hectic and amorphous creature. Despite the mythology woven later on, within the Derg there was no one with a known pre-February militant political record. Some were monarchist, others not, and none of them had a clear vision of what they wanted. All in all they were good at extemporizing. Mengistu's first public speech explaining the motto of "Ethiopia First" is quite revealing. He said:

"to make a reality of 'Ethiopia First' we must get rid of our selfishness, we must work day and night, we must replace ill-will and laziness by diligence, cooperation and love; we must, especially in the Army, eliminate despising others and unfounded criticism and replace these with respect for each other and a discipline which must be worshipped more than religion, and the heroism and love for our country must be renewed and strengthened".²¹

The call for respect and discipline addressed to the army showed the Derg's preoccupation with the opposition to its role by the soldiers and officers in the Divisions. But all in all, the speech was not the type to be made by someone who was later to be lauded as "a committed Marxist and clear-sighted revolutionary since the 1960s".

In fact, it is proper to deal with Mengistu himself at this point. The lies about the Derg are interwoven with the falsifications about his background and need to be rebuffed. Mengistu had no political history prior to February 1974, though he was known for championing the "cause" of the graduates of the Holetta Military School in opposition to the more "privileged" graduates of the Harar Acad-

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emy. If, as it is claimed, his brief sejour in the USA gave him political consciousness, this was something he kept quite to himself. In the Third Division, Mengistu was known as a rowdy officer inclined to hitting the bottle quite often (his favourite bar is not a secret) and resorting to fights. Working in the purchasing department of his Division, he dipped his hands into the coffers quite often and had not the auditors been his Holetta mates, he would have been arrested. (Instead, they let his friends secretly make a collection and repay the missing amount.) Mengistu is also remembered as a cruel and quick tempered man, though he now confuses visitors by assuming an air of "modesty and serenity".

There is also no doubt that Mengistu suffered his share of Ethiopian racism, due to his pronounced "negroid features", but there are examples of incidents which show that he used this to corner his rivals and enemies. His background is also coloured in accord with the whims of the writers: those who want to assert his humble origins and status of being "oppressed" refer to him as Oromo or Wollamo while others with different purposes emphasise his "Amharaness". In fact, two authors have gone as far as alleging that "Mengistu is viewed in awe and with respect in Ethiopia because he is considered as the grandson of the illegitimate child of Emperor Menilik".²² Many Ethiopians claim that Mengistu is either a close relative or the son of Dejazmatch Kebede Tesemma, the notorious feudalist who helped Haile Sellasie to depose Lij Iyasu and later sabotaged the patriots who were organizing to block Haile Sellasie's return from exile in London after the end of the Italian occupation. Kebede also played a critical part in foiling the 1960 coup attempt against Haile Selassie. Physical resemblance between the Dejazmatch and Mengistu is attestable and Mengistu resembles the Dejazmatch's sons quite closely. (One of the sons, Kassa Kebede, is ambassador in Geneva, while the other, Ayalew or Yared Kebede had earlier infiltrated the EPRP and spearheaded the liquidation campaign designed at the

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EPRP's destruction.) Whatever the case, Dejazmatch Kebede helped Mengistu and his friends in the Derg with inside information about the palace and the intentions of the Emperor. Be it for this or out of filial duty, Mengistu made sure that the feudalist Kebede was left untouched by the nationalisations and confiscations which befell his other friends. Kebede lived in luxury till he died in the early 80s and got a public burial - the state radio read an eulogy of him.

A closer look at the composition of the Derg officers also goes against the populist notion invoked by the myth of junior officers and sergeants. Of the seven to ten top powerful officers, the majority were majors or captains; only Legesse was a master-sergeant. Mengistu, Moges, Birhanu Bayih, Fikre Sellasie, Debella Dinsa, Kiros, Sisyaye, Asrate Desta, etc., they were all majors. Politically confused, the majors approached one or the other civilian groups: Demisse Deressa was advised by Baro Tumsa, who was to form Ichaat, Fikre Sellasie was with Senaye Likke, Moges was close to the EPRP, etc. The radicals *per se* from within the armed forces were purged and the sub-Dergs dissolved. The Derg, once in power, did not know how to proceed other than realizing by instinct that it must curtail the mass protest in order to stabilise its rule. Mengistu and a few other officers went to the university to address students on September 16, 1974, and it was then that they made their famous attack against Marxism and vowed that they had "the philosophy of 'Ethiopia First'" and thus need not "wake Lenin from his grave". Ethiopian socialism came right after that in an attempt to defuse the Left's call for socialism, but again this was a hodgepodge theory which was criticised by the more aware intellectuals. It could be said that the Derg was groping in the dark, unwilling to allow the democratic formation of a popular government, yet unable to chart its own clear course.

The genesis of Abyotawi Seded is also illustrative. This secret group was first formed by Mengistu, Fikre Sellasie, Legesse Asfaw, Teca Tulu, Tesfaye Wolde Kidan,

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Daniel Asfaw, Getachew Shibeshi, Ali Mussa and a few other hardcore militarists. Subsequently, Mengistu approached Majors Moges and Demissie. Moges accepted and insisted that Captain Alemayehu and General Teferi be brought in. This was done and the whole Seded thing was described as being a counter-group to the Colonel Atnafu group. In reality, the preoccupation of Mengistu was to form his own political and loyal group so as not to leave the field of political organization and group formation to Meisone and the others.

The first program of Seded described the EPRP as an enemy and stipulated also that "to rely on falsehoods and deception to strike at enemies is a correct method of struggle". The two points led to some arguments, but the redrafted program did not change much in essence. The other point of contention was the assertion that only Seded can organize within the army, and this brought some wranglings from the Woz League supporters like Fikre Sellasie who were attached to this group which had some officers as members. Whenever possible, Mengistu consulted the wider Seded and when the Mogeses started to oppose him he resorted to the hardcore Seded and avoided them. The February 3, 1977 coup was plotted by the hardcore Seded in secret meetings.

Colonel Atnafu was not for sure a radical; in fact he had many conservative views and in this he was no different from the likes of Debella Dinsa and others who are still in the PMAC. The problem with Atnafu was also that he opposed the dictatorial powers of Mengistu. In fact, as Mengistu eliminated the various officers, Atnafu felt that his turn must be next. He thus started to organize his own army group called *Abyotawi Seif* (Revolutionary Sword) to counter Mengistu's Seded and Meisone. Atnafu was too slow for the decisive and power-hungry Mengistu; he was arrested and executed and accused posthumously of being a member of the EPRP-EDU-ELF troika.

In all the Derg upheavals, we hardly find evidence of clear political conflicts. Atnafu was wary of the Soviets,

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but so were others who are still with Mengistu. Atnafu was not a Marxist - the same can be said about all the members of the Derg, Mengistu included. The ideological choice made by Mengistu and his group was motivated by political opportunism, their alliance with Moscow was dictated by the refusal of the USA to sell them arms in the face of the Somali aggression. This was an opportunism Atnafu and the others would have been comfortable with. For that matter, even Meisone's pro-Moscow turn could be attributed to an opportunist political move given the fact that for a long period the Haile Fida group was overtly pro-Chinese.²⁹

This is why it is wrong even now to resort to journalistic delineation of pro-Soviet and anti-Soviet or nationalist groups within the ruling junta. Notwithstanding the fact that some may be enamored by the Soviet model (as Mengistu seems to be now with Kim Il Sung's, much to the chagrin of his apologists who never failed to point out that he had no personality cult) the officers in power knew that their tenure at the top was resting on Soviet support. Actually, the fact that the Mengistu regime had to resort to foreign backing indicates that the regime had no political capacity of its own to stay in power.

Perhaps it may be fitting at this point to raise the question of how the various officers within the Derg almost quietly went to their deaths. As we mentioned earlier, Major Sisaye's execution was not approved by a meeting and decision of the Derg. The same was the case in February 1977 when Teferi Benti and the others were shot. At this time, Atnafu, the vice chairman, was not even in Addis. Atnafu was also executed in a similar manner. To understand this curious situation one is forced to treat Mengistu's nature (decisive, ruthless, opportunist, and unfettered by legal or moral questions) and the prevailing attitude of officers of the imperial regime (acceptance of authority, lack of decisiveness, etc.) In this way, Mengistu was "different" from the others; he wanted power and he had no scruples on how he was going to get it. More im-

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portantly, he knew the mentality of his fellow officers, their legendary hesitation, their tendency to believe in words and promises (which he gave freely), etc. His immediate friends, Legesse, Getachew, Ali Mussa and Daniel Asfaw, were in many ways like him: contemptuous of civilians and intellectuals of all sorts, worshippers of force, decisive, without moral restraints when it comes to lying or killing ("the end justifies the means") and to a great degree loyal to Mengistu. Evidently, Mengistu had the upper hand over his rivals.²⁴

The Derg which proclaimed the "Red Terror" was not the Derg of June 28, 1975. It was a much reduced body; it comprised, for all practical purposes, of Mengistu and his close friends within Seded. The other members were not part of any substantial decision making process; they were informed after and they accepted. As the dictator's powers became more and more absolute, the Derg disappeared for all practical purposes as far as political weight and significance was concerned. Meisone, Woz League, Ichaat and Malered were purged and the few Derg officers with Mengistu on top remained as the holders of power. They became COPWE and subsequently WPE, but the fact remains that power lies in the hands of Mengistu and his few military cronies who had eliminated not only their civilian allies but also the Derg itself.

Meisone and the EPRP: Since the roots of the two organizations were entwined, it is difficult to treat them separately. Quite a few incorrect reports have been made about the formation and positions of the two major protagonists in the infamous "Red Terror" and we would comment on these *en passant* as we attempt to present both Meisone and the EPRP in what we believe is a truthful and objective light.

Both Meisone and the EPRP were, in general terms, products of the Ethiopian student and intellectual movement. When the student movement inside the country adopted a more radical line and espoused anti-feudalism

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and anti-imperialism as its platform, the unions abroad followed the line and supported it. In this period, Haile Fida and his friends played a prominent role in radicalising the unions abroad. However, by 1968 the radical students in Addis Abeba were growing impatient with their comrades abroad who, in their views, were satisfied with "producing pamphlets" and were taking "no measures to form an organization". The students who went to Europe and the USA in the late sixties were also disappointed to find out that the foreign-based student leaders said the revolution was "an affair which had to wait some generations". These students felt that the Haile Fidas had stayed too long abroad and lost touch with the reality in the country: their feelings in this respect were somewhat justified in light of the fact that the Haile Fidas, who controlled the student union in Europe, censored the highly popular leaflet produced in Addis Abeba in 1969 (under the title "Congratulations for Your 77th Birthday - Inquan le sebasebategnaw yedem lidet adereswo", which attacked the Emperor and exposed the scandalous acts of the Royal family and the ministers) out of fear that such attacks against the Emperor would not be liked by the people.

The gap took time to widen. The Haile Fida group, it must be said, was not as idle as was thought. They had contacts inside the country, they were producing journals abroad (in the name of the student union) and trying to smuggle these into Ethiopia, and they had contacts with foreign leftist organizations. Haile Fida and his friends seemed to want to progress slowly towards some form of a political organization but their conceptualization of the formation of the party or the struggle to be waged was vague. At the same time, Haile Fida and his close friends were well disposed to the Chinese line and critical of "Soviet revisionism".

The cleavage appeared at first over the national question. Alem Habtu, Hagos Gebre Yesus, Melese Ayalew, Desalegn Rahmato and others who led the union in America (ESUNA) came out with a congress resolution and

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theses arguing that in Ethiopia one can only talk of regionalism and it is incorrect to talk of nationalities and their right to secession. Based on this and a critical appraisal of the leadership of the Eritrean front, they also condemned the struggle there.²⁵ This was in direct opposition to the 1969 position expressed by the home union's (USUAA) paper.²⁶ The 1971 ESUNA resolution was criticised in a paper issued under the pseudonym of Tilahun Takele by intellectuals exiled in Algeria at the time. The Tilahun Takele article, if somewhat schematic and general, nevertheless reaffirmed USUAA's position and argued that in Ethiopia nations and nationalities existed and that national oppression was a reality affecting the majority of the oppressed nations/nationalities. The right to self-determination up to and including secession was recognised in the paper and the authors affirmed that the Eritreans have this right despite the nature of the front leadership. The debates raged on the issue.

The 1972 student congresses showed starkly the differences between the various positions. In ESUNA, students led by Mesfin Habtu (the 1968 secretary-general of USUAA) and others stood against the 1971 regionalism resolutions. The veteran ESUNA leaders stuck to their positions. At the end, the majority vote passed the "correct resolution on the national question" and repudiated the regionalism theses. At this point, Senaye Likke led a group of other students to form a splinter ESUNA faction. In Europe, at the ESUE congress in Berlin, the debates were heated ones and in attendance were two delegates from Algeria and two from the USA (Endrias Eshete to back the regionalism theses and Mesfin Habtu to counter it). Once again, the majority was inclined to adopt the nationality theses with the right to self-determination being recognised. The Haile Fidas belatedly backed the majority position. However, while Negede Gobezie and others had been, during the discussions, expressing views opposed to the majority, their backing of the resolutions was considered opportunist and tactical. This opened the door for suspicions and doubts.

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The Ethiopian student movement being a relatively organized, vocal and influential force, the secret political groups were keen to impose their influence on it. Hence, in many instances the issues which divided the secret groups were aired within the student unions and the theoretical battles waged in the movement. This in turn gave the student movement a character which was closer to that of a political party rather than a broad-based mass movement. At the time, there were secret contacts between the Haile Fida group and those who were to form the EPRP; to hold the talks Haile Fida travelled twice to Algeria. In the talks, the questions of the time were raised: the national question, the question of organization, the issue of armed struggle. On the national question, the intellectuals in Algiers, who represented the positions of the militants in the USA, the Sudan and back home, argued that Ethiopian revolutionaries must unequivocally affirm the right of nationalities to self-determination up to and including secession while reserving their right to examine each case to practically support or object to the act of secession. Haile Fida agreed to the proposal but added that "not all" in his group supported this position and thus they could not come out openly supporting it at that time.

On the question of organization, the Algiers intellectuals stated that there was a need to form a secret vanguard party and to work systematically and clandestinely to lay the structures of the party in the country and to prepare for the armed struggle. On the need for an organization, Haile Fida was also in agreement, but again he stated that they believed that the time was not yet ripe for forming such a party, that the formation of such a party must be preceded by recruitment or infiltration within the state bureaucracy ("so as to know in advance any repressive moves on the part of the regime" was the reason he forwarded). As far as armed struggle was concerned, though Haile Fida stated that his group was not in principle opposed to the idea, they did not believe that the time was ripe to think of launching such a struggle. On the international question, Haile Fida

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emerged "more Chinese" than the others had expected and since they discounted his fears of an eminent Soviet attack (this was after 1969 and the conflict at River USURI between the two Communist powers) on China, he promised to subscribe for them the "relevant journals" to keep them well informed.²⁷

If we dwell at length on these past wranglings, it is mainly because they lay at the root of the conflict between these two groups and one cannot grasp the EPRP-Meisone conflict without such a background. The secret talks continued, but they were fruitless. Meanwhile, militants in Ethiopia admonished their comrades abroad (Algeria, the USA, etc.) for wasting time with "veteran embassy raiders" who seemed "unprepared for higher forms of struggle". Haile Fida wrote to Algiers sometime in early 1972 informing them that their position remains unchanged and given this, if they agreed, his group would be ready for a merger. The others refused, stating that since their differences on the basic issues remained unresolved a merger would be out of the question. Prior to the formation of the EPRP, the Haile Fida group was informed officially, via a letter, that the formation of such a party shortly was "a possibility".

In April 1972, the EPRP was formed. The founding congress adopted a political program (which appeared later as the program of the EPLO), elected the party leadership (of these, Birhane Meskel Redda, Tesfaye Debessai, Benyam Adane, and Kiflu Kebede are now dead), decided to organise a guerrilla unit to launch the armed struggle and adopted the name the Ethiopian Peoples' Liberation Organization (EPLO) as a cover name to be used for foreign relation purposes. On the question of the Soviet Union, though some delegates forwarded the theses of "social imperialism" to characterise the Soviet Union, this did not get the backing of the majority and was discarded. Still, the congress stated that "revisionist USSR is no friend of the Ethiopian Revolution" and must be handled as such; open attacks against Moscow were also

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prohibited on the grounds that this would render the work of the EPLO (and especially of the plan to train and plant a guerrilla unit) very difficult given the regional situation at the time.

As the EPLO, the EPRP made contacts with the Eritrean fronts and with organizations in the Middle East. The Palestinian Al-Fateh agreed to train the members of the first guerrilla unit of what was later to become the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Army. At the time, the EPLO was closer to the PLF. This led the ELF to get closer to the Haile Fida group which was represented in the Middle East by one Tesfaye Tadesse, who had settled in Beirut and was condemned in the student movement as a "government agent". The ELF leaked to the Haile Fida group the information about a possible group of EPLO trainees coming to the Middle East. And the Haile Fidas rushed with the news to their student paper to pass the information in a thinly veiled attack against "those who rush to pick up the gun". The others were incensed and considering this an outright betrayal and indirect service to the imperial regime, hardened their positions against the Haile Fidas.

In the student unions abroad, the formation of a World Wide Federation of Ethiopian Students (to replace the old World Wide Union) also led to conflicts. The Haile Fidas thought that the WWFES was going to be the vehicle of the EPRP and objected to it on a variety of grounds. Publications flew left and right and the debate which raged during that period can be found in the student publications of the time. The gap widened.

When the February Revolution erupted, the fundamental chasm became even more apparent. The unions which supported the EPRP line hailed "the revolution" and gave the "workers" the vanguard role. The Haile Fida group called the revolution "a disturbance" at first and later on said it was a popular movement led by the petty bourgeoisie. While both assertions concerning the leadership role were debatable at best, behind the designation of

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"a petty bourgeois-led movement" by the Haile Fidas was their expressed criticism of the negative qualities of this class. The others suspected that the Haile Fidas were preparing the ground for calling a halt to the revolution. In fact, their fears were justified: the Haile Fida group publicly argued that "Endalkatchew Makonen's government should be given time to institute reforms so that we can use these for further democratic struggles". For the Hailes, supporting the continuing workers' strikes and urban unrest was "extremism", for the others it was a correct policy of "continuing the revolution". When the Derg assumed power, those supporting the EPRP condemned the "usurpation of power" and echoed the demands of the EPRP, CELU, etc. The Haile Fidas cabled the Derg a congratulatory message expressing their support.

Inside Ethiopia though, the division was not actue. In fact, the EPRP and those linked to the foreign-based Haile Fida group had close contacts. The leaflets produced by the Haile Fida supporters also echoed the demand for the formation of a popular provisional government. However, this relation was to end when Haile Fida and the others returned from exile. The "deviators" were purged or demoted, and concrete steps taken to get closer to the Derg. A Meisone article published in English in May 1977 explained the situation at the time in these words:

"...Meisone's political line was identical to that of the EPRP for a whole year since the start of the February Revolutionary Movement. In February 1975, after a thorough review of our line, a radical change had to be brought about. Changes had also to be made in the leadership of our organization." (Page 14)

In Addis Abeba, after the arrival of Haile Fida and the others, attempts were made to hold talks between the EPRP and their group. The secret talks were held (Tefaye Debessai representing the EPRP and Haile Fida representing what was to become Meisone but was at the time only identified through its organ, *The Voice of the Masses*) but the EPRP said it discontinued the talks because "the Haile

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Fida group stuck to its position of supporting the Derg and also leaked the information about the talks alleging that 'the EPRP also is deciding to ally with the Derg'. The rupture was almost complete when the EPRP became the opposition and Meisone the ally of the Derg.

Meisone: Meisone emerged as a political organization in March 1976 though its organ, *The Voice of the Masses*, had been published since 1974. The organization had as its chairman Kebede Mengesha, who had spent long years of exile in Sweden and was active in the Europe branch of the student union. Haile Fida, the more known of the Meisone leaders, was for long in exile in France along with Fikre Merid, Negedde Gobezie and others. From West Germany came Andargatchew Aseged and other low-level cadres while from Moscow came Nigist Adane and her husband Desta Tadesse. The brother of Desta, Daniel Tadesse, was also a central committee member of Meisone.

Meisone defined itself as a Marxist-Leninist organization, though it did not call itself a party explicitly, and in the initial period was close to China. China sent (for free) thousands of books to Haile Fida's "Progressive Bookshop" in Addis Abeba (the bookshop served as a vehicle for recruitment) and it was Haile Fida who reportedly went on a secret visit to Peking with Mengistu to ask the Chinese to arm the militia that was being formed. China agreed to supply 100,000 rifles of which 10,000 were delivered.²⁸ The position of Meisone was to give "critical support" to the Derg though it was not that apparent that the critical aspect of this formula was ever in evidence. Meisone argued that the call for the formation of a provisional popular government was incorrect and, instead, "the masses must be made conscious, organized and armed" first. Thus, Meisone considered the EPRP, CELU and the others opposed to the Derg rule as "extremists". On the Eritrean question also, Meisone practically reversed its position and condemned the liberation fronts as "tools of Arab reaction and imperialism". Furthermore, it drafted the Derg's National Democratic Revolution program which stipulated the regional autonomy arrangement as a solu-

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tion and denied, even in principle, the right of secession. Suffice it to add that Meisone originated the 1976 Raza Project or the Peasant March on Eritrea.

Meisone saw in the EPRP its main nemesis and it cannot escape the blame for its resort to all means and methods to destroy this party. Though Haile Fida himself was never an Oromo nationalist in the narrow sense of the word, Meisone did resort to invoking Oromo nationalism to combat "the Amhara-Tigray EPRP" though the EPRP was as multi-national as Meisone itself. At another level, Meisone also failed to influence the Derg, and especially Mengistu, in a way that would have avoided the path of violence to settle political disputes. On the contrary, Meisone was the one which called for and spearheaded the repression against the opposition. Worse still, Meisone leaders and members participated in the killings and torture of countless democrats and militants lumped together under the convenient epithet of "anarchists". The leftist jargons, the invocation of Bolshevik experience to justify massacres, the hardening of positions and the extension of the repression can all be brought to the door of Meisone.

Ensnared within POMOA and taking advantage of its extensive powers, Meisone was able to swell its ranks in a short time. Till its demise, it identified fully with all the policies of the Derg, policies which were in their majority drafted by Meisone in the first place. Meisone also thought that the alliance struck with Moscow would last and that the Kremlin would stand behind it in any conflict with the Derg officers. It miscalculated on this point just as it had had a wrong assessment of its strength when it came into conflict with the Derg. Within POMOA also, Meisone was arrogant of its strength and alienated the other groups; so much so that when it came into conflict with the Derg, members of Woz League and Malered helped Seded squads to hunt Meisone supporters.

Meisone, whatever its arguments to the contrary, stood for the continuation of military rule. It is likely that its position was based on an opportunist appraisal of the situation which led it to the conclusion that through an

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alliance with at least certain sections of the Derg (Mengistu's group primarily) it could work its way towards power. By calling for an intensified repression against the EPRP, Meisone intended to eliminate the vocal opposition from the important urban areas so as to have a free hand to realize its plan and to also impose its hegemony over the students, intellectuals, workers, etc.

For it was apparent by 1976 that these sections gave more support to the EPRP than to Meisone. As *Africa Confidential*, which had little sympathy for the EPRP, put it:

"The dergue's failures... have not only added to its own unpopularity and that of Me'ei Sone (sic) but they have increased the support of the EPRP which calls for the removal of the dergue and the immediate setting up of a provisional people's government. To many this is beginning to seem like a very good idea, and indeed the only way to safeguard the revolution which still is extremely popular. Many feel that the revolution itself will be at risk if EPRP are not brought into power, indirectly at least, and the struggle between the EPRP and Me'ei Sone resolved in favour of the EPRP which clearly has the greater support".²⁹

Meisone knew the EPRP had the greater support and it decided the best way to change this was by eliminating the EPRP. It was unaware that the process opened the way for its own subsequent elimination. The united front formed by Meisone, the Derg's Seded and the three other small groups was no guarantee of equality. In its total identification with the Derg and its policies, Meisone reaped the hatred of the anti-Derg forces, and when the terror began and Meisone became its vanguard it gained the hatred of an even bigger number of people. In Ethiopia presently, the relatives of the victims of the Red Terror, the kin of those languishing in jail and all those who hate the regime consider Meisone as "banda" or traitor.

When Meisone and Seded clashed, Meisone chairman Kebede Mengesha advocated for "decisive action" against the Mengistu group but Haile Fida convinced the majority

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that this was a mistaken policy. But while Meisone procrastinated, Seded acted and started to liquidate Meisone members and leaders. When the notorious torturer and Meisone leader, Abdullahi Yusuf, was gunned down the radio attributed the crime to the EPRP but Meisone knew the killers came from Seded. Hasty meetings were held to review the situation, and in one such leadership meeting held at the Filwoha Hotel in Addis, it was decided to "go underground" even if, as one leader cautioned, this held also another danger: "the EPRP is also in the underground"! Meisone had no underground apparatus and it was easily neutralised by the Derg, and only two of its top leaders (Negede who was abroad and Andargatchew who managed to escape) were spared. Meisone's strength also proved an illusion as its members and leaders rushed to join the Derg and Seded.

Meisone considered the EPRP as its nemesis but the feeling was mutual. The EPRP also felt on its part, that without the backing and advice of Meisone the Derg would have been more vulnerable.

The Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party was formed in April 1972, but during the February Revolution, as it admits itself, the party was weak and unable to play the leadership role.³⁰ However, during February and immediately after it, the party was able to emerge as a strong force. *Democracia*, its organ, was extremely popular and the conscious sections of the population who were standing against the Derg saw in the EPRP the continuation of the student militancy which had bedevilled the former Emperor. In the post-February situation, in 1975, the EPRP was able to set up its interzone, zone and sub-zone structures in the cities and towns and rural areas, while at the same time planting its trained guerrilla unit in the Assimba region of Tigray (though the unit was not officially declared or given a name). The EPRP's popularity at the time did not grow just because it opposed a regime which was killing people, but mainly because it was able to articulate the basic demands of the people. Workers, students, intellectuals and, to a certain extent, peasants also saw in

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the EPRP positions of calling for democratic rights, the right to organize, the formation of a popular provisional government, the arming of the poor peasants and the recognition of the freedom of the peasant and urban dwellers' associations, the recognition of the rights of oppressed nationalities, etc... a better alternative than the one the Derg was presenting. And if it came to radical change those who supported such options were more inclined to believe the EPRP than the "late-converts" of the Derg.

In addition, the EPRP program also envisaged a multi-party system, though this could have been in contradiction with the exclusive vanguard role staked out for "revolutionary parties" by the official dogma influencing the Ethiopian Left as a whole. At the time, the EPRP leadership concentrated on the urban political struggle and did not even take adequate steps to strengthen or declare its rural guerrilla force; "the peaceful path had to be exhausted" was the line of the leadership, and this was not positively appreciated by its own "more Left" members. In fact, as the EPRP grew tremendously, so did its problems. The huge influx of the youth into the Youth League (EPRYL), and the party, brought with it a certain degree of extremism. The formation of a broad democratic front in Addis Abeba in other towns militated against clandestine structures and work. The growth led also to political variations within the party itself. Some of its members (at home and also in the USA) were "die-hard Maoists" with little inclination to analyse the Ethiopian situation soberly. There were also others who thought that the urban political struggle would by itself bring about the demise of the Derg. In the complex and fast-developing situation, the party leadership was unable to fully and politically explain the party positions; slogans which had to be withdrawn in time were not pulled back and new positions were not explained in all their ramifications and subtleties.³¹

The EPRP's predominant membership was made up of students and intellectuals, but those elements who declare that it was a party of students fail to grasp the picture. Neither the EPRP nor Meisone were "the party of students"

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and it is wrong to assert that both were not in reality mass organizations. In fact, the EPRP from 1975 to 1978 and Meisone from (late) 1976 to May 1977 were mass parties, in so far as their organizations had a big number of people from the various walks of life as members. It could be said, in reverse actually, it was because of this that they lost their organizational tightness and were to become relatively easy targets and victims of the repression.³² The EPRP was strong in Addis Abeba and the main towns (it had a party structure even in Asmara city, Eritrea, manned by civil servants, teachers, workers, soldiers, etc.); in the rural areas its strong organizational work was in Shoa, Kaffa, Sidamo, Gondar, some parts of Gojjam, Wollo and Hararghe. The EPRP leadership was (and is) multi-national. As such, it had a relatively strong following among the Gurages (where the party-affiliated BUGUDEN or Gurage National Democratic Movement was active), the Kembatas and Hadiyas, Tigreans, and its indisputable popularity in Kaffa and Hararghe was enough to show that it could also legitimately claim a substantial following from Oromo militants. The Oromo Peoples' Liberation Organization, which published the underground *Mukukula*, was also working closely with the party; as was the Moslem Youth Association in Addis Abeba, which was formed by elements in total sympathy with the EPRP.³³

The EPRP officially declared its existence (prior to that, it was known through its publication, *Democracia*) on August 31, 1975. This was preceded by an enlarged extraordinary party conference in Addis Abeba in July. The conference decided on the name EPRP for the party, enlarged the central committee and amended the 1972 political program formally. Since prior to the conference the group which was publishing *Abyot* (in Amharic) had been taken into the party, two elements from this group were made members of the central committee. The declaration of the party, accompanied by the distribution of the party program and a special issue of *Democracia*, was extensive and went so smoothly as to alarm the Derg and Meisone.

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In concrete terms in light of the struggle that was to follow, the positions of the EPRP could be found in the above mentioned *Democracia* issue (Vol. 2, No. 13) which was distributed along with the party's political program. The issue carried "A Declaration of the Stand of the Central Committee of the EPRP on the Urgent Questions of the Moment" and after pointing out the failings of the military regime, it enumerated the steps it believed were the proper ones to be taken to solve these questions. These were:

1.) The replacement of the military government by a provisional popular government to be formed by anti-feudal and anti-imperialist political parties, groups, mass organizations, CELU, democratically elected representatives of the armed forces, Teachers' Association, peasant associations, etc.

The formation of a people's assembly which represents and can represent the social classes and forces which made the revolution and can assure its continuation.

2.) The recognition of basic democratic rights; these are the right to free speech and of the press, of belief, assembly, organization, etc. Political parties, mass organizations and political groups opposed to feudalism and imperialism should have the right to organize and to function practically.

3.) All militant political prisoners should be released.

4.) The Eritrean question must be resolved peacefully and democratically. To realize this:

- the war must stop immediately;
- Eritrean nationalist political prisoners must be released;

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- the *unrestricted* right of the Eritrean people to decide their own destiny must be proclaimed;
 - direct talks must begin with the liberation fronts which have been leading the Eritrean struggle.
- 5.) To protect themselves from reactionaries and to carry the revolution to victory the broad masses (peasants, workers, Zematch students, etc.) must be armed;
- 6.) The economic demands of the people must be fulfilled:
- a) the minimum wage of workers must be raised to 4 Birr as a law;
 - b) the wage scale of workers must be amended.
- 7.) The country must be freed from dependence on imperialisms. To this end:
- a) all unequal treaties and international agreements must be revoked;
 - b) foreign military bases must be closed and their personnel expelled.

These were, in broad terms, the points around which the EPRP struggled, and these were the points the people sympathised with when they supported the EPRP. In political terms and program-wise, despite superficial similarities, the Derg, Meisone and the EPRP thus differed fundamentally. Even on the question of democracy, as *Democracia* (Vol. 3, No. 2, April 1977) explained, the differences were serious and basic. Of course, for those interested in reducing the whole thing to its barest minimum, it can be said that what the Derg found unpalatable in the EPRP position was the call for the military regime's replacement by a popular provisional government, the call for the respect of full democratic rights (freedom of organization and association, in particular) and the EPRP's support of the national struggles.

On the eve of the declaration of war against the EPRP, it was evident that the party had considerable influence all

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over the country; its position was enhanced by the massive support it enjoyed from the conscious sectors of the society. The more the EPRP struggled for democratic rights and around the points mentioned above the more the Derg resisted and turned repressive and thus exposed itself more to popular opposition. This was the reality at the time and the Derg also was weak and appeared weak thus giving the opposition the wrong view of its capability as a State to rebound for a counter-offensive to defend its power.

The EPRP made the mistake of underestimating the Derg's potential in this respect. Worse than this, its leadership, especially the politbureau, entertained the illusion that a determined political and military struggle in the cities could at least debilitate the government. Thus, the urban armed actions, which started as self-defense measures, expanded and spread to the detriment of the rural armed struggle which was accepted as fundamental at least officially. When the USSR and its allies came in to support the Derg, the balance of forces was clearly changing in favour of the Derg, but the EPRP continued with the costly urban armed struggle. Aside from the external factor, the party was also facing internal problems and should have been well advised to fold its urban actions in due time.³⁴ The Party didn't and the cost, as events showed, was very high indeed. The ferocity of the repression also showed that EPRP's swollen rank held within it elements who were totally unprepared for the struggle that was destined to take place; the break up of the urban structures was serious. This problem was again to face the party in 1980 in the rural armed struggle and to cause it considerable damages as part of what it calls the "liquidationists' campaign".³⁵

In the terror campaign, the protagonists were the Derg and Meisone on the one side and the EPRP, CELU and all the other groups and mass organizations associated with the EPRP on the other. On the side of the Derg and Meisone, there were also three small groups.

Woz League or Proletarian League, was formed and led by Senaye Likke, Shewandagn Belete and others. It was a group dominated by the autocratic personality of

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Senaye Likke. It had some members within the Air Force and some sections of the army and though the group was not strong within POMOA, Senaye Likke exerted a strong influence on Mengistu and his close friends.

ICHAAT or Revolutionary Organization of Oppressed Ethiopians, was led by Baro Tumsa and Zegeye Asfaw. Baro, a law school graduate who hailed from Wollega, was a political chameleon who attached himself to a variety of groups with hostile political aims. Ichaat was predominantly Oromo, had little following and resorted to ultra-nationalist positions in its attempt to spread its influence. It was, however, dwarfed by Meisone and Seded which were playing the same tune. Zegeye Asfaw is presently in jail while Baro Tumsa has been killed in Harar by a group of Moslem Oromo ultra-nationalists with whom he was working after fleeing from the Derg.

Malered or the Marxist-Leninist Revolutionary Organization, was a miniscule group made up of elements who deserted the EPRP and joined the Derg (in 1975). Despite its claims, the group never managed to pass "its message" across, nor were many people aware of their program. Dawit Assefa, Abebe Haile, Haile Yesus Wolde Senbet and Tesfaye Makonen were some of the leaders of this group. Malered and Woz League assumed some importance after the purge of Meisone and Ichaat by the Derg, but it was not long before they were also decimated by the Derg.

The battle lines were thus drawn. The Derg Meisone camp cried blood. The EPRP made it clear that it would resist in every way it could. The air reeked of violence and blood did flow actually. All camps were guilty of misconceptions of one sort or another.

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"On behalf of the broad masses of Ethiopia, I want to thank the Communist Party and the Government of the Soviet Union, the world's first socialist country and the bastion of support for the working class, progressive and national liberation movements, for the tremendous material and political support they extended to us."

Mengistu H. Mariam, September 12, 1978

An ambassador to Addis from an East African country states that when he met Soviet Ambassador to Ethiopia, Anatoly Rattanov, during a cocktail reception in Addis Abeba, at the height of the "Red Terror", he raised to him the question of the terror and how he could square this with revolution and socialism. Rattanov is said to have replied half in jest: "African socialism has its peculiarities and this is the feature of the Ethiopian revolution".³⁶ Rattanov was understandably evasive - he played a major role both in the February palace coup of Mengistu and in the terror against the EPRP.

The Soviet leaders enjoy fishing in troubled waters, in fact they are adept at creating waves where none were apparent. There was no denying that they were "very much interested" in what was going on in Ethiopia during February 1974. Here was a strategically placed country in the Horn of Africa, an ally of the USA being wrecked by a mass upheaval and the ingredients for a radical overturn were all there. But the Soviets had a problem: there was no communist party allied to them through which they could manipulate the situation. The intellectuals were seen by

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Moscow to be "Maoists" in their majority, within the armed forces the Soviets had little influence and the fact that they were supplying and backing Ethiopia's "traditional enemy", Somalia, was not an act to make them the darlings of the Ethiopian officers. In any case, the majority of the officers were pro-American or pro-Israeli or at best nationalists with little or no sympathy for the Soviet Union.

The good hunter waits and stealthily approaches its quarry. The Soviet Union waited, issuing lukewarm perfunctory statements about the revolution and it advanced cautiously using South Yemen to assess the situation. The opening came with the problem in the Ogaden as Siyad Barre ignored the advice of many of his friends not to intervene with his army inside the disputed area.³⁷ Jimmy Carter also inadvertently played into the Kremlin's hand by refusing to sell or to deliver even the already paid for and bought arms to Ethiopia. The Derg tried China, which obviously could not arm the Derg in the massive way it wanted (the Chinese had no reservations about the Derg at the time). The situation was ideal for the Soviets. Using South Yemen, which was building a budding relationship with Meisone, and Castro, Moscow tried to bring Barre and Mengistu (and South Yemen) into a confederation. The plan failed. And Barre, under the illusion that Carter would back him or that the Soviets would not abandon him, sent his soldiers en masse into the Ogaden. With one move, Barre dealt a serious blow to the anti-Derg opposition inside Ethiopia (by giving the Derg the chance to whip up nationalism and to attack the EPRP and the opposition as a whole as anti-national) and opened the way for the Soviet domination of Ethiopia. The Kremlin made some fast and serious calculations, Berbera or not, it believed that Ethiopia, with its population and political weight in the area, was much more of a prize than Somalia. It shifted its backing to Ethiopia, armed Mengistu, dispatched Cuban soldiers by the thousands and painted itself as the defender of the Ethiopian revolution and territorial integrity.

The Soviets had for long coveted Ethiopia and had even tried to woo the "feudal Emperor" and so their claim

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that their backing to the Derg was motivated by their concern for the Ethiopian revolution hardly convinced anyone outside the usual pro-Soviet coterie. Even in 1976, the Soviet media was busy heaping attacks and insults on the EPRP and the opposition and as Meisone got even more close to Cuba and South Yemen, the attacks from Moscow directed against the anti-Derg forces were increased. Y. Tsalpin wrote in the *New Times*, in November 1976 when EPRP militants were being secretly and publicly executed, "the steps taken by the government against the counter-revolutionaries and economic saboteurs enjoy wide support among the people". Ambassador Rattanov was close to Mengistu and Meisone, the late East German party leader Lambert called the revolution "my revolution" and was a constant visitor to Addis where he conferred with Meisone leaders and Mengistu. The noose was tightening and even before the 1977 Mengistu coup, the Soviet Union was moving to ensnare the military regime through contacts with certain officers of the Derg and with Meisone.

The February palace coup of Mengistu was immediately hailed by the USSR via Rattanov who was photographed congratulating Mengistu on the next day of the execution of the Teferi Bentis. The fast recognition and backing pointed by itself to Soviet pre-knowledge of what was being prepared. In fact, the Soviets did know and were involved in the planning of the coup; to combat, in the words of Valentin Korovikov, "the treacherous divisive activity within the Dergue against the revolutionary nucleus in the military government led by Lt. Col. Mengistu Haile Mariam".³⁸

The Soviet involvement in Ethiopia is usually covered or justified by Moscow's alleged sympathy "to the Ethiopian Revolution" and the "need to defend Ethiopia from Somali aggression". The first one taxes the brain of anyone who knows that Soviet foreign policy for decades has not been motivated by notions of revolutionary solidarity but by sheer naked national interest covered up by radical rhetorics of "solidarity, internationalism and anti-imperi-

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alism". The "Somali aggression" bit does serve as a convenient cover even if to accept this argument wholesale one is asked to forget that it was none other than the Soviet Union which was for years arming Siyad Barre's "Socialist Somalia" to an extent that was far beyond the needs of the impoverished country and its defense requirements.

Despite all this, the Soviet Union's involvement in the Derg terror against the EPRP and the opposition as a whole is an undeniable one. It armed and backed Mengistu to the hilt not only to combat the Somali army but also to strike against the EPRP-led opposition, as striking at both was for Moscow, again in the words of Korovikov: "the external threat and the struggle against the counter-revolution inside the country were not opposites but required by the dialects of the revolutionary process to be treated as two parts of a single threat".³⁹ Moscow and its satellites were not only thus restricted to verbal attacks against "the CIA-tool called the EPRP" but were taking concrete measures to help and advise the Derg to eliminate this same opposition. It is thus admitted by themselves that by arming Mengistu they were helping him to crush the EPRP and to chase the Somali Army out of the Ogaden. It could be renamed as the "dialectics of terror".

Soviet involvement in the terror was more direct than this as we shall try to cite below:

- 1.) In mid-1977, a team of KGB telephone tapping experts arrived in Addis Abeba and tapped the telephones of people suspected of EPRP sympathies. The team was composed of 22 experts and their presence and activity was revealed by employees of the Telecommunications department who sympathised with the EPRP. In fact, immediately after this, arrested EPRP suspects were confronted by bugged telephone conversations, photos taken by telescopic lenses and other results of a more professional shadowing and

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investigation technique. In addition, the security agents and interrogators never slackened from boasting about the help they were getting from "Soviet and East German comrades".

2.) In the summer of 1977, a high level Secret Strategic Military Commission was set up in Addis Abeba. The Commission was made up of eight Soviet high officers (one of whom was a lieutenant general), seven Ethiopian and three Cuban high officers. The Commission, chaired by the Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces, was an ultra-secret one assigned the task of charting "strategic plans" for "the war against Somalia and against internal counter-revolutionaries". The strategic plan drawn up to combat the "counter-revolution" comprised of "intensifying the Red Terror" and "resorting to the effective and systematic use of turncoats and infiltrators". At the propaganda level, it was advocated that the "counter-revolution should be presented as terrorist so as to deprive it an international audience".⁴⁰

The Terror was intensified accordingly and the system of mass denunciations expanded. EPRP members broken by torture were made to denounce others, an organizational chart of the EPRP was drawn and information from various torture and interrogation chambers gathered in a central way to help further actions of the same kind.

The Soviets, the East Germans, the Cubans, etc. They all backed the terror. But did they actually take part in direct killings and tortures? There is up to now no evidence of this, but the issue becomes somewhat irrelevant. KGB, Cuban DGI and East German terror experts advised the security forces and the anti-EPRP Special Committee within the Security. The Security's Special Committee was staffed by Teca Tulu, Colonel

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Lulseged, Colonel Mulugeta and others. A general from the East German Security was assigned as an expert to head the Ethiopian Security service.⁴¹ The Soviet bloc and the Western parties allied to the Kremlin stepped up their propaganda barrage against the EPRP, projecting it as "terrorist", "extremist" and "counter-revolutionary". The Derg terror was hailed as "a firm and decisive revolutionary measure".⁴²

The gross interference by the Soviet Union and its allies was put to evidence when Cubans smuggled Meisone leader Negede Gobezie into Addis Abeba and vainly tried to reconcile him with Mengistu. The Derg refused and Negede had to leave; the incident led to some friction between Havana and Addis Abeba. This last desperate attempt by the Soviet bloc to salvage the organization which had so diligently, and foolishly, worked to get the Derg into their orbit, reaffirms the alleged close ties between the bloc and Meisone, ties which were forged during the terror campaign against the EPRP.

The Derg terror eerily resembled the repressions which had taken place in Eastern Europe. The similarity was not accidental: it had the advice of the East European experts of terror. During the denunciation meetings of the "Red Terror", the child who betrayed his parents to the secret police and now has a monument somewhere in the Soviet Union was frequently mentioned. Ethiopians were exhorted to follow this example.

When those responsible for the crimes of the Red Terror are finally brought to justice, the responsibility of the Soviet Union and its allies cannot escape from being considered a major and criminal one. Under the cover of "the dialectics of a revolutionary process" the Soviet Union aided and abetted a regime which massacred thousands

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and aborted the revolution in the process. Fidel Castro is alleged to have said that if the Ethiopian revolution needs for its success the wiping out of a generation, "so be it". But then, Castro's fault is not only being loose mouthed.

Notes

Part Two

- 1 In August 1976, the newly appointed heads of the various corporations were gathered in the Addis Abeba Chamber of Commerce and shown the film, which according to Mengistu (who addressed them), "proved the economic sabotage" undertaken by the former minister of National Resources Development, who was called Mengiste and used to be Mengistu's close friend till he challenged him at one public meeting and got subsequently arrested.
- 2 While as Marxists, Meisone should have been more concerned with the stand and activities of the EPRP it resorted to such accusations, echoed by the world apologetic pro-Soviet media out to paint the EPRP as the party of "princes" and "disgruntled middle class leftists", in its drive to discredit the EPRP in the eyes of the people, especially in the rural areas of the South, and internationally. Actually, while Haile Fida came from humble origins, many of the Meisone leaders belonged to the upper classes while the same could not be said of the ERP and of even the other pro-Derg groups.
- 3 In mid-September an EPRP squad, helped by members within the police force, had raided the Sendafa police station and acquired arms. There was no shooting and no one was injured or killed.
- 4 Amnesty International Report on Ethiopia, London, 1977. See also J.C. Guillebaud's "Dergue's Red Terror", *Guardian Weekly*, Feb. 28, 1978.
- 5 There is no reported estimate of EPRP's membership figure at the time. Some ex-EPRP sources allege that the Youth League alone had at the time more than 15,000 members. I have not been able to get a confirmation on these estimates from the EPRP.

Notes

- 6 The Derg put the blame on the EPRP which was accused of agitating the people not to read the Derg newspapers and not to listen to the radio.
- 7 Of the executed, only Major Moges was organizationally linked to the EPRP according to EPRP sources.
Michael Warr, writing in *Horn of Africa*, vol. 4, no. 3, (New Jersey (USA), 1981), stated that Captain Alemayehu Haile was an EPRP member and he also tried to attach the same tag to General Teferi Benti by alleging that his son was an EPRP member. The EPRP denies that neither the captain nor the general were ever its members. Those who knew both men closely discount Warr's allegations as partisan echoing of the Derg's positions.
- 8 Dr. Alemu Abebe, who was educated in the USSR, is commonly referred to in Ethiopia as "the KGB's man". He defected from Meisone and joined Seded and is now a member of the politbureau of the ruling WPE.
- 9 Reported by the Swedish Doctor Arnt Meyer-Lie (who had served for many years as Ethiopia's Director of Medical Services) to an Amnesty International meeting in Athens, March 10-11, 1978.
- 10 In his article, the "Dergue's Red Terror", Guillebaud wrote:

"the authorities take a suspicious view of kebelles that cannot show a sufficient number of arrests at the end of the month. One man recounted: 'in our kebele as they had made practically no arrests, they got busy organising collections and giving lots of money and blood for the soldiers on the front.'"

The lack of zeal to carry out the terror had to be covered up by other "loyal and patriotic" actions!
- 11 This practice was to increase later on as Seded squads under Legesse Asfaw fulfilled KGB instruction by liquidating people suspected of being CIA agents.
- 12 The Madebo Squads got their name from Temesgen Madebo, the head of the Derg's AETU, who had been killed by the EPRP.

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- 13 Mulugeta Sultan, for example, was brutally tortured by Senaye Likke himself. The latter held a grudge against him since their student days in the USA where they had basic political differences and belonged to two opposed unions.
- 14 Amnesty International Report, *op. cit.*, 1977, page 19.
- 15 Translated in ABYOT (information bulletin of the EPRP, in English), vol. 2, Special Issue, February 1977.
- 16 Valentin Korovikov, *op. cit.*, page 93.
- 17 Teferi Benti's naivete is also illustrated by the reported reply he gave to a friend who warned him that Mengistu and Meisone were planning to kill him and his friends. Teferi is said to have replied: "if they kill us, who will accept them?"
- 18 Halliday and Molyneux, *op. cit.*, page 122.
- 19 Hagoses' article was presented to the Vth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies held in Nice, France (December 19-22, 1977) and it was laboriously titled: "The Bankruptcy of the Ethiopian Left, Meisone-EPRP, a Two-Headed Hydra - A Commentary on the Ideology and Politics of National Nihilism".
- 20 The false reports carried by many foreign writers (the Ottaways, Vivo, Lefort, Schwab, Halliday, etc.) continues to confuse many people as the EPRP and Meisone have not yet written publicly their histories. The Derg, on its part, is busy writing a new history of itself embellishing and changing the facts to fit its political objectives and the task of building up Mengistu's personality cult. A detailed summing-up of the EPRP's experience has been made by the 4th Plenum of the CC (1979) and especially by the Second Congress of the party (1984).
- 21 Quoted by Legum, *op. cit.*, pp. 59-59.
- 22 Halliday and Molyneux, *op. cit.*, p. 154. footnote.

Notes

- 23 Mengistu reported to the Standing Committee of the Derg. According to one source, no one asked questions or voiced reservations or objections.

- 24 The Chinese hailed the land nationalisation proclamation, called the Derg "anti-imperialist" and were on the whole favourable to the regime and to Meisone with whose leader, Haile Fida, they had had ties. At the time, the EPRP and the Chinese had no contacts.

- 25 Aside from being a demagogue, Mengistu is said to be a cunningly deceptive man with the capacity to hide his quick temper when he meets foreign visitors to whom he projects assiduously the image of a shy and humble man. Fidel Castro, who met him only for three days and for the first time, praised Mengistu in the following terms:

"I can say I got to know Mengistu well - he is calm, intelligent, audacious and brave. I feel he possesses exceptional qualities as a revolutionary leader. I regard Mengistu as a genuine revolutionary." (quoted in *The Ethiopian Revolution*, magazine published by the PMAC, September 1977, p. 39.)

Castro may have been deliberately buttering up the famous ego of the Ethiopian major, but Ethiopians are also more inclined to believe that the Derg chief does not lack the ability to hoodwink, even in three short days, another verbose demagogue.

- 26 CHALLENGE, published by ESUNA, New York, vol. XI, no. 2, July 1971.

- 27 In the particular issue of USUAA's journal (*Struggle!*), the position acknowledging the existence of nationalities, national oppression and the right to self-determination was expressed in an article written by Walelign Makonen, who was killed in 1972 during a failed hijack attempt.

- 28 Haile is reported to have subscribed to them, for a year, *Guardian* and *Le Monde Weekly* (in English).

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- 29 Some of these AK-47s were captured by the EPRA in an ambush at Mai-Leham (Tselemt, Gondar) during this same period.
- 30 *Africa Confidential*, London, October 8, 1976. For the Derg's thinly veiled admission of the EPRP's influence over CELU, see the *Ethiopian Herald*, April, 1977. Also Michael Chege, "The Revolution Betrayed: Ethiopia 1974-9", *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 17, 3, 1979, pp. 359-380.
- 31 I have found no EPRP publication in which the party asserts, as Halliday and Molyneux suggest, that it had played the vanguard role in the February Revolution. In fact, the standard presentation of the EPRP on the issue is that despite the significant role played by its militants and *Democracia*, "the party was not strong enough" to assume the leadership role.
For Meisone's claim that it had been "the inspirer" of the February Revolution, see *Le Monde*, Paris, September 3, 1977.
- 32 For example, there was a lingering confusion on the content and purpose of the slogan of the popular provisional government. The "fascist" tag attached to the regime was also taken by some to imply that "a fascist system existed in Ethiopia". Even the leadership policy statement on the need to resort to urban "armed self defense" was presented in such a way that made it open to interpretations alleging the advocacy of insurrections. Actually, some EPRP members allege that the politbureau which issued the directives was inclined towards insurrectionist positions. In fact, the summing up of the 4th Plenum of the CC itself admitted that the erroneous orientation had influenced the party leadership and a section of the membership.
- 33 This was more true of the EPRP than of Meisone as the latter more or less worked openly by choice, having its members appointed, armed, etc., by the regime. The EPRP was in the opposition and clandestine and the looseness and amateurishness which bedevilled it as its rank got swollen exposed it to serious damages.

- 34 Though the main targets of the "Red Terror" were the EPRP and the groups and mass organizations associated with it, attempts have been made post-facto to present the nationalist organisations as the main targets of the Terror. This flimsy attempt at the political manipulation of facts to suit partisan politics emerges as wholly baseless and futile. As far as nationalist organizations are concerned, the ELF, which was the only one with an underground structure in Addis Abeba, was affected by the campaign. In Tigray, till the end of 1978, the terror was directed against the EPRP and even in Asmara itself the terror per se focused on EPRP suspects amidst teachers, officers and soldiers and within the administration. In Kaffa, Arsi, Hararghe and other areas inhabited by Oromos, the terror was mainly against the EPRP members, sympathisers and supporters.

For the translation of the 10 point program of the Oromo People's Liberation Organization, which worked with the EPRP and was repressed, see ABYOT, vol. 2, no. 5, 1977.

- 35 The most serious internal problem of the EPRP was posed by two of its leaders (Getachew Maru and Birhane Meskel Redda) who opposed armed opposition to the Derg even after the declaration of the war against the EPRP and argued that the party should try to form a united front with the Derg to combat the EDU and the Somali aggression. Of the two, Birhane Meskel was the more well-known as he had been an active student leader and had played a prominent role in the formation of the EPRP. Getachew, on the other hand, was till 1969 an apolitical religious student, though he later espoused Maoism and formed with others the ABYOT group which was incorporated into the EPRP.

According to the EPRP, the two were suspended from the central committee because they "violated organisational rules and tried to push their conciliatory views "in violation of democratic centralism". The two leaders were given the chance to air their views in their party's internal journal and to respect the majority's decision in the meantime. However, it seems that the two felt that their opposition was so serious that they had to break away and form their own faction. In the EPRP publications they are referred to as the

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anjas, factionalists. It is alleged, and proven later on, that the followers of the two joined with the Derg and helped in the terror campaign against their former comrades.

Birhane Meskel tried to negotiate with the Derg but his attempt was blocked by Meisone which feared that he might succeed in getting close to Mengistu and to reduce their influence. He was later captured and executed by the Derg. The *anja* problem was serious and quite an obstacle for the EPRP's urban political and military struggle.

- 36 The "Liquidation Campaign" occurred within the EPRP in Gondar within the framework of the armed struggle. Following the party leadership's self-criticism (the 4th Plenum), a group of people, who argued that the contradiction between the Derg and the peasantry was muted and that it was not possible to continue the armed struggle in light of this and in light of the Soviet backing of the junta (while the party had no significant foreign backer) called for the cessation of the struggle. Actually, these elements were able to air their views via a paper called BUTTA, which was being published within the EPRA in Tselemt. The net result of this agitation was that numerous members of the EPRA and rural cadres of the EPRP defected to the Derg or went out to the Sudan. A number of them also defected to the TPLF.

Events later showed that the liquidation campaign was spearheaded by elements with close ties to "inimical forces" like the Derg and the TPLF. Yared Kebede, the one who led the campaign "to dissolve" the EPRP and the EPRA, joined the TPLF which immediately used him and the others who had had contact with it even earlier to form an anti-EPRP group controlled by it. Yared emerged as the leader of this group which took the name EPDM. However, it was not long before Yared defected to his real masters - he joined the Derg and was appointed as a central committee member of COPWE and later of the WPE.

The few others who stayed with the TPLF to carry on with its EPDM allege presently that they were organised inside the EPRP and had contacts with the TPLF though the EPRP and ex-EPRP members reject this as a self-serving historical falsification. According to these, the defectors were organised into the EPDM by the TPLF itself. If so, this would not be the first time that the TPLF had tried to take advantage of

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internal EPRP problems: during the *anja* crisis, the TPLF reduplicated and distributed the publications of the Birhane Meskels who were attacking the EPRP.

- 37 Reported to the author by another East African diplomat.
- 38 According to Halliday and Molyneux (op. cit., p. 203 footnote), both the ELF and the Sudanese politician, Sadiq El-Mahdi, warned Barre not to invade the Ogaden.
EPRP officials have also told the author that they communicated their strong opposition of the Somali intervention to the Somali ambassador in Khartoum "who promised to pass it to Siyad Barre" but who was himself "quite evasive and sure that the Soviets would not abandon Somalia for Ethiopia".
For the EPRP's position on the Ogaden war, see *Democracia*, vol. 4, no. 9.
- 39 Korovikov, op. cit., p. 93.
- 40 *ibid.*
- 41 At a press conference (February 1978) Mengistu denied the existence of such a secret military commission.
- 42 *Times*, London, March 22, 1978.



Part Three

The Red Terror In Action



1

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*"We are ready to unleash red terror on the EPRP fascists. Their blood shall serve as the water with which (we will) put out the fire of counter revolution."
Voice of the Masses, organ of Meisone, February 1977*

*"If they say we don't have to kill people, aren't they saying that we have to quit the Revolution? The cry to stop the killing is a bourgeois cry."
PMAC reply to Amnesty International Protests,
November 12, 1977*

The "Red Terror", designated as such, was officially launched on February 4, 1977. Mengistu himself made the call: carry the red terror into the camp of the anarchists, one thousand of them for every militant of ours. He was not indulging in arithmetical hyperbole - he meant what he said. Meisone was quick to prove the Ethiopian adage, the disciple is worse than the master, by being more fanatic than those who had been trained as a matter of profession to kill. "The terror is turning red," they all cried, and blood was needed to make this so. Strike at the anarchists without mercy and save the revolution, let us not repeat the mistakes of the Paris Commune and Allende. Kill! Mengistu ordered. Kill! Meisone ordered. And the instruments of terror unleashed themselves to have a field day and to register one of the most barbaric periods in the history of Ethiopia.

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The Red Terror was not only an open call to outright carnage, but it was also extensive. It was carried "to all corners of the country", to quote a Meisone rallying call at the time. Parents were executed for the "faults" of their offspring, children were killed for the "crimes" of their elders, innocent people were slaughtered for psychological purposes and to whet the murderous appetite of some armed psychotics. It was an unchecked orgy of violence. The Red Terror gave no quarter, it knew no mercy. Its mission and operational guidance dictated its savagery and arbitrariness. The aim of terror is to terrify, and what terrifies more than haphazard, illogical, inexplicable and indiscriminate violence? Meisone can take the credit for emphasising and practicing this aspect of the terror; during this period its tracts read more like terror manuals rather than political leaflets and this was as it should be. The terror should not be selective but all inclusive, it should not be reasoned and reserved but wild and irrational (is there ever a rational terror?), it should be consciously cruel: this was the Meisone message and its members and supporters lapped it up.¹

The case of Girma Kebede, a Meisone cadre and a kebele official, serves as a good illustration. Girma was, until 1974, an apolitical student more inclined to party-going than to party politics, and known for his association with foreign teachers and the sons of the military high brass who rode horses every weekend at the Janhoy Meda. In 1975, he was recruited into Meisone and was to emerge as one of the most sadistic killers produced by this organization, which was led by Europe-educated intellectuals who would discourse on high level intellectual matters and also engage in nocturnal tortures of other human beings.

During the house to house searches in Addis Abeba, Girma personally liquidated some 30 people, including the eight month pregnant Daro Negash, who had several children and was a worker at the Berhanena Selam printing press. She was bayoneted to death after being tortured

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brutally and the cruelty of it all enraged the printing press workers and the inhabitants of Arat kilo who demonstrated to voice their protest. Girma had also stepped out of line by arresting and almost executing a close relative of Mengistu himself. To dampen the protest, Girma was arrested. Meisone fumed against this and protested against actions which hamper the revolutionary zeal of militants engaged in the anti-EPRP struggle. Senaye Likke of Woz League, ever alert to openings for a blow at Meisone, impressed on Mengistu that Girma should be executed as an example and as a propaganda scapegoat. Mengistu and his Seded friends were not also averse to using Meisone in such a manner. Girma was sentenced to death and publicly executed. At his execution site, a Woz cadre read quotations from Mao Tse-tung and Girma was cut down as he attempted to speak. The Soviet writer Korovikov alleges, contrary to Meisone, that Girma was in fact an "EPRP infiltrator who planned to smirch the name of the government"!²

There were a lot of Girmas. Mayor Alemu Abebe ordered the execution of more people, the US-educated Asazinew Bayisa executed more than Girma did, Abdullahi Yusuf, a friend of German leftists in Hamburg, used pincers to rip off the noses of arrested workers and students in Dire Dawa, Mohamed ——— (who is now a professor in New York, USA) killed some 110 people and threw their corpses outside Harar, and so on and on... All were good soldiers of the Red Terror... their list is long.

The open and secret executions increased in number. The tortures were horrible too. Torture was not used to make the prisoner confess but to terrorize him and others and to take revenge. Prisoners were tortured in front of others, prisoners were forced to torture and even to execute other fellow prisoners, mutilated bodies were exposed, corpses were thrown on the streets... The aim of terror is to cow the people, is it not? The Red Terror did not slacken in carrying out its mission.

But what exactly were the features of the Red Terror in action?

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Mass executions: The secret and announced executions of quite a great number of people became the main feature of the Red Terror. This refers not to the day to day killings, which were by all accounts quite numerous and in some instances reported over the radio too, but to the practice of executing large batches of prisoners. We can only document some of the glaring ones as the enumeration of all the recorded ones (of killings of people numbering more than 12) would be quite too long.

On February 26, 1977, forty-four prisoners were transported from the Third Police Station in Addis Abeba and taken to the outskirts of the city, executed and buried in a mass grave. The youngest of the 44 was only 17 years old while the majority were aged between 17 and 26 years. One, engineer Osman Ahmed, was in his early forties. The secret mass execution was revealed by one of the two prisoners who managed to jump out of the police van and to escape. The following is his story:

“In the (Third) police station, if the guards lock us in our cells by 4 p.m. and if our meagre supper is given us early, we knew there would be an execution that night. February 26th was such a night. At 8 p.m. the notorious Sergeant Teshome came to our cell and called the names of 45 people. I was one of them, and we all knew we were going to be killed. Some of those whose names had been called started to sing anti-Derg and pro-EPRP revolutionary songs. Some made speeches to the remaining prisoners, others were quiet. As we came out of the cell, the soldiers beat us with rifle butts, tied our hands behind our backs and threw us like sacks into the van. Those who continued to sing or to insult the soldiers were beaten senseless before being thrown onto the van. Engineer Osman was beaten but he refused to remain silent, so a soldier strangled him right in front of us and threw his corpse onto the van.

When Sergeant Teshome called the name of each prisoner, Major Yosef, who was flanked by Captain Eshetu

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and two soldiers, made a mark on a paper he had in his hand.

When the van moved finally, we started to shout and sing so as to make the people in the houses along the street know that we were going to be killed. My friend untied the rope binding me by using his teeth; I untied him also. As we were going to untie the others, they told us to jump as "there is no time". We opened the window of the van used for ventilation and we jumped. I don't know what happened to my friend, I had seen him fall and he was running behind me. I heard shouts and shots but continued to run without looking back. This was how I escaped."

The others didn't. They were executed and buried in a mass grave. Thus died Girma Seifu, Tesfa Limeta, Tesfaye Zewdu, Messele Debalke, Solomon Gebre Tsadik, Ayalneh Asmamaw, Tessema Deressa (a trade union leader), Kassu Kemma, Fikru Yosef, Ayehubirhan Demeke, Hailu G. Kirstos, Tibebu Abebe, Tsegaye H. Michael, Teshome Asrat, Bekele Merine, Ashenafi Zeleke, Getnet Yamane, Haile Mariam Kassu, Sisaye W. Mariam, Getahun Makonen, Fikadu Gameda, Worku H. Wold, Belayneh G. Mariam, Daniel Habtu, Getu Tegegne, Bisrat Dibaba, Mohamed Mesud, Mamo Belaye, Demissew Bizuwork, Birhane Yeshitila, Yehualashet Shewatatek, Endale Haile, Abayneh Hunegnew, Abiy Merge, Kassalan Negash, Alemayehu Andualem and others whose names have not been remembered.

On April 29 1977, numerous students and workers prepared to stage their "May Day" demonstrations. The Derg and Meisone got wind of the plan and the murderous squads were prepared. Here is how one observer put it:

"On Friday morning, April 29, virtually everyone in different parts of this city of one million had heard heavy gunfire. Not the light, sporadic rifle fire that is common when the midnight curfew is announced prematurely, but a heavier machinegun sound at 6:30 p.m. Most people had heard that there was a student demonstration which had been suppressed with gunfire with some loss of life. Only

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gradually did people begin to comprehend that the demonstrations had been widespread (perhaps in a dozen places). The army - actually it was not the army, but a specially trained branch called the flame", recruited from impoverished, unemployed illiterate lumpen immigrants in the city, prone to follow any order - responded rapidly with jeeps. Mounted on the backs of the jeeps were heavy machineguns. Sitting behind the machine guns were soldiers wearing yellow goggles, symbolically separating them from their countrymen. At each demonstration the begoggled machine gunners let loose, cutting down dozens of teenagers, demonstrators as well as shoppers, people going to night school, walking home from work, or on the street for any reason. At a few places the demonstrators shot back but for the most part they were unarmed.

Over the weekend people began to count the caskets at church funerals and to count the new hospital admissions. By Monday the city was numb with disbelief. In ten minutes probably three hundred youngsters, mostly unarmed, had been killed and several hundred (one rumour said six hundred) who had been arrested were taken out of jail and summarily executed. Altogether at least nine hundred were killed, and some rumours had the figure as high as twenty-four hundred. Reportedly, parents had to pay a fee to reclaim the bodies of their children - several dollars per bullet."³

Actually, the killings were done by the Seded and Meisone squads. The squads used the occasion to break into houses, to pull out previously-targeted people and to execute them. Moreover, those shot were not only those found demonstrating or arrested on the streets - Meisone and Seded took out numerous prisoners from the Kebelle jails and executed them too. The corpses were thrown at crossroads of the city. The Secretary General of the Swedish Save the Children Fund stated that "1000 children have been massacred in Addis Abeba and their bodies, lying in the streets, are ravaged by hyenas. The bodies of murdered children,

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mostly aged from 11-13 years, can be seen heaped at the roadside when one leaves Addis Abeba."⁴ The massacre was promptly exposed to the world by Peter Mason of the *London Daily Express*; the Derg detained him for two days and expelled him while all the time stating that the report was "a pure imperialist fabrication". Later on, after the Derg broke with Meisone, a Derg official (who is himself now arrested and presumed dead) revealed that the massacre was actually "the work of Meisone".⁵

Forty-four people in one single night, more than 1,500 youngsters in just an overnight: these were the tip of the iceberg as concerns the crimes of a regime which was lauded so profusely by Castro and others. Every night an estimated number of some 200 prisoners were executed and dumped into mass graves; the aforementioned Swedish official stated, quoting Swedish sources in Addis, that some 100-150 people were being killed each night in Addis alone.⁶ But this figure was much closer to the daytime killings. What was happening in Addis Abeba was also happening in Nazareth, Gondar, Dessie, Debre Marcos, and other towns all over the country. To be sure, there were slack and busy days, or hot and cold days as one Meisone cadre is said to have put it, but the total of the daytime and nocturnal executions never went down so as to alarm the zealous executioners.

In Debre Marcos (Gojjam) in October 1976, February 1977, June and August 1977, mass executions were registered.

In the outskirts of Dessie and Kombolcha (in 1977 many times and again in 1978) batches of prisoners were shot to death.

From May 1-15, 1977 alone, the Derg itself announced the execution of 1713 "counter-revolutionaries and reactionaries" in Gondar, Sidamo, Hararghe, Bale, etc.

On the night of December 16, 1977 alone, some 300 people were executed in Addis Abeba and their mutilated bodies thrown on the streets. Two American Congressmen, who were visiting Addis at the time, reported that

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they saw at least 50 corpses thrown on the streets. Prior to December 16, 385 prisoners in Addis, 56 from Tigray, 74 from Wollo, 32 from Chebo and Gurage, 56 from Gondar were liquidated.

Every day in Addis Abeba, especially after October 1977 when the second wave of intensified killings began, units of the notorious Madebo squad roved around the city in their Landrovers killing at will whomsoever they wanted to. The squad cars were usually accompanied by an ambulance which picked up the corpses not slated for street exhibition. The Madebo death squads killed a minimum of 25-30 people in any "ordinary" day.

Youngsters and children were special targets. On November 25, in the Tekle Haimanoat area (New Market) of Addis, two boys who washed cars for a living were shot and their corpses exposed on the street. On December 19, in the Aware area 19 corpses were exposed, of which quite a few were that of small boys (and one was a very old man and the other a middle-aged woman who was shot while going to church).

On December 21, 1977, Madebo squad killers erupted into the central mosque of Addis Abeba and machine gunned scores of people who were praying. The incident, reported at the time by the EPRP, was confirmed by a report of a foreigner who had resided in Addis for a long time. The report published by the *TIMES* (London, 3/22/78) went as follows:

"The Imam at the great mosque was hit (by a terror squad member) and fell to the ground seemingly dead. But later he recovered. When the military government heard of this they invited him to express regret. He was told: 'Is it not terrible that anarchists should have stormed your mosque and killed so many innocent people' - The old Imam replied: 'In our district there are no anarchists. You have done this, but why? There were only poor and simple people in the mosque standing there with the Koran in their hand. We prayed for rain and for bread, yet you have killed 50 of them. Why?' He received no reply and was allowed

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to go home. But the next day he was taken away and has not been heard since."

Prisoners in the central Alem Bekagne prison went on a hunger strike and their relatives backed them. The response? A massacre.

House to house searches in the city and towns. The result? Mass executions.

The prisons getting congested. The solution? Nocturnal executions in greater numbers.

The mass media gloated over the deaths, every victim be it a child or an 80 year old man (Takele Wolde Gabre who was killed in Kebele 13 of Addis on 2/22/78) was presented as "a dangerous and armed anarchist who resisted arrest and tried to open fire on the security forces". In the words of Meisone, the killings were explained as follows:

**"It is a known fact that official execution, imprisonment and ransackings (sic) have been made. But these measures were taken against those notorious paid killers of the EPRP, EDU and CIA... the measures were taken not only for they opposed the ongoing revolution, but because they attempted to subvert it... most of them were killed because of refusal to surrender peacefully... To defend the people and their revolution it was necessary to take such measures."
(Response to Amnesty International, in English, May 23, 1977, p. 16)**

Meisone in fact continued to sing the same tune even after its break with the Derg. On September 17, 1977, Negede Gobezie, who still had hopes of reconciliation with Mengistu, told a *Le Monde* interviewer that the reports about the red terror were exaggerated "in order to poison international opinion". Necessary measures, exaggerated reports, false reports by imperialists, intensify the red terror... as Meisone and the Derg uttered contradictory statements they did not bother about international opinion. Nor did they bother about the local one, as they were busy trying to silence it through mass executions and massacres.

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By mid-1970, the mass executions were winding down in Addis Abeba but heating up in earnest in the rural towns all over Ethiopia. Mass killing was the feature of the Red Terror, the deliberate policy to wipe out a generation.

The Netsa Irmija: This was another feature of the Red Terror and it literally meant the right to kill freely, to shoot unhindered by the need of arrest, proof of guilt and other legal procedures considered by the killer "revolutionaries" as "bourgeois legal niceties".

The *netsa irmija*, for the adoption of which Meisone had strongly pushed, was started sometime in September 1977. According to this policy, the squads were given the right to shoot on sight anyone they suspected to be or felt was an "anarchist". In accordance with this policy, the shooting was thus done on the streets, in offices, factories, anywhere and anytime. The squad members jumped out of their jeeps or Peugeot cars, executed someone and moved on, no questions asked. The victim could be a child, an old man or woman, a priest or a student - it didn't matter.

The *netsa irmija* was used by the kebele squads to settle personal scores or to hire themselves as assassins for whoever paid enough to have his enemy eliminated. Girls were raped and executed, traders were robbed and executed, rivals were killed. The folly which prevailed at the time was reported by a *Le Monde* correspondent:

"A sick mother in the Piazza district sent her only son one evening to the pharmacy. On his way back home, the teenager was killed by a bullet through his head at the steps of the square. The killers turned the body over with a foot, and told the mother: 'sorry, we took him for someone else'."⁷

These were very polite killers indeed, and were anomalies in their behaviour as far as the *netsa irmija* was concerned. A Derg leader is reported to have told assembled leaders of Kebeles (October 4, in Addis) that the *netsa irmija* is intended to focus on the youth.⁸ The

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teenager killed on his way back from the pharmacy was as good a target as any.

In fact, the whole policy was so insane that the administrator of Gondar, the murderous Derg member Major Melaku Teferra, used to summon the chief of the Special Commandos in Gondar city and to order him: "*netisa imija* for half an hour!" Following the order, the commandos descended on the town and shot anyone they met on the streets for the determined period of time. The commandos did not break into houses during such occasions, otherwise the death toll would have been even higher. Major Melaku ordered the measure whenever he felt like it and he decided the duration of the killing spree as he liked.

Meisone loved this policy so much that when it broke with the Derg it argued that one of the faults of the Derg was that "reactionaries within it were trying to stop the *netisa irmija*".

House to House Searches: The idea for this measure was, once again, the fertile imagination of the Meisone leaders. The policy was presented to the Derg in a memo written by the Addis Abeba POMOA and its chief, Kebede Mengesha. Prior to the "red terror" the house to house searches were not intense nor as organised.

The house to house search under the "red terror" was actually an euphemism: what was intended was not merely a routine search but a cover for more extensive killings. The searches were accompanied by arbitrary executions, by the *netisa irmija*. If the suspect is found, he or she is killed; if absent, those found in the house are killed en masse or at least one or two of them.

The first house to house search as such was launched on March 23, 1977 and it lasted for four days. Another one came on May 7 for two days and on October 10 a nightly search in the Mercato (New Market) led to the death of scores of people. When the search got announced, all bars and cinema halls were closed, no cars allowed to move on the streets unless belonging to the squads or the security

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forces, people were ordered to stay indoors and gates and doors to houses were to be kept open - such was the order. As an eerie silence descended on the city and it looked as if it had been abandoned, the squads and security agents moved from house to house dealing death. All exits from the city were closed by armed troops and Seded-Meisone squads who manned the roadblocks armed with the ubiquitous AK-47 and the ID photos of some 800 "anarchist suspects".

Officially, the search was for EPRP suspects, for arms, *Democracia* copies, cassettes of EPRP songs, duplicating machines, etc. But the radio triumphantly announced during the searches the "capture of butter, honey, Maria Theresa silver coins," etc., and all this was identified as "EPRP cache". In other words, what was going on was robbery, pure and simple. Had the whole thing been restricted to a mere theft of butter and red pepper and old silver coins, perhaps the people would not have minded much. But what made the searches terrifying was the arbitrary killing. Parents who could not account for their missing children were shot. If a copy of *Democracia* was found in the house how many would be killed was determined by the whim of the leader of the search party - but somebody would be shot in all cases. The search party raped girls; some were shot some were spared. If money was found in the house, the owner was made a victim of the *netsa irmija* and the cash confiscated by the raiders. The death toll was high; the government gloated over the killing by announcing daily over the radio that "counter-revolutionaries who resisted arrest have been decimated".

The house to house searches did not unduly affect the structures of the EPRP as it was able to know beforehand the date of such searches. Still, during the searches numerous EPRP members were killed. During the March search, EPRP member and CELU chairman Marco Hagos died in a shootout with soldiers while Tesfaye Debessai, a central committee member of the EPRP, committed suicide by jumping from a multi-storeyed building when he got cornered by government squads.⁹

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At the roadblocks, the killings were also arbitrary, but at one such roadblock in Akaki, Nega Ayele, Nelaku Marcos and Yohannes Berhane were killed along with a British teacher from the university.¹⁰

The house to house search in which a whole city gets paralysed / occupied by murderous squads and left to their whims for days, is perhaps unknown in this scale in many other countries. Anyway, in Ethiopia it emerged as a component part of the "red terror" campaign and was used for the summary execution of countless people. In the New Market (Mercato) area, where EPRP squads and traders resisted the government thugs, the shooting was intense and the squads were unable to kill and loot as they had hoped to even though the death toll was still quite high.

Torture: In Ethiopia, interrogation by the police or the security agents has for long been synonymous with torture. He who readily confesses his guilt gets at least a taste of a good beating, few are spared.

But there is torture and there is torture. Haile Sellasie resorted to it to break or punish political dissenters or captured guerrillas. The suspected thief gets the cane during interrogation but never the whole works like the political. The "red terror" changed all this; in fact the Derg repression in general changed all this: everyone was tortured, your only chance was not to get arrested in the first place.

Torture was an integral part of the terror campaign. Very few indeed were lucky to escape it. Old or young, everyone was tortured. Innocent or guilty it did not matter - by the time the torturers had had enough with the prisoner he was either dead or confessing his "guilt". Confession did not necessarily stop the tortures: admit your fault and you were beaten anyway. Interrogations were preceded by torture and followed by it. In the fetid and congested cells of the kebelles and the security jails, rotting flesh, amputated limbs, missing ears and noses, pulled out nails, gouged out eyes, crushed testicles and mutilated vaginas,

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burnt backs and hair... You name it and it was in evidence. The chambers of horror were the true features of what Castro had eulogized as "the true revolution".

In the various prisons, jails and kebele detention centres, the following torture methods were used on prisoners:

Flogging: This was referred to usually as the *wofe Illala* and also known as number 8 or number 6 depending on how the prisoner is tied before being beaten. The whips were made of rough hide (*akormaj*) or of rubber with iron rods within it. The beatings were administered usually to the soles of the feet, but the back was also subjected to flogging. In some instances, the prisoner was dumped head first into a barrel full of water and beaten at the same time (this has invariably proved fatal in Gondar prison).

To make the pain acute, the torturers first sliced the sole of the feet with a knife and let the wound fester for two days or so before starting to beat on the wounds. In other cases, when the beatings split the skin of the prisoner's feet, salt and red pepper or urine were poured on the wound. The skull was also beaten by a sharp-edged ruler.

Sexual Torture: Raping women and girls, some of whom were as young as nine years old, was quite routine. When female prisoners were called out of cells for after midnight "interrogation", it meant usually rape. And though the victims themselves were usually ashamed and uncommunicative, there were reports of gang rapes and sodomization.

Male prisoners were also tortured by having a red hot iron shoved into their anus and by the tying of a water- or sand-filled bottle around their scrotum or penis. In the Military Police HQ, they were specialised in the act of crushing testicles and castrating male prisoners.

The private organs of females were also mutilated by the shoving of long and thick iron poles into the vagina, the insertion of bottles into the vagina (the bottles are then

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kicked and broken inside), or the torturers put into her organ ground glass.

Mutilations: Mutilations consisted of the stripping off of the skin from the arms and thighs with a sharp knife, the pulling out of nails, the cutting of the fingers piece by piece, the ripping of noses and cheeks by pincers, the pulling of the pubic hair and skin by pincers, the cutting of the nipples of women's breasts, the gouging out of eyes and the singeing of the hair, the back, the stomach by fire. In some cases, the amputations were undertaken extra-slow by using an ordinary carpenter's saw; prisoners were also immersed in boiling oil and taken out to be dumped in cold water.

In all cases, wounds were left without medical attention so as to frighten new prisoners and to kill the victims themselves through rotting and days of agony.

Cannibalism: Horrid as it may seem (and it is) this was also practiced by the goons as part of their terror campaign. Not that the torturers ate the flesh of their victims. But they force-fed the prisoners human flesh. There is the case of the mother we mentioned in the preface who was forced to eat the sliced penis of her own son (it happened in Gondar). In the Security prison of Addis Abeba, many were fed forcefully slices of their own flesh.

The force-feeding also involved human excrement (again this was practiced in the Addis Abeba central Security jail and in the Military Police HQ); prisoners were also forced to drink human blood and to swallow phlegm.

Mental Torture: This was used extensively. Mutilated prisoners, those with festering and malodorous wounds, were thrown in with new prisoners. New prisoners were forced to watch others being tortured. During the height of the "red terror", kebele residents as a whole were made spectators of public tortures. A prisoner who proved obdurate was forced to watch his parents being tortured in

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front of him or her. Fake executions were also staged (the specialty at the MP HQ in Addis) to terrorise prisoners. Screams of pain from torture victims were deliberately made to be heard by the new prisoners. Since the night torture sessions were brutal and executions were usually done at night, prisoners passed sleepless nights. Their agony was aggravated by the sadistic guards who would make believe as if they were opening the doors; at times officers came with a list or paper called out names, but went back again leaving the called ones who had thought they were going to be shot. Prisoners, especially those who were close friends, were made to torture one another.

The conditions of the prisons and jails were unbearable by themselves. In a cell of 4.5 metres by 4.5 metres, more than 50 prisoners were stacked back to back with little space for lying down. Toilet facility consisted of a small bucket at the corner which was usually overflowing; the stench of the cells, the smell of the urine, vomits, of the rotting flesh of the tortured, was horrible.

Torture was undertaken everywhere. The most brutal spots were the kebele detention centres (staffed by Meisone or Derg members), the Security HQ at the Third Police Station compound, the military Police HQ near the ex-Princess Tsehai Hospital in Addis Abeba. The torturers were members of the security police, kebele officials and soldiers (especially in Gondar where the Special Commandos were involved). The victims numbered in the thousands, young and old, men, women from all walks of life. Many were physically handicapped, many driven into insanity. Many were shot, including the mad ones, as this was no excuse, in the Derg's eye, for escaping "a just punishment". Many have survived, some are still in jail, some "free" and others in exile. The torturers are still around also though some have been killed or have died natural deaths. Some of the torturers have also made their way into exile... just like some of their victims.

Wasachew Mengistu was an eight year old boy who got arrested in Gondar on charges of hiding some docu-

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ments which had belonged to his brothers who were suspected of being EPRP members. Wasachew was brutally tortured for days, unable to show them the hiding place which they insisted he knew. He died under torture.

Alemayehu was a 22 year old student who lived in the Kolfe area (Addis Abeba) while Sisaye Alemu who lived in the old airport area was a 27 year old worker. Both were arrested on charges of being EPRP members. After repeated torture sessions, benzene was poured on Sisaye and he was burnt to death instantaneously. Alemayehu was to suffer more: he was stripped down to his pants and then his naked body sprinkled with benzene and set afire. He was left untreated for the burns and died in the cell after a few days. In Bahr Dar (Gojjam), Birhane Kidane, a 25 year old teacher, was burnt to death like Sisaye.

Hirut, a 22 year old girl from the Kera area, was also brutally tortured and died after a red hot iron was pushed up her vagina following the piecemeal cutting of her two breasts.

Hassenu Alkassim died under torture in the Gondar prison. His mutilated corpse was thrown on the street for exhibition. His younger brother, who was not yet ten years old, cried when he saw his brother's body and the government squads shot him on the spot for the violating the order which forbids shedding tears for "dead anarchists".

Hailu Asfaw, a 25 year old student, died from unattended wounds incurred from sever beatings in the hands of the torturers.

Etagegn Birhanu, a 25 year old teacher in Dabat, was five months pregnant when she was arrested. She was tortured and rendered practically lifeless before being shot and thrown on the street. With her, the mutilated body of another prisoner, Fentu Gelaw, was also exhibited.

Yonas Addisu was a mildly political 34 year old teacher in Gondar. He was arrested and charged with being a "top EPRP leader". For weeks he was tortured to reveal names, structures and hiding places, and he couldn't. He was paralysed from the waist down and suffering from a variety of afflictions. Since the officials thought they had

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a prize catch, they took him to the hospital where he was treated, with his hands and legs chained to the bed. Later on, another prisoner convinced the agents that Yonas was no top leader. In October 1977, Yonas was taken out of the hospital in a stretcher and thrown into a grave. And he became one of the few terror victims who were buried alive.

Ibrahim Zeleke, Hassan Mohamed, Assefa Jemaneh, Moges Belaye, Tadess Ayalew, Sergo Muhe, Shitahum Estiphanos, Melaku Wolde Tensaye, Gebre Tsadkan Haile and countless others were tortured brutally and executed. Yosef Adane's backbone was broken by torture and no one knows still whether he is alive or dead since he has "disappeared" just like Fikre Zergaw, who was also brutally tortured. Girls like Habtam Andargatchew and Almaz Tadesse had to endure savage tortures before finding relief in death.

The terror brought into the open all the cruelty and savagery lurking inside the members of the regime's repressive apparatus and squads. When corpses were thrown on the streets for exhibition purposes, it was possible to see the barbarity of the torturers. Such brutal tortures are still going on in the jails and prisons of the "people's democratic" government.¹¹

Exhibition of Corpses: This was a "red terror" exclusive. It is alleged that the idea came from the Soviet and East German advisors but it was in any case brutal enough to be adopted by the regime.

The corpses of people killed in prisons, of those who had died under torture, those killed by the *netsa irmija*, bloodied and mutilated corpses were thrown at crossroads, on main streets, near houses and exhibited for a day. No parent could pick up the corpse of a kin or an offspring, no one was allowed to shed tears. In fact, kebele dwellers were gathered and forced to sing:

*"abet abet des amletu
yanarchist dem sifes maletu"!*

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*("how happy it makes us
to see anarchist blood flowing"!)*

At other times, Meisone trained youngsters were brought to the site to sing the above or other such songs.

The exhibition of corpses was intended to terrorize the people out of their wits, to dehumanize them and drive home their helplessness while accentuating the might of the State. Numerous parents were driven insane as they saw their children lying on the streets mutilated and dead. They suffered anguish for not being able to mourn or bury the dead, they suffered immensely as they trekked from kebele to kebele to search for their kins who may have been killed and thrown on the streets.

To terrify even more, the corpses were also deliberately mutilated. Some were decapitated, others amputated. In some cases, the severed hands were nailed to the forehead. In the majority of cases, a placard was nailed on the corpse and on it was written the message: "I was an anarchist" or "The Red Terror will be intensified!". As an example, perhaps, of the black (or red?) humour of the "red terror", dogs were killed also and thrown alongside the human corpses; on the dogs also a placard was nailed with the message: "I was also an anarchist!"

In the evenings, municipal trucks collected the bodies and dumped them in anonymous mass graves.

The exhibition of mutilated corpses was one of the brutal features of the savage terror and it also indicated in clear terms the inhuman and barbaric nature of the Mengistu junta and its Meisone allies.

The Sale of Corpses: In the Menilik hospital of Addis Abeba, corpses of terror victims used to be piled up high starting from September 1976. Concerned relatives queued outside the gate to check the pile of corpses and a new field of employment was opened for those people who would pull down the pile to pick the identified corpse.

No one took the corpse for free. As the killers said: "Does the government get bullets for free?" Anyone who

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wanted to retrieve the corpses was forced to pay became known as the "bullet price". The amount was arbitrary but calculated on the whole on the number of bullets riddling the corpse. A "lucky" father was whose son or daughter had died of only a single bullet there is no attempt here on the author's part to inject humour; this was how parents really felt. The sale of corpses was a brisk business though the originator of the idea remains unknown. Later on, as parents refused to bury their children ("you killed them, eat them!" many said) and an exhibition of corpses came into the picture, the sale of corpses dwindled.

The Denunciations (Agalt, tegalet): It was not accidental that the practice of denunciations became a common feature of the terror after the Soviet bloc terror entered Ethiopia en masse.

The denunciations took the following forms during "red terror":

1.) Self-denunciation. This was resorted to either in prison during torture sessions or in public meetings.

Arrested suspects were accused of a variety of crimes and asked to denounce themselves as EPRP members or leaders. "You have already been denounced, so you better denounce yourself and save yourself from death," was how the ultimatum line went. Prisoners who had been broken enemies or members of the *Anja* which broke from the EPRP to join the Derg were also brought in to influence the prisoner to denounce himself. The irony of it all was that those who denounced themselves thinking that these would save them from torture were tortured afterwards and were still even executed.

In the mass public meetings, the gatherings were held in public squares, the people guarded by armed units of Sedet Meisone, were harangued by the Derg or Meisone.

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cadre to rise up and denounce themselves. Those who refrained were threatened by death: "if you do not denounce yourself but if you are denounced by others or your name is found on our list, it's the *netsa irmija!*". The cadres made believe as if they had a list of members and sympathisers of the EPRP or of those who had read *Democracia* even once. Thus, afraid and bewildered, the people denounced themselves. "I have read *Democracia* once, "I suspected my son of anarchist sympathies but I said nothing", "I had talked with an anarchist", etc. Those who denounced themselves were arrested and whisked off. In one day alone (early May 1978) 6,000 people denounced themselves in Gondar and a few other provincial towns!

2.) Denouncing Others: A prisoner is tortured until he supplies the names of other "anarchists he knows". Many who were unable to bear the brutal torture denounced others, just supplied names of acquaintances so as to end with their own suffering. Those arrested as a result of the denunciation by others were tortured and forced to denounce others, and thus the cycle went on. The practice of denouncing others was also resorted to in mass "denunciation meetings" held in kebelles, factories, etc. Hooded informers were taken to the bus stations, the cinema halls, etc., to point out suspects. The population was ordered and exhorted to denounce "anarchists", children were used to accuse their parents. Some used the opportunity to denounce personal enemies and rivals over business or love affairs. As a result, countless people with absolutely no organizational ties with the EPRP were trapped and liquidated.

An atmosphere of fear and mutual suspicion was spread among the people. No one trusted anybody else, the young son could denounce his mother, the maid may have accuse her employers. The dilemma was heavy: if you

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don't denounce yourself, somebody else might; if you don't denounce others, you may face torture and death and may even be denounced by somebody else. The problem was also when you denounced others you were also taken as an accomplice and did not escape retribution. The courageous refused to be degraded by this charade and denounced nobody else and sometimes denounced themselves to try to save others. Those who were relatively weaker (and we imply no judgment for who can judge but one who himself passes through the crucible?) denounced themselves and others and they ended up by prolonging the agony of others and of themselves - even as late as 1982-83, many prisoners who had denounced others and expedited their execution were themselves taken out of prison and shot in secret, as was the case in Addis Abeba, Gondar, Dessie, Jimma, Mekele and Harar for example.

The "Red Terror" reduced the whole nation to indescribable levels of fear and trauma. The word "shibir" now frightens many, the image evoked is that of the "red terror". It was more than sheer death, pain or humiliation - it was a deliberate attempt to break the spirit of a people. The "red terror was aimed at the living", someone has written and it was true. The aim was to crush the living by showing them the cost of dissent. Even for Ethiopia, which had seen much violence over the time, the Red Terror was too much. The means, the extent, the savagery was all beyond imagination.

The Red Terror in action was mass murder, brutal torture, mutilation of corpses, massacres, summary executions, throwing live persons into graves, pitting parent against children and vice versa, spreading mistrust, fear and helplessness. Only those who endured it, those who lived through it can gauge its real effects, effects which are still gripping the people years after the terror had at least officially been ended. During the "red ter-

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ror", death was a relief if it came suddenly. Many prisoners and relatives of the arrested committed suicide. Numerous EPRP members killed themselves by swallowing cyanide pills, others drank insecticides - quick death was better than arrest and what was sure to follow: death through slow and protracted agony. The "good" torturer was the one who beat you senseless and killed you quick, the bad ones were the likes of Sergeant Teshome who made you beg to die and kept you on edge to suffer more. Death was a relief for the ones who survived suffered more: the parents who saw themselves become childless in a day or a week, the mother who witnessed the torture of her only son, the sister who had to sing praise to the government who had killed her brother so brutally, the ones in jail who exhibited amputated stumps where legs and hands should have been, the ones rendered blind, the relatives who had to take care of the youngster reduced to insanity by torture, etc. For the living the "red terror" meant worse than death.

And it showed to what a depraved level despots can sink to fulfill their cravings for power; it shamed many who wavered and fingered others to a sure death; it stained the respect given to the intellectuals when some of these were found to be no better, if not worse, than the illiterate killers employed by the regime. The "Red Terror" in action damaged the whole nation in a way which needs decades to overcome and erase.

How Many?

How many Ethiopians died during the "Red Terror"? Somehow, it seems improper to try to quantify something which in reality damaged a country and millions of people in so many ways. But an answer has to be given if only to counter those who try to minimise the whole issue and the death toll.

How many? To this question many Ethiopians answer in their own ways. How many died? "Who didn't die?" respond some. How many? "Only God knows how many," say others - the dead were that many.

The terror was the great equalizer in many respects - it visited almost every corner of the country (at least the towns down to the district level), it made no discrimination based on sex, religion, class or nationality. In fact, it can be said that the Derg thugs were especially ferocious when it came to women and the worst massacres happened in areas inhabited by Amharas. The EPRP was taken by the Derg as the expression of the widespread dissent and thus the terror focused on it and its allies.¹² But the terror killed more than those who were tied with the EPRP - the extent of the killings could be gauged only if the whole thing is viewed as a government's drive to wipe out all vocal dissent and to kill more, to kill indiscriminately and deliberately to terrorise and cow the people. The terror was the Derg's way of assuring "stability" and in this calculation the deaths of thousands were counterbalanced by the need to subjugate millions.

The question of numbers calls on us to be precise in the designation of the terror. The "red terror" per se began in

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February 1977. Before that there was terror and repression, especially since September 1976, but the terror was not dubbed "red" officially till February 1977. Meisone claimed that the Derg terror began actually after August 1977 but this date only highlights their rupture with it. Apparently for Meisone, the terror that preceded their break with the Derg, the terror in which they participated so fully and brutally, was revolutionary and to be supported. Leaving aside such attempts to whitewash a criminal past, suffice it to say that when we refer to the "Red Terror" we restrict ourselves to the repression which was designated as such and which continued from February 1977 up to early 1979.

How can one reach a reasonable estimate of all those who fell victim of the repression? We believe that this can be attempted by taking the death rate during the peak periods of the killings, by adding up the Derg's own reports, by asking various people who have survived and who can shed light, by taking into account the daily and nightly death rates (minimum / maximum) and by not forgetting that what happened in Addis Abeba was repeated and duplicated in other towns big or small all over the country. Some quarters, whose motives may be put to some question, have tried to forward a 5,000 figure as the total death toll in the "red terror" (for example Bereket Habte Sellasie in one article stated this and it had been picked up and echoed by American officials, including former US ambassador to the UN, Jane Kirkpatrick).¹³

However, it is possible to see that this figure was not able to account even for the killings which took place from late April 1977 to the end of May 1977. Within a month period, no less than 5,000 people were killed: some 1,500 in Addis Abeba during the May Day eve demonstrations, the junta itself reported the killing of 1,713 people in the rural areas of six regions between May 14-15, and the Secretary General of the Swedish Save the Children Fund reported that daily (or every night to be precise) 100-150 people were being killed in May 1977, one of the peak

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killing months. Apparently then, the 5,000 figure indicates either lack of information or manifests a deliberate attempt at minimising the carnage in the mistaken belief that suggesting a bigger number may indicate a stronger political-military struggle and be to the EPRP's credit!¹⁴

Let us deal with some estimates.

- Amnesty International reported that at least 10,000 people were probably killed between February and December 1977.

We have shown that even in the month of May alone more than 5000 people were killed. If we take the peak killing periods, we see that from February 1977 to June 1977, the red terror was intense and then it "cooled a bit" and intensified again from October 1977 to December 1977. Reuter reported on March 7 that between February 3 and early March some 2,000 people were estimated to have died.

Evidently, the death toll was quite high. If we take single cases of "particular outbursts" (May Day Eve, December in Addis Abeba, other months in Nazareth, Gondar, Dessie and other towns) we arrive at a figure which surpasses the aforementioned ones. In Addis Abeba itself, each night we assert that not less than 150 people died in the peak months and the figure was also high for particular dates such as, for example, in December 1977. Furthermore, the killings occurred every day and every night in various parts of the country (especially in Shoa, Gondar, Hararghe, Gojjam, and Wollo). One has to take all this into account and estimate the daily and nightly killing and the execution of prisoners in batches ranging from 50 to some 200.

Professor Richard Greenfield presented a report which stated that some two million men and women were in prison at the height of the terror campaign.¹⁵ But we agree with J.C. Guillebaud, who reported that the figure of 80,000 to 100,000 prisoners "would probably fall short of

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the real figure".¹⁶ We estimate that during the height of the terror campaign, in the various prisons and detention centres throughout the country, there were no less than 250,000 prisoners. A fraction of these were released and there are presently no more than an estimated number of 30,000 political prisoners. Where did the others go?

According to our calculations, close to 150,000 Ethiopians were murdered by the "Red Terror".

The total number of people killed by the government from the time the Derg assumed power up to the winding down of the "red terror" in early 1979 is no less than 250,000.

This figure is actually a conservative estimate which we are sure would be proven to be far below the actual figure when the possibility of arriving at the total figure becomes a reality. A number of Ethiopians the author has talked to declare that the 250,000 figure applies only to the "Red Terror" without including the repression and the toll before that. Our estimate does not include the deaths in the rural areas which were connected with insurgent wars.

The figure we have forwarded concerns only those who died as the government moved to destroy the EPRP and the mainly urban and town-concentrated protest against military rule. In Addis Abeba and other towns, there is practically no family which has not been touched by the terror. To be sure, thousands of the above could be designated as the "disappeared" but there is no doubt whatsoever that they are all dead. Such repressions have taken place elsewhere (Argentina, Uruguay, Chile, etc.) but these pale when compared with the Derg's terror; the Derg attacks Pinochet of Chile as fascist but by comparison the murderers in Santiago emerge as "liberals".

In the final analysis, as stated before, how many died precisely is not by itself such a weighty question. A generation of the country's young perished in one way or another; millions were traumatised by fear and terror. The nation as a whole bled and the giant steps taken during the historic February Revolution were not only stopped but

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reversed. The terror of the Derg destroyed the revolution Ethiopians had yearned for. What wobbles now on the scene is actually a demagogic caricature which resembles more the murderous regimes of old and has become even worse than them. The terror has left the Derg clinging to the power it coveted so much, but in the process it has eroded the ground under it so much that it will have no peace, no popular backing and none of the stability it had sought through the sword. The cycle of violence continues and perhaps when we ask how many we should actually include all those who are continuing to die even after the terror officially ended and the killings continued.

3

Let the Victims Speak

*"Let he who was present at the event speak,
Let he who was present at the funeral break the news
to the relatives".
translation of an Ethiopian proverb*

The grisly details of the "Red Terror" are difficult to apprehend unless one leaves the plane of detached and dry comments and gets into the heart of the matter. And who can present it better than the ones who saw it, who suffered under it and who still maintain nightmarish memories of it?

We present below some of the testimonies and reports which we were able to gather as part of the overall research for this book. Some of the testimonies have been abridged; in some cases, for obvious reasons, names have been left blank or referred to by initials only. The stories we present are not necessarily the most horrible ones, but they are illustrative of the terror and will help the reader to grasp what the Ethiopian regime meant when it said "to make revolution, we have to kill".

Debre Marcos (Gojjam region)

"I was arrested in September 1977; police and kebele guards came for me based on a tip they had received from an informer who used to be a Meisone member.

They took me to the central police jail in Debre Marcos. In the cell I was thrown into there were 41 other prisoners who were all, with exception of two accused of theft, charged with being EPRP members. The cell was

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small and crowded, but the most terrible part was the smell. It smelt of urine, of unwashed bodies, and there was a sickening stench which I was to find out later came from the rotting flesh of the torture victims. Six of the prisoners (Shitahun, Melake, Estifanos, Gebre Meskel, Tadesse Ayalew and Sergo Muhe) were paralysed from the waist down as the result of the torture and they either crawled or were carried by others when they wanted to urinate. There was another prisoner who had gone insane and either cried or laughed suddenly and loudly and urinated on his hands.

They called me out in the evening and took me to a room which evidently was the torture chamber. The interrogators / torturers were five; without asking me a single question one of them just kicked and punched me. They then tied my hands behind my back with my elbows fastened together and they suspended me from the roof with my feet dangling above the floor. One of them turned me around like a fan or a propeller.

You have been denounced as an anarchist, one of them said. Are you ready to confess and denounce your accomplices?

I denied ever having been an EPRP member or sympathiser. As if they had been expecting and even hoping for such a reply they hastened to pull down my trouser and underwear. I was flogged on my naked buttocks by two of them - one was using a thorny lebek (stick) while the other had a short thick whip. When they stopped and pulled down the rope I fell sprawling and screaming to the floor. They then untied my hands, pulled off my shirt and tied my hands again. Forcing me to lie on the floor on my stomach, they beat me on my naked back and buttocks. I wished I could faint or die but this was not to be. After a while they started to light with matches pieces of papers which they threw on my bleeding back and buttocks. I could not move since they pinned me down with their hands and boots to the ground and when my screams got too loud they stuffed a dirty cloth into my mouth. I finally fainted and when I woke up in my cell I was covered with blood and vomit.

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I was tortured five times in two weeks; I think each torture session lasted some two hours. While in the police jail, I saw scores of prisoners being called out at night and none of them ever returned. The six paralysed ones I mentioned were killed one night like this. Later, I was taken to the central prison where there were more than 1,400 prisoners at the time. In October 1977, in December 1977, and in June and August 1978, numerous batches of prisoners, at no time less than 25, were taken out and killed. Once in December 1977, a prisoner who refused to come out of his cell when his name was called at night was strangled and killed by the guards right there in the cell and they whisked his body away. I have now forgotten the name of this person but he was a young student arrested in early 1977.

I was never charged or brought to trial; I expected to be called one night and to die. But I survived. Four years later on September 1981, I was released."

Gondar

"I was arrested by special commando soldiers in Gondar city in December 1977. The informer was a 'banda' who had joined Seded.

They took me directly to the Gondar Palace where I was tortured twice in two days. The tortures included of beating the soles of the feet with tough whips, hanging head downwards from the ceilings and turning the body like a fan, beating the joints with a thick wooden club and applying a red hot iron to the nipples, the thighs, the forearms and the palms. After this, they took me to the Baata prison.

In the section of this prison reserved for political prisoners, there is one big door leading to several numbered narrow cells. The cell I was in could not take more than five people at the most but we were thirteen of us in it. Two were accused of being EDU members, there was another young man who had been arrested for shedding

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tears when he saw the corpse of his brother on the street - this one was later taken out and shot. Another, Takele Assefa by name, was an employee at the Telecommunications Department and he didn't know what he had been accused of though they had already tortured him. On the day I arrived, he was taken out and tortured for long hours; after they brought him back he went into a deep sleep and we discovered in the morning that he had died.

One of the other prisoners was a radio vendor who was accused of being an EPRP member. But he told me he was arrested because one member of the special Commando suspected him of sleeping with his mistress. However, the soldier tightened the case against the radio vendor by bringing an eight year old boy to testify that the radio vendor used to 'tear government newspaper as junk'. The small boy, a newspaper vendor, had himself been tortured and this was the price for his promised 'release'. Anyway, the radio vendor was tortured many times and died from this one day. I remember one time when they brought him back bleeding all over his body - the torturers laughed and one of them pointing at the blood flowing from the victim's nostrils told us: 'if any of you want whisky, drink his blood - it's pure whisky!' Another prisoner, a boy, was there because his mother had quarrelled with a prostitute and the latter, who had a kebele official as a lover, had taken revenge by having him arrested as an anarchist.

Many of us were unable to walk because our feet were wounded. I and a few others could not use our hands to eat because our palms were burnt. We tried to help one another, amidst the prisoners there was solidarity. Each night our number decreased as they took some for execution and each morning it increased again with new arrivals. The smell of rotting flesh was terrible. The worst time was at night when you waited anxiously for the executioners to come. If we heard a car's motor or if the chain outside the door of our cell creaked (sometimes due to the wind) we would all sit up and wait anxiously. We hated the night more than the tortures...

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I can tell you of Hailu Asfaw who was brutally tortured and killed. He was arrested mainly because he lived in the same compound with a suspect who had disappeared when the soldiers came to arrest him. This was Melaku Tsegaye who was to be caught later and killed. Anyway, unable to find Melaku they took Hailu. He was tortured several times, the toes of his feet were stripped clean of flesh and the bones were to be seen. He was rotting alive and died from his unattended wounds. In June 1977, they took his corpse out, riddled it with bullets and threw it on the street. I also knew Hassanu and Idris Ibrahim, Iyayu Birhanu and Aminu Ibrahim. They were all tortured horribly. They executed them one night and threw their bodies in the city - Idris and Iyayu were thrown near Aba Samuel (Gondar-Azezo) while Hassan and Aminu's bodies were thrown outside their family house near the market place. Later on, I heard that their six year old brother was shot because he was found by the soldiers crying near the corpses of his brothers.

How many were killed? It is difficult to say but I can say that there was no night during which few prisoners were not taken out and shot."

Wollo

"IN KOREM, DESSIE, Kombolcha, etc., many suffered, many died. I can tell you the case of Asseged Ashagre who was a teacher in an elementary school. In February 1977, he was arrested with Moges Belaye, Gashaw Beza Mekuria and scores of other teachers and students. All were accused of being EPRP members and tortured brutally but none of them confessed. Moges, Wendaya Teka, Gashaw and scores of others were taken out to the Shoa Robit desert and buried in a mass grave after being shot. This happened on March 9, 1977.

Asseged was jailed for six months and released. In May 1978, the terror squads came again to arrest him and deciding to evade the previous horrible experience of

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torture he drank malatine (insecticide) to commit suicide. But the soldiers forced him to drink yogurt, made him vomit what he had drunk and they took him to the Dessie hospital. When he recovered he was taken to the police station and tortured for several days with little rest between the sessions. He was then executed and his body was thrown on one of the streets of Dessie in May 1978.

One of the corpses thrown along with that of Ashagre belonged to Hailu Gebru, a student who suffered almost all the torture methods in the arsenal of the torturers. Hailu in effect died to help twelve other youngsters who were in the same cell with him. The boys, none of them above sixteen, were extremely terrorised by the prison condition and the tortures. Hailu told them to denounce him as their recruiter and he also told the torturers that he had tried 'to use' the boys who 'actually know nothing and did nothing'. The boys were left alone and Hailu was tortured for fifteen days before his almost lifeless body was shot and thrown on the street. As is to be expected, four of the boys were also killed later on while the eight others survived and were in prison as far as I knew.

I know of also Almaz Tadesse who was arrested in Woldiya in November 1978 along with my _____. In jail, Almaz was subjected to brutal tortures, knives and bottles were used on her sexual organ and her breasts were chopped off. She would have died of her wounds but they took her out one night along with Kassetch Berhe (a female teacher), Teshager Ayalew, Yimer Kebede and ten other prisoners and shot them all. Of course, their bodies were thrown on the streets for exhibition. In the town of Woldiya, I have personally witnessed in 1978 (November 22, March 17, and December 20) the 'red terror' - I have counted 49 mutilated bodies thrown on the streets.

Aweke Asmamaw (who worked in a firm), Desta Si-saye (a student), Kebede (a teacher) and fourteen other students were taken out of Alemata jail in August 1978, transported to a forested area, made to dig their own graves and shot dead and buried. The number of people who

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disappeared in this manner from the prisons of Wollo is indeed too big.”

Addis Abeba

“I was arrested on January 19, 1978. This was the second time for me - I was first rounded up in November 1977 and released after two weeks. The second time I was arrested at home by kebele guards and cadres acting according to a tip by an informer (tequami). After my first brief stay in jail, I never went to the movies since when you came out there would be armed guards and hooded informers who pointed at people and got many arrested.

I was detained at the prison of kebele 43 and then transferred to the bigger prison of Keftegna 3. In the kebele jail we were around 145 while in the Keftegna one we were no less than 500. Almost all the prisoners were accused of being EPRP members while a few were caught during armed operations. None of the latter survived. The interrogation was haphazard but the torture was constant. After torturing me, they asked me to admit I was a member of EPRP's urban armed squad but I refused to sign my own death warrant. Both in the kebele and keftegna prisons, I was tortured. The following types of tortures were employed on me directly or on my cell-mates:

- *wofe illala* (fellaga) - electric shocks to various parts of the body;
- hammering nails into fingers
- flogging the naked back and pouring urine or urinating on the wound
- using knives / bayonets to cut parts of the body
- burning with benzene-soaked cloth and pieces of papers

I had heard of a torture method which involved a hot clothes-iron which is pressed on the back, but I was not

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subjected to it. There were prisoners with ruined sexual organs, amputated feet and hands... During my stay, each night names were called and prisoners were taken out and shot... In the Keftegna prisons, there were the so-called 'Red Terror Committees', made up of the same officials and cadres who supervise the whole repression. The committees periodically sign the death sentences of batches of prisoners though some had already been executed previously. The conditions of the tortured prisoners was by itself enough torture for the new arrivals; the nocturnal anxiety was also debilitating. I remember one prisoner, whose wife was also under arrest, was often taunted by the guards in front of all of us: 'Your wife has a nice _____. It's a shame you wanted to enjoy it alone!' At other times, they told him: 'Don't worry. When we shoot you we will make sure she would be right beside you embracing you.' The husband and wife were both killed later on.

I knew of also another similar case though it did not end with death. The man used to work in the union of the Ethiopian Air Lines. After they arrested him, they also brought to the jail his wife and six year old son. The lieutenant raped the woman and she became pregnant. The boy was taught by the soldiers to shout slogans against the EPRP and brought in front of his father to shout these same slogans. Three months later, the unfortunate man was brought face to face with his pregnant wife while the lieutenant hovered and gloated. The man was crushed by this sight more than by the torture he had had to endure for so long. I later heard he was released though I didn't know what happened between him and his wife after that.

I also know of Atsede Woyin, the young girl student from the Empress Menen School who was brutally tortured and was made unable to eat solid food as a result of the torture. She died of unattended wounds and starvation but they still shot her corpse and threw it in her district in October 1977. Gebre Tsadikan Haile, who worked in the Tigray Agricultural Development Unit (TADU) was arrested in Makalle and tortured. They were unable to make

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him confess (EPRP membership) and then they sent him to the Addis Abeba Security Department. Here again he was tortured for days on end and he died under torture.

Many of my cell-mates ended up on the streets, liquidated. I was sent to Alem Bekagne and released on September 1983. I was never charged or sentenced formally."

Shoa

"I will write to you what I saw in prison with my own eyes. The first story involves mainly Tariku, a militant who had come from Addis Abeba to Chira Meda which is found in the district of Mafud in the province of Yifat and Timuga. The day they arrested him and brought him to the interrogation centre of Shoa Robit prison, they started beating him the wofe illala. This was the first day and like all of us, his feet were bleeding.

The next day he was again subjected to the beating and asked about his 'accomplices and contacts'. He told them that one of his contacts was still around and he would show them. Since lunch hour was approaching the torturers ordered the police to take him back to the cell and left for their homes. Tariku was now very weak and bleeding from various spots. Unable to walk back straight to his cell, he fell down. One of the policeman, who was called Gebre Igziabher and carried a two headed whip, struck Tariku on the head and the edge of one whip struck one of his eyes. Tariku's eye was pierced and 'poured out', he screamed in agony as they carried him and threw him into our cell. They wanted to take him out in the evening but he was almost dead - one eye swollen, one blinded, his feet torn and bleeding, his back and face swollen.

In the morning they came for him. The head of the interrogators was Lieutenant Solomon, who was said to be a member of the Derg. Tariku seemed to be in a delirium. 'You will show us your friends,' they said to him as they picked him up and took him in a Peugeot car. We heard

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later that Tariku had fingered one and told them that 'he was dangerous'. So they left Tariku with the newly arrested and the chauffeur of the car as they went to trap the other 'dangerous one'. Somehow Tariku and the other one managed to take the pistol of the chauffeur, to wound him on the thigh, and to escape; the other one carried Tariku on his back as we came to know later.

The security men came back and without telling us that Tariku had escaped they vowed to 'intensify the red terror' on us. Some thought that Tariku had been killed while others suspected he may have escaped or committed suicide by jumping from the moving car. A few days later, the Derg's tugs got a windfall - Getaneh Beza, one of the most wanted militants in the area was captured in a shootout which ensued as a result of his attempt to escape.

As Getaneh was brought to the Shoa Robi interrogation centre, one of the interrogators / torturers, a huge man called Nigussie, again kicked Getaneh on the mouth with his heavy boots; Getaneh's mouth was filled with blood and some of his teeth got broken. 'If you want blood, take this,' said Getaneh and spat blood on Nigussie's trouser. Nigussie kicked him more and then went to change his clothes. When he came back he tied Getaneh up and beat him the wofe illala. When they threw him again on the floor, Getaneh continued to curse them and again Nigussie slammed him against the cement floor. By now Getaneh was bloodied all over and his bruised and battered face was quite unrecognizable. His hands and legs were so mutilated that we could see the bones sticking out - still they tied his hands with the chain (which we called 'Asmara catena').

At night in the cell, Getaneh was in a delirium and constantly begging for water. In the morning, they came again. As usual, they get the cell door opened and came in only after some five or so minutes so as not to be affected by the stench of the cell. After another day of torture, he promised to take them to his cave hideout. Since he was unable to walk they had to carry him there and they found

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some dried meat, a broken UZI machine gun and some red pepper. They brought him back in anger and submerged him in a barrel filled with dirty water and alternated this drowning treatment with brutal beatings.

At night in the cell, Getaneh asked us to kill him but this was not possible as everyone was afraid that someone may reveal who did it when tortured. One prisoner told him the problem and advised him to kill himself. There were also spies and stool pigeons amidst us. Getaneh asked one prisoner to help him stand against the wall - he then brought the big bolts of the chain near his nose and he fell against the cement floor. It was a terrible sight. He did it again and the cell was splattered by his blood and we saw him die like this. In the morning when the torturers came, they found a dead Getaneh and a quiet cell full of prisoners. The prisoners were ordered to clean the cell, and they took Getaneh's body to Chira Meda and after sprinkling on him what we later came to know was the blood of a goat, they shot his corpse and threw it on the road.

Tariku was also recaptured some days later and subsequently shot. In the Shoa Robi prison there were many such cases. I don't exactly know how many people were executed but I can swear that the killers were always busy and they had enough victims."

Addis Abeba

"I am sixty years old and I have seen horrible things but none can compare with the red terror. You ask me what I witnessed? I could tell you about my son who was a teacher in _____ and who was killed but I never got to see his corpse. I saw my sister's 15 year old daughter shot during a demonstration in our kebele. But I know of many cases. In the Shola area, near the Kelemework school, I have seen no less than a hundred corpses thrown on the street during the red terror period. It was horrible and I stopped going to see the relatives who lived in that area.

What about my neighbours, the family of Z—? Z's daughter lost all her sons to the red terror. Her son Elias

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was tortured for six months, blinded by torture and then taken to Sebata along with others and shot and thrown in a mass grave. Her other son, Birhan, was tortured for two months (he was put in boiling oil) and then shot and thrown on the street right here in our kebele along with other ten boys I didn't know. On the day the notorious kebele official, the woman Yeshewalul and her deputy (Biruk) were killed, the kebelles murdered a lot of youngsters in our area and her third son was shot and dragged along the street by a car. That day, I was praying in the church with her mother and we saw this corpse being dragged by the car from afar. We cried for the unknown victim - little did the woman with me know that the corpse belonged to her grandson.

Ijigayehu and Wossene were two daughters of a woman who worked as a cleaning lady in the Water Authority building. Ijigayehu was arrested and tortured so brutally that the whole kebele was praying for her quick death. After torturing her for twelve days, they killed her and threw her corpse on the crossroad which had come to be known as kera (the abattoir) by the dwellers of kebele _____. I forgot the name of another woman who lived in our kebele and had two sons - one was a student and the other a civil servant. One night the squads came to look for the student but he had disappeared; instead they started to beat the civil servant and to tie him up to take him. The enraged mother struck at one squad member with a bottle. They shot both the mother and the son right there on the spot and they robbed the whole house including the clothes of the male victim.

The kebele guards also used to phone to houses pretending to be friends of suspects. Once they tricked a mother like this and she told them that her son was at home. They came, pulled him out of the house and shot him at the door. The mother came out screaming and they shot her on the thigh. In one house they shot two boys and released the dog and made it lick their blood - all this right in front of the mother. The mother fell on her knees begging them to

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leave her the corpses but they refused and took them. 'Give birth to new sons who would be nurtured by the revolution,' they scoffed at her. The woman went crazy and she used to sit day in and day out at the spot where the corpses of her sons were thrown for display. When we were ordered to prepare rations for the militia they picked her up but she refused and her arm was broken by one guard. Still, she was brought to the kebele hall where we were preparing the rations and she was made to work.

Tigist, the daughter of _____, was arrested by a kebele guard who had tried to marry her and had been rejected. Her area was near _____sefer, close to the piazza. Tigist was tortured brutally with red hot iron shoved up her private part and guards stomping and jumping on her stomach 'to check if you are carrying some unborn anarchist'. She died under torture and was thrown for display in the usual place near the Kelemework school. At Nifas Silk, an ex-lieutenant who was hunting the children of others came home in the evening to find his six children machine gunned by other squads. You know at that time squads used to visit areas other than their kebelles to help weak kebelles or to show solidarity - so they didn't know that the father was a killer like them.

One old man refused to pay the bullet price to take the corpses of his three sons from the Menilik hospital. 'Eat them if you want,' he said in anger. He was lucky to escape with beatings and only one year imprisonment. 'You think bullets are free? What about the petrol for the ambulances?' - this what they used to say to us when we went to collect corpses. After a while, everyone stopped going to pick up the corpses or to pay.

In all the kebelles the same story repeats. Every Sunday, we meet in the church and pray for deliverance. No family has been spared. The killers are still with us, we see them every day. They know we hate them and we are all awaiting the day of judgment. If you want the full story you have to talk to all the families for each family hides in its bosom so much sorrow, so much pain."

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Addis Abeba

"I was arrested and taken to the Military Police HQ which is near the former princess Tsehai hospital. This prison is as worse [sic] as the security jail in the Third police station and comparable in its brutality to the Maichew Military camp (the big prison near Janhoy Meda - the cells are built above the sewage system).

There is a three metre high wall around the prison and in front of the wall there is a ditch dug by the prisoners themselves - thus escape is quite difficult. Inside, the cells are 1.5 metres by 2 metres and are used for solitary confinement; the window high up on the wall opens towards the corridor. The floor is of cement and cold. The prison is silent and the silence is eerie and oppressive.

When we arrived at the prison, they made us take off our shoes and we handed over all our belongings and then they made us fill a form specifying the names and addresses of relatives to be notified to take our 'bodies'. After this, they lined us up near the ditch, cocked their rifles and 'pulled the trigger'. The mock execution practically killed us.

In our eerily silent cells, we pass the day and night not knowing which is which as an electric bulb burns all the time and the windows open to the inside of the prison. Interrogation goes with torture. After beating you on the soles of the feet they make you jump on a chair made of tough ropes and this is even more painful on the soles of your feet. Their speciality is crushing the testicles by savage kicks and by applying pressure from an instrument / contraption made for this purpose. 'We will kill you and no one will know' they tell you as they torture you. The torturers are 'punctual' - when their lunch hour arrives they would stop and leave - leaving you suspended from the roof till they get back in the afternoon. The usual tortures to which I was subjected were the flogging, electric shocks, pulling the pubic hair with pincers, beating the skull with a sharp edged ruler, etc. There were others

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whose fingers were chopped off slowly and still others who were fed human excrement and forced to drink human blood.

Every Friday, it was execution time. It was terrible to wait at night, afraid that the footstep might stop at your cell door... Of the prisoners I came with only two of us survived - I never saw the others and I presume they were killed."

Nazareth (Shoa)

"I was caught in October 1977. They took me from my house at around 2 a.m. in the morning. Sisaye Wolde Yohannes (who is now a sergeant and somewhere in Eritrea) and Bizuneh Indaylalu, who were at the time known as 'Meisone members' who had rallied to Seded, led the squad which arrested me and also searched my house.

In prison, I met Meharnet Mebratu - in his house a copy of *Democracia* had been found. I was asked repeatedly if I had any 'organizational' contact with Meharnet but I denied ever having any. The interrogators and torturers I remember are Tesfaye Mengistu (chairman of the Wonji 'Revolutionary Defense Committee'), Yonas Arero, a cadre, and Abate Tessema, a Meisone member. One night, they called Meharnet out and he has not been seen since. There was another prisoner called Mulugeta who also disappeared in the same manner. I was kept for a month and released, but I cannot say I was tortured as brutally as Teshome (a worker from the Wonji Sweets factory) and Solomon (an electrician in the Wonji Sugar factory) who were subjected to cruel punishments of all kinds. Among the worst torturers I remember Milikiso Anjelo who was a Woz League member and who was so notorious for his cruelty that the other killer of the Akaki workers, Tamyalew Eshete (now in the CC of the WPE), used to call on him for help. Milikiso and Tamyalew have killed between them far too many workers.

In February 1978 alone, I have seen in Nazareth (outside the Atse Gelawdios School, near the Gimb market

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and the St. Mary church) the corpses of some 21 teachers, students and other people I didn't know but who were alleged to be EPRP members. From Wonji, many people were arrested and have since disappeared without a trace."

Hararghe and Addis Abeba

"Before writing about my own experience, I think it would be useful to write about what I know, about those arrested and tortured and killed. In September 1977, in Harar, Negash Mussa, a teacher and director of the Medhane Alem School, was arrested and tortured so brutally that his feet were ruined and bleeding and his urine was also tainted by blood. In November of the same year 27 prisoners were taken to Erer (on the way from Harar to Jijiga), summarily shot and buried. Of these 27, I remember Alemayehu, a history teacher who also edited *Tenes / Arise* (the organ of the Harar Teachers' Union), Kifle (a math teacher), Zewdi (a female student in the Medhanealem school), Bashenkur (another female student), Asheber Hailu (a university student from Addis), and Solomon and Yeshitla who were both students.

Girma, who was nicknamed London, was executed and his body dragged by a car and displayed as that of a 'Somali infiltrator'. In Harar again, when squads came to arrest one youngster called Tiumelisane, he resisted, killed two and was himself also killed. When his mother came back from the market she was kidnapped by the squad members and has disappeared.

In prison, I have met many others who had been tortured in the jails of Asbe Tefferi. They say since one EPRP member was beaten seven times before he admitted being a member, the torturers believe in prolonged beatings called 'sevens'. They tie you up in what is known as number 8 or 6 and beat you for long hours till your feet bleed and the bones get exposed. After executing a prisoner they also liked to tie the corpse to a car and drag it around the town: such was the case with Sultan's corpse.

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In late 1976, Major Getachew Shibeshi, member of the Derg, spearheaded the killings in this town. Workers from the Cotton factory were executed en masse. The members of the Gelemso Peasant Association, some students and civil servants and the administrator of the province (an ex-Air Force lieutenant) were rounded up by Major Getachew and executed en masse in the forest between Gelemso and Bedessa. At the same time, some 30 students rounded up in Asbe Tefferi were taken to Meiso and executed.

I myself was arrested in Addis Abeba and detained in Kebelle 10 (Kefteгна 2) near the Cinema Empire. At first I was subjected to flogging and beating. My torturers were Masresha Kebede, Firew (a former pickpocket), Tadesse (a security agent), Tsegaye (a kebele guard and a chauffeur in the Sports Federation) and one called Feleke who was a cadre of Kefteгна 20. In this kebele, of the corpses I have seen I knew that of Alemayehu, Samuel and Girma Tafesse (who were killed at different times for the same 'crime' - the killing of one kebele leader called Tamrat).

In the kebele prison the various tortures were: the number 8 hanging and flogging, submerging in a pail of water while flogging, flogging the back and then burning newspaper on it, burning the hair and mixing the ash with your own blood and force feeding you this, putting out cigarettes on the tongue, forcing the prisoner to swallow the torturers' sputum, forcing the prisoner to insert a finger into his anus and to put the same finger in his mouth, stepping on the wounds on the back and feet and pressing the back with an electric iron.

In November 1977, one university student was taken out, shot and displayed on Tewodros Avenue. One alcoholic youngster who denounced five of his friends in order to escape from additional torture was taken out with the five, shot, and the six corpses were displayed at the place commonly known as 'Somali tera'. Eight young boys were also brought to Kefteгна 21, shot and thrown near the Ras Makonen Bridge. In our kebele prison there was a 14 year old girl who used to bring food to one of her relatives who

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was arrested with us. One day, she was also arrested as one of the guards had taken an interest in her. This guard, who was called Tadesse, raped her and when he found out she had become pregnant, killed her. Later, when Tadesse was arrested for other crimes this was also added to the list but he got only a few years in prison as punishment.

The kebele chiefs and guards raped, killed and robbed. For example, the chairman of Kebele 11, one called Haj Badru, and Tereffe from Kebele 09 and Aweke from Kebele 13 were notorious in this respect. They used to arrest people and extort money from the relatives. They robbed money and killed the owners - this was the fate of the owner of the Netsanet Goh Bar in the Market area. Tereffe, the chairman of Kebele 09, took the wife of the owner of the Girar Hotel as his mistress and then killed the husband. I know a butter merchant, G—, who had to pay 15 thousand Birr to escape possible execution as an 'anarchist'.

Killing numerous people for one 'crime' was also in evidence. As I mentioned three people were killed for 'having killed' the kebele chairman called Tamrat. In January 1978 a mass meeting was called at the kebele and a young man called Kerware was exposed as the killer of Tamrat. A kebele guard shot Kerware on the spot right in front of the people who were then ordered to sing the usual song about the joy of seeing anarchists dying. A week later, another meeting was called and this time a resident of the kebele, Gebremedhin Shumye was exposed as 'the killer' of Tamrat. This time the people dared to protest. 'Did they queue up to shoot Tamrat or what?' was what many said. Gebremedhin was thus spared and spent three years in Alem Bekagne prison before being released.

Haj Badru was responsible for the killing of the many people whose corpses were thrown near the Habte Giorgis bridge. In January 1978, for example, one prisoner escaped and the enraged Badru took out eight new prisoners and executed them - their corpses were thrown at the Habte

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Giorgis bridge. Betre, the chief of kebele 17, was also another notorious killer and torturer who specialised in burning prisoners and force feeding prisoners their own rotting or blood-soaked flesh. I have also been told that he burnt the penis and anus of prisoners with lighter fire. In the political school the Meisone and other cadres liked to fill the bathtub with boiling oil and water so as to submerge prisoners in this.

In June 1978, a special committee made the rounds of the various prisons and detention centres and after picking up all those who were accused of being members of the EPRP Defense Squads they took them to the Derg HQ where they were interrogated and tortured and many of them shot.

I spent six years in prison - I was never formally charged or sentenced."

*Addis Abeba*¹⁷

"On Sunday morning at around 3 a.m. I experienced a bit of a rude personal awakening to be introduced to the unpalatable facts of the red terror. All three doors to our house were being banged as the insult-hurling terror squads attempted to break in. My immediate reaction was to jump out of my bedroom window and to hide in the farthest and narrowest corner of the corridor which was found between the window of our house and the foundation. Unfortunately, in my haste I had forgotten to shut back the wooden shutters.

From where I was hiding I could hear the intruders shouting, insulting and I made out two female voices (no doubt informers) who were directing the goons to 'check the walls for panels', 'tear the roof', 'break the picture frames', 'check the mattress', etc. They were tearing the place apart. I heard them hurl questions at —, the old woman in whose house I had been hiding for quite some time now. Where are your children? Where are you hiding them? - they were harassing her and threatening to shoot

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her on the spot. All of a sudden, I saw the light from my window come on. Before I finished asking myself the question, I got the answer: I had forgotten to shut the wooden shutters from the outside. I heard a panicky voice say 'they have escaped through this window! They must be hiding, be careful.' They opened all the back windows and it was absolutely dark where I was since all the lights in the rooms were on. One of them used our own weak flashlight (I think) to search for the 'hidden ones' - I held my breath and stood motionless with my back firmly pressed to the wall and my face turned away.

'Come out, you have been seen!' he shouted. We must have seen the same movie, I was to think later on. I did not budge and he went back into the room. At this point, I thought of checking the identity of the intruders and the informers; I was sure I would not be seen. So, I inched my way to the closest window (my bedroom) and peeked in - there was only one guy busy stuffing in his pockets my cassette tapes and underwears. So I decided to move to the middle window and the wooden venetian blinds type of window shutters helped me to get a better view. The window led to a combined living room and dining room which were separated by curtains but which we, however, used as bedrooms.

I saw a lot of people, armed people milling in and out of the room. There were two unarmed girls, their faces hidden by the 'Gabbi' cloth they were wearing. They were the informers - *tequamiwoch* as we called them. Radios, clothes, household utensils, etc., were being carried out by the armed thugs. The old woman was busy arguing with a guard who was trying to take her special golden necklace. He took it and, holding her braided hair brutally, he also took her matching earrings. After a while many of the leading cadres left the place ordering their juniors to search the place thoroughly.

All of a sudden, I heard a voice and at the same time saw a silhouette of a man on the back wall of the house in front of the window. It was very close to me and he was stepping on the bed. I dashed to hide near or under a

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galvanized tin roofing and some broken clay pots nearby - in fact an arm's reach from the window.

'I am still suspicious of this open window,' I heard him say. 'Somebody give me a match'. I heard him crumble some papers and scratch the match and light the paper.

The two of us were locked eyeball to eyeball, he blinked and so did I. I was numb with shock. I could see he was scared but he regained his composure fast enough to grab me by the hair. And there I was under the clutches of the red terror!

He made a noise and others rushed over; he pulled me by the hair halfway through the window. As if from afar I heard someone say, 'be careful, the bitch may be armed!' Dragged in, I was slapped, punched, spat upon and thrown on the floor. Some cocked their pistols as if to shoot me.

'Are you —?' one of them asked holding up my ID which I had left near my bed. 'Yes, I am,' I cried. The ID identified me as a maid. Tears were rolling down my cheeks. 'The priest next door told me to be careful of anarchists who come in the night disguised as policemen. That's why I hid myself,' I blurted out.

'Where are the anarchist girls who used to live here?' one of them asked. "One false reply and I will bash your head in!"

'She went to church wearing her new dress early in the morning. She left by the Total gas station road,' I replied. And without giving them a chance to ask more questions, I flooded them with pleadings calling the various saints, the God of all males, the mother of Christ, etc. But they seemed not to be interested in me and they repeated the question about the girls, accompanying each query with a slap or a kick. I gave the same reply. They pulled me up and moved me from room to room to show them the 'hiding places'.

The most prominent features of S—'s face were his large eyes which were now popping out of their sockets as I was hurled into the next room. S— was standing naked near his upturned bed and his whole body was shaking. A

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year and a half ago, he had seen this same house being ransacked and his father being taken away handcuffed. S— was six and a half years old. The room was a mess, pillows and mattresses were torn apart. One of the searchers was emptying the book shelf shouting at the same time 'no wonder there are no books in town! The anarchists have hidden them here.' Another was standing on top of the bookshelf and shearing open with a knife the canvas of the roof expecting a gun or some hidden document to fall on him. 'Show us where!' they shouted at me. I raised my voice and pleaded: 'I have never left the kitchen, please don't kill me,' etc. My captors were becoming irritated.

They slapped me some more and shoved me back into the living room where I saw the 'big boys' sitting on the sofas. The telephone, I could see, had been disconnected. The door of the living room was burst open from the verandah at the same time and in came the Chairman of the Revolutionary Guard, Kaftegn 2, Kebelle 10 and vice commander officer in the Airborne, who lunged straight at me grabbing my throat with one hand and my hair with another. He literally picked me up and carried me into the room I had been viewing from the outside.

'You ——! We are going to intensify the red terror on you just like your bitch friend over there,' he cursed.

I looked towards the corner and saw the old woman cradling on her lap on the floor the foam-spewing, twisted body of M—. The old woman knew that M— did not have a heart attack as the goons were thinking; I also knew that M— had swallowed the cyanide pill she kept in the leather bound traditional pouch hanging from her neck. The old woman moaned softly chanting a lament, and as I watched, M— shuddered and became still, dying thus like countless others who were her comrades.

M—, I should say, was a committed militant. During her university days she was actively involved and supported the student movement, though at the time not many university girls did. During the February Revolution, she was involved in the task of organizing secret cells amongst

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women workers and after the Derg assumed power she continued in this same mission. Her opposition to the military regime was total and her own personal experiences added to her hatred and consciousness. The first time I met M— at a friend's house she was in the underground (hiding) and she was there together with her fourteen year old sister. Her young sister had been arrested during a demonstration in September 1976 and had been raped by a prison guard. When I saw her with M—, the young girl was already four months pregnant and pestering her older sister to 'do something'. Their mother had gone to Harar for medication and was stranded there by the Ogaden war while their brother had been jailed as an 'anarchist'. M— surely had reasons enough to hate the military regime and what it stood for. Seeing my friend die like this as the goons gloated over her wrenched my heart. My captor dragged me outside of the room.

Hurling foul insults at me and all my kin, he dragged me outside the house through a debris and garbage filled alley. Shredded glass tore at my soles and every now and then the beast stopped to beat me up and stomp on my stomach. He also stepped on my throat and threatened to kill me; I was bleeding, in pain and almost on the verge of losing consciousness. After a hundred metres or so we reached the asphalt road where the red terror volkswagon (license plate 95022 AA) was parked with the commander of the search party at the wheel. The commander got down, opened the back of the van and handed to his deputy an aqua-coloured red terror poster and some big nails. I fell on my knees and begged repeating my litany about being a poor and ignorant maid and how she, the one they want, had gone via the Total gas station road. The deputy dragged me across the street to a grassy patch and after punching me down he loaded his kalashnikov. I thought this was the end and almost thought of hurling defiant insults at him. But somehow I held back and repeated my litany - the banal words were going to be my last. After what I thought was a very long time but was in fact not more

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than a minute, he stomped on my stomach again and told me to get up. That stomp did not hurt at all.

He dragged me into a dimly lit side street and I suspected he had rape on his mind - but I was mistaken. After a few minutes walk we were stopped by rifle-cocking people shouting 'who goes there?'. My tormentor told them the password and we were allowed to proceed. He took me to a nearby large compound with a high stone wall fence with broken glass and bottles generously cemented on top. The building, I knew, was a private social club of an association formed by one ethnic group. There were lots of armed men both inside and outside the compound. A group of them escorted us into the brightly lit, big hall.

As we entered the big hall all eyes - more than three hundred pairs - were turned towards us. A man with a whip flogged the young people crouching on the crowded concrete floor so as to make way for us to pass to the two oblong tables where the members of the Red Terror Coordinating Committee (RTCC) were seated. There was a few square metres space which was relatively less crowded - and I saw there was a reason for that. As I approached, I saw a young man called Solomon, whom I knew and who used to be an elected secretary in one kebele in the area, being tortured. He was suspended and being flogged - the torturer stopped beating him when he saw me, a new victim. One of my escorts tripped me deliberately and I fell near the torturer and he raised his spiked military boots and brought them down on my fingers as if he was warming up for a parade of some sorts. Someone handed the chairman of the RTCC my ID card and before he even called my name I went into my 'innocent maid and she went by the Total road' bit. 'Oh, I am going to faint,' I said and swooned. The visibly tired chairman waved his hand in disgust as if saying 'get rid of this stupid maid' and I was thrown on the floor where I assumed the fetal position and started to moan softly.

When I opened my eyes, I saw from where I was lying the familiar dress and face of Woizero Tsigie, the 55 year

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old militant who was so popular among the people in the area that she had been repeatedly elected vice chairperson of a kebele. She knew me and since we had held several clandestine meetings in her house she knew about our activities. And there she was looking sadly at me, feeling sorry for me, as if she was not in the same predicament. Later on, I found out that she had been tortured in the hall in front of all the prisoners but she had revealed nothing.

The AETU representative and confirmed killer Mola (also known as Getachew), came over to her and told her to stand.

'I am going to intensify the red terror on this old anarchist bitch and five others,' he fumed. He picked five other prisoners at random and took them out. By this time it was around 5 a.m. in the morning. I saw that the majority of the prisoners were between 10 and 18 years of age though there were quite a few who were apparently below ten.

In the morning, the guards woke those who were asleep by wading into the prisoners shouting and whipping everyone. And Mola also burst in walking in his cocksure way and shouting 'I should have killed those six anarchos with one bullet! I feel sorry wasting six bullets on them!' He then pointed his AK-47 at us and pulled the trigger - as the gun went click the guards burst into a roaring laughter enjoying our fright and attempts at ducking down. The RTCC were now on the sidelines and the stage was taken over by the likes of Martha, Gidey, Assefa and Joejualla. Those were said to be former EPRP members who had been 'converted' to join the 'revolutionary camp'.

Gidey took his shirt off and showed us his unhealed torture wounds while Martha pulled up her bell-bottoms to show us her scarred legs. Assefa used a megaphone (though this was unnecessary) to blare at us: 'We were anarchos like you, we were duped by *Democracia*. We suffered these wounds in vain, you shouldn't be fools. Join the revolution.' The turncoats spoke one after another and warned us that we should vomit the 'discipline pill' which

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the EPRP had made us swallow. The audience was prodded to ask questions but no one dared.

'This silence itself a sign of the "demo pill" you have swallowed', one of the coordinators shouted. One young boy broke the silence by asking what was the difference between 'enashenfalen' and 'enachenfalen'.¹⁸ Another girl asked why 'demo' or the EPRP was addressed in the feminine form. This went on for a while and we were given a break to give us time to 'denounce' ourselves and others.

When the call for self-denunciation was made there was again absolute silence. Mola was furious: 'You better start denouncing yourselves or I will intensify the red terror on the whole lot of you,' he barked. I should mention here that though I was not given a form to fill out, the other prisoners had filled out an eight question form on the first day of their incarceration. The questions were: name, address, code name, who recruited you? whom did you recruit? to which EPRP organization did you belong? (youth league, party, women's organization, Illama, democratic front, etc.), status in the organizational structures (cell member, sub-zone, zone, interzone, region, sub-region, etc.), and material or documents in your care or whose hiding place you knew of. Some of the cadres were busy consulting the filled forms and transferring the information into a big chart. Mola was impatient with them and picked some of the forms and said: 'I will call each one of you and your answers better be right or else it is flogging and the red terror for you!'

The problem really was with the question of who had recruited you. If you give the names of those who had died or gone underground or to the rural areas, you will be stripped down to your pants and tortured. 'We know this "Demo" technique of giving names of people we can't arrest,' they would say. If you give the name of someone in the hall his filled-out form is pulled out and comparisons made and if the answers do not tally the two are made to torture one another. If you finger someone who was not under arrest then you are asked to lead a raiding party to his hiding place.

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The torture took place right there in front of all the prisoners. The prisoner is made to strip down to his underpants and he is made to sit on the floor pulling his knees to his chest and extending his hands towards his ankles. His hands and feet are then tied tightly with a plastic rope. A crooked pestle or stick is put between the folded knees and the stretched hands, then the two ends of the stick or pestle are picked up by two attendants and placed on two chairs. At the torturers whim the prisoner can be moved like a chicken on a roasting wire is turned for seasoning or basting. In this position, he is then subjected to the various tortures. The torture paraphernalia consisted of whips, sticks of various shapes and sizes, plastic ropes of all sizes, belts with heavy metal buckles, long pieces of torn truck and tractor tires knotted together at various spots, thin knotted pieces of wires, swords and knives, matches, cigarette lighters, plastic bags and dirty socks. The favourite spots on the body chosen by the torturers were the soles of the feet, armpits, backbones, breasts and nipples, the thighs, etc.

The physical torture was complemented by mental ones. Denial of sleep, continuous threats, mock executions, forced shouting of slogans... It was a gory scene indeed with the tortures, the others singing praises of the torturers, the goons laughing and fuming, guns being cocked and pointed, whips flying and landing helter-skelter and the unfortunate being taken out at random never to be seen alive though we found out later that some were taken out for execution and released quietly as their parents had paid thousands of Birr to the RTCC.

The cadres used the forms and put up seven charts with the organizational structures of the EPRP allegedly filled in. Each large chart was to be a score of a sort of who is who in the various structures; every information obtained by torture was added into the chart. The cadres also consulted by phone with other such detention centres who had similar charts and exchanged information.

The torture session and the denunciation charade went on throughout the day and we were given a break only to

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eat or go to the outhouse. The sanitary condition in the hall was as bad as that of the latrines.

Food was brought in by relatives and the torturers made sure that a big quantity was brought in. From this, they selected the better dishes and ate these ones themselves. There were in all some 60 wardens, guards, torturers and cadres and RTCC members. Though the prisoners were gripped by fear some were duped into a false sense of security when they saw the thugs being liberal with food and cigarettes (brought by relatives) and took time out to flirt with some of the female prisoners. Some of the female prisoners had to prostitute themselves to save their skin and some became informers inside the hall itself. Still, many were also taken out at random and shot, sometimes by the same man who had earlier enjoyed their sexual favours. Referring to the cigarettes being brought by the relatives of the prisoners, the cadres used to joke: 'The revolution has liberated you! You no longer have to smoke in hiding, now your relatives know and they are buying you cigarettes.'

After the dishes were taken out, Mola burst in on us once again fuming and swearing:

'You dirty anarchists! All the time you had been cheating us by saying you have come back to mother revolution. You ungrateful souls who bite the breasts of the mother who feeds you! We have found out the secret message you had put in the thermos flasks and which you had addressed to your anarchist friends outside. We know five of you are involved - confess!' He gave us five minutes to denounce ourselves, took out his watch and started to count the minutes by his fingers. The whole thing was a concoction by Mola and his friends and no one got up to denounce himself or others. Mola's countdown reached zero! He called five names and the five were taken out protesting. Later on one of them returned with an elderly man in pyjamas whom we suspected was the young boy's father. He went out with Mola no doubt to arrange the payment for saving his son's life. Maybe they killed him too - I don't know.

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New prisoners were being brought in by the minutes or the hour. When the new ones arrive those who know them or have denounced them are brought forth to receive them and to convince them to confess. Engeda, one of the cadres, brought in four prisoners and came near me with two of them. 'Convince these two anarchists to confess or else all of you would be subjected to the red terror,' he said. The two prisoners who had denounced the new arrivals went on to convince the two to confess. In the meantime, the torture platform was busy. At about 1 a.m. we were allowed to sleep with the boys on one side and the girls on the other - the latter corner was visited by the guards and cadres, of course.

Tuesday, early in the morning there was a lot of commotion outside the stone wall fencing. Apparently more than the usual number of family visitors were pushing and shoving each another to stand on the ledge of the fencing on the opposite side of the street. All we could hear was the loud voices of the guards and the shrill voices of women; one of the red terror committee members came in and phones the Higher detention camp to explain about the situation. He requested extra guards and also said he was going to put up more barricades. Mola, who had been trying to take a nap, woke up to curse 'the anarcho mothers who spoil their children and complain' and he ordered the others to go tell the women to leave the area or be witnesses to 'the intensification of the red terror on their sons and daughters'. The commotion lasted till mid-morning.

Then the much awaited 'consciousness raiser and cleanser of all anarchist sins' came. He was a cadre from one of the Derg-allied organizations, and after lecturing us about 'the bankruptcy of the EPRP' he made us sing in unison the song with a refrain which roughly translates as follows:

*'oh, how pleasant!
oh, how pleasant!
It is really a treat*

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*To see that no good scoundrel and cheat,
EPRP's mercenary, that trotskite
Hit by the red terror and his body thrown in the
middle of the street!"*

His enthusiasm for the song was not shared by us but we all sang it again and again till he got satisfied and went on to explain how the EPRP was 'trotskite'.

More and more prisoners were being brought in the meantime. One particular group was brought in by the likes of Ergete Medebew, Semu Negus, Kellbessa and Alemayehu - all of them sadistic killers who made the Molas look like amateurs. In fact, Alemayehu of Keftegna 14, whose favourite torture method was to dip the prisoner into the latrine, became a liability even for the regime and he was executed in late 1978. These sadists moved from one prison to another as freelancers checking on the identity of wanted elements. One of the prisoners brought by them into our hall took the stage to denounce himself and heap curses on the EPRP. They enjoyed his performance and wanted to take him back with them but the friends of Mola refused saying that he had been arrested in their area. A heated argument ensued between the thugs and it was settled when Mola himself handed the youth to the Ergetes. This, we knew, was the manifestation of the intense competition between the various Derg-allied groups to recruit turncoats into their own particular group.

Throughout this period, I was stationing myself in various corners trying to make myself inconspicuous. I was also hungry since no one had brought me food and no one had given me any. My attempt at being inconspicuous was also motivated by my identification of one of the kebele guards as Yikuno Amlak, the same man who knew me in the ministry I had been working in. Yikuno was an office guard and we had tried to organize him and the cleaners and messengers in the Ministry so as to enable them to fight for better pay and working conditions. However, he was later to find the kebele job more lucra-

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tive. One of the informants who had brought the raiders to our house approached me and advised me to denounce one of the youngsters in the hall as the one who was coming to our house to meet with the 'anarchist girls'. I told her that I had hardly left the kitchen but I knew the house of two girls to whom I used to take bread. She was excited and tried to get a raiding party organized but right that moment a more juicier target seemed to have been found and she left. The house I mentioned was empty and my plan was to try to escape if possible or to show my 'good faith' anyway if not.

After lunch, they brought in some workers arrested on suspicion of being Illama members. The torturer was Tadesse, the ex-Airborne man who had brought me to the hall. One by one he tortured them brutally, sometimes stepping on their windpipes, making them faint, reviving them and stepping on them again. While the torture was going on, workers from a nearby hotel were brought in to watch and were told to tell 'other middle roaders' what they have seen.

After dinner the usual terror continued... The torture rack was busy and we were told to denounce ourselves again as they claimed to have found out that 'there are at least five anarchists recruiting members even here in the hall'. Two youths denounced themselves stating that they have been discussing among themselves admiring the stamina of some of those who had been tortured. Then, the messengers of terror read a list of names, fifteen prisoners in all. These were lined up and ordered to hand over their 'valuables' to their relatives in the hall. They were then taken out by the armed guards; after a while less than half of them were brought back and we were allowed to sleep.

At 3 a.m. the dimmed lights were switched on fully and we were kicked and whipped to wake up. And in came the armed Ergetes, Kelbessas and Alemayehus, wearing dark glasses and ski masks. They moved amongst us picking prisoners at random; even children were picked out. The selected were all taken to whet the murderous appetite of the savage killers.

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On Wednesday morning, we were allowed for the first time to go out of the hall for a breath of fresh air. I stayed put. Later, the cadres and the guards brought *Kat* and chewed this while we were divided into groups and ordered to indulge in political discussion. Out of the padlocked box, whose lock was shattered by a bullet from Birhane's (one of the cadres) pistol, they brought out books. The books and *GOH (Dawn)* magazine copies, which was associated with the EPRP, were piled on one side and Birhane, a keftegna vice chairman, shot into the pile to make them 'unreadable'. We were given Derg and Meisone /POMOA publications to read and discuss. The Molas and Birhanes chewed their *Kat* and rested on the laps of their chosen female prisoners.

After a break for lunch, the discussion continued up to dinner. After dinner, numerous anti-EPRP slogans were chanted and songs sung. Everyone seemed in a jovial mood, the thugs were also high with *Kat*. All of a sudden one of the RTCC members barked 'Silence!' He said it was now time to denounce 'the members of the urban squad members of the EPRP'. The somewhat relaxed mood was thus shattered. No one ventured to the forefront but they picked on a shy looking 17 year old boy. I knew him. An only child, he had grown pampered by his dotting mother who never failed to tell me (when we met over coffee at Woizero Tsige's) that her son was 'not like the other boys who run around quarrelling with the government.' He stays at home all the time was the way she used to put it. And here he was now, innocent and unprepared, being stripped and put on the torture rack. He gave them one name and the minute he did so they took him down, congratulated him for joining the revolution and even put some medicinal liquid over his wounds. The message was clear: denounce someone and you will get 'special considerations'.

As they say a mother's womb is of various colours and people come in quite many different wrappings. At this point, one spineless prisoner got up and told them that the carpenter's shop in the neighbourhood was used as a

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shelter by some hiding EPRP members. They were ecstatic; a raiding party was sent quickly to the shop along with the informer. Sometime later, the informer came back with his arm in a sling: he told us that the hiding militants had thrown a grenade at the raiding party and managed to get away after killing one kebele guard and wounding others, he included.

Early Thursday morning, the raiding party, which had passed the night waiting in an ambush for the employees who would come to work in the morning, brought in five of the carpenter's workers. They locked these up in a cold room after stripping them of their clothes. And the hall was silent for the morning as the cadres went to the funeral of the dead guard. Only one cadre who had come to lecture us about EPRP's trotskism remained, boring us with his ridiculous talk about how the magazine *GOH*, 'run by the EPRP', had criticized Stalin and therefore proved its unabashed trotskism. His lecture was interrupted by the return of the thugs who had gone to the funeral. They wasted no time in bringing out the locked-up workers.

One of the workers, who was said to live in the shop as well as work there too, was put on the rack first. His teeth were chattering from fear and the cold, he asked for a cigarette; one of the cadres lighted one and put it in his mouth but it fell. Mola kicked him and stepped on the cigarette. It was one of the most brutal tortures we had had to witness in the hall. He was beaten on his face, body and feet; blood coagulated and hung from his ears like icicles. They shaved his head without using water or lather, one of his teeth was pulled by a pincer and when his mouth was filled by blood they held it tight forcing him to drink it. Yet, the floor was covered by a pool of blood. Some prisoners fainted at the sight of so much blood. The prisoner was screaming and to stifle his cry they shoved a dirty and now bloodstained sock into his mouth. At the same time, they whipped us and made us sing aloud the 'oh, how pleasant!' song. Dispersed amongst us, they watched who was singing loudly and who wasn't - everyone sung aloud, I should say. They lighted a plastic bag and let it drip on his

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thighs and the inside of his forearms. At times, they picked up a sword, raised it above his head, enjoyed the fears of all of us and brought down the sword with the flat side hitting the body of the tied prisoners. The poor man excreted involuntarily and finally fainted.

Lunch was 'served' after that and many of us were unable to eat though we tried to hide it. The hall was silent and every prisoner morose - terror was supreme.

After lunch, we were ordered out of the hall which had to be cleaned, especially the area around the torture platform. Outside the hall, the very young prisoners started to play among themselves. One nine year old third grader was having a good time running around and kicking with his friends and in an effort to escape from the kicks of his friends he banged repeatedly against the door of the hall. Mola, who was catnapping, woke up, opened the door and finding the little boy there just picked him up, took him inside, tied him up and started to beat him with the belt which had the big iron buckle. All of us heard the kid screaming and whimpering as the belt landed on his body again and again. When we all entered the hall, Mola received us with yet another cry 'even this little anarchist had hidden up to now the names of eight anarchists but the terror has loosened his tongue. How many of you big ones are hiding more?'

They went to bring the ones denounced by the little boy. We were given in the meantime papers to write on our denunciations. (The papers were not given to all but to selected prisoners). The raiding party came back with some young boys and girls; the adults were not found, we heard them say. Berhane took over the interrogation of the new prisoners. He started with Elefteria, born of a Greek father and an Ethiopian mother, who was stripped all the while being subjected to chauvinist insults concerning her being a half-caste. She was ashamed as a twelve year old girl to stand naked in front of all the male prisoners; Birhane took pains to beat her on her budding breasts. She denied ever having been an EPRP and declared that the boy had hated her because she beat him up once in support of

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her younger brother with whom he had been fighting. Asked, the boy who had denounced her admitted this was true and that he had called her name so as to escape Mola's belt. Birhane nonetheless beat up another young girl, Tizita, who had been brought along with Elefteria.

Friday morning another cadre from one of the Derg-allied organizations came and checked up the songs we had studied. He then told us that our songs were immature since the EPRP 'is not trotskite' but 'anarcho-syndicalist'. He made us study new songs with these characterisations and then left. During the day, many new prisoners came - some had turned themselves in. But they were also tortured. 'The red terror would have pulled you out of your mother's womb anyway,' was what the torturers said to them. In the evening, there weren't many cadres around and we were told to sleep early. However, the duty officer, Birhane, had insomnia. To pass the time, he sneaked up on some sleeping prisoners and started to whip them, all the time roaring with laughter. In a while we were all awake. He then picked 15 prisoners (accused of belonging to the EPRP-supporting Gurage National Democratic Movement) and whipped them to make them dance the Gurage national dance. He got bored by this and then he picked out a girl and snarled he would 'intensify the red terror' on her. Since she had a sister, he made them bid each other goodbye, and laughing, he dragged the girl outside. After some minutes he came back laughing his head off - behind him trailed the young girl, crying and dishevelled. We sighed in relief - after all, compared to death, rape did not seem too much!

On Saturday, all the senior RTCC members, kebele officials and cadres were conspicuously absent and the stage was taken over by minor officials who were, on the whole, lumpen elements from the locality. These crooks passed their time trying to imitate the Molas and Birhanes by making us feel harassed and scared. One of them let one girl to speak with her family over the phone and we heard him tell the parents he will come over to collect his due. Another took two girls, daughters of the local baker, to

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their house for a shower and change of clothes. When he came back, he also brought pastries to the other guards. A woman who used to be the wife of one of the crooks was also brought in and interrogated for her 'anarchist' connections. The man was trying to punish her for divorcing him.

Sunday morning: 6:45 a.m. in the morning. One Zegeye was present. I got up and approached him. He was a member of the RTCC and head of one keftegna guards.

'The annual Mass of the Trinity cathedral is being held today,' I told him. 'Cadre Engida had promised me Thursday that I would go but he hasn't come back. I can't miss the mass, please send me.'

He started to say 'wait for Mola' but I interrupted him and said, 'as for those employers of mine who had disappeared, I will go back and continue working there and inform you of what goes on. They have made me, an innocent maid, suffer for their crimes,' I added with what I hope was an angry tone.

'Fantastic!' said Zegeye. 'This is the worker spirit. Make sure you gather as much information as possible and don't tell anyone but me. Remember, only to me.' And he escorted me right out of that bloody hall and the whole compound..."

And before concluding this part let us mention Birhane Bihonegta, the 30 year old teacher, who was arrested in Bahr Dar in September 1977 and executed a month later. He was subjected to all kinds of torture and his arms and legs were amputated; the torturers used an ordinary saw to cut through the flesh and bones!

In Jimma (Kaffa), a policeman, who was part of an execution squad, found his own son among those standing against the wall waiting to be shot. The public called to observe the execution watched in silence. The policeman did his job and killed himself the next day.

Multiply the few testimonies we have presented here by the thousands and the gruesome and tragic features of the red terror emerge more vividly.

Notes

Part Three

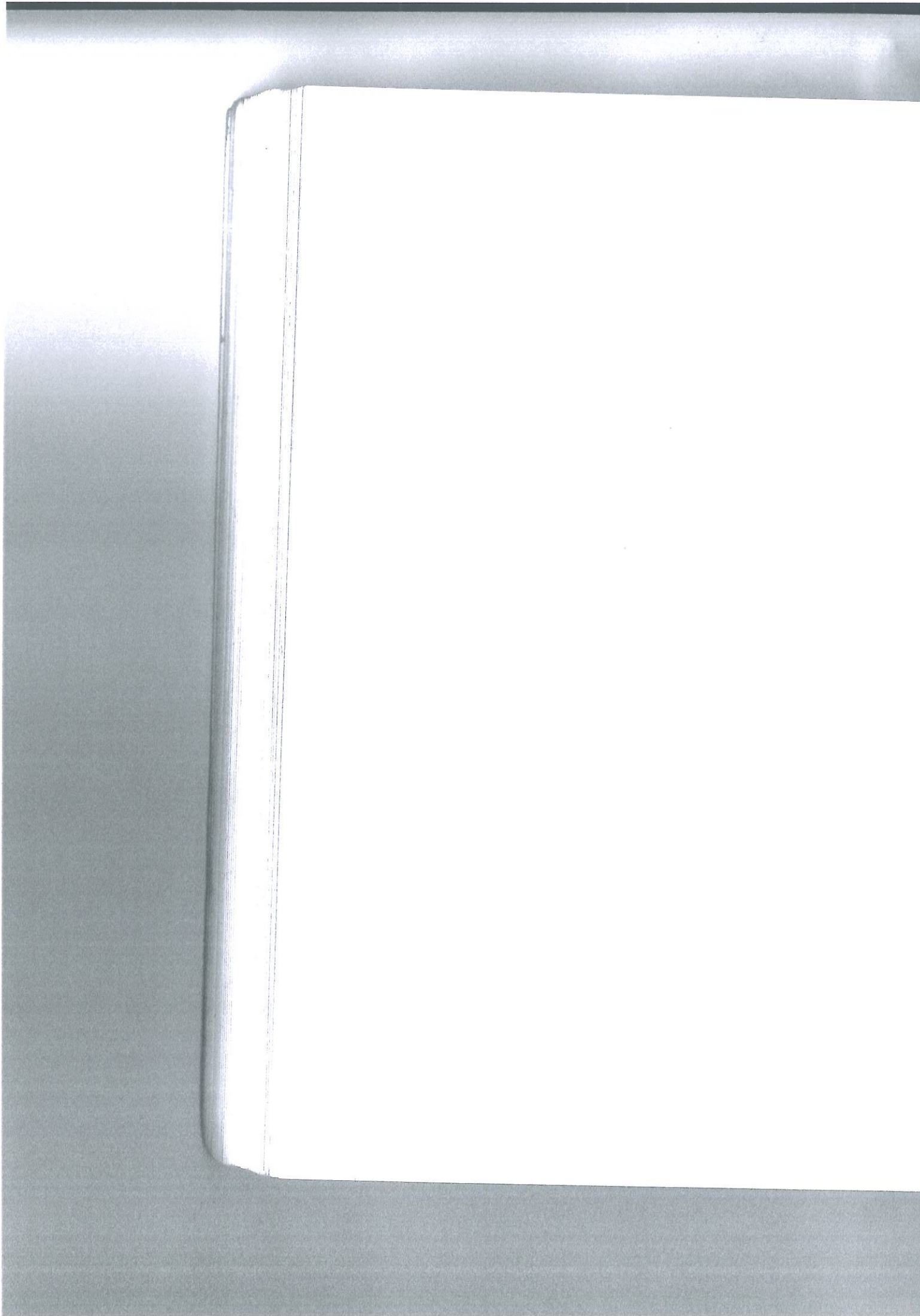
- 1 For euphoric articles calling for and justifying the red terror, see Meisone's *Voice of the Masses*, all issues of February and March 1977.
- 2 Korovikov, *ibid*, p. 94.
- 3 An Observer: "The Ethiopian Revolution", *Monthly Review*, NY, July-August 1977, pp. 46-47.
- 4 *Times*, London, May 16, 1977.
- 5 *Daily Telegraph*, London, September 13, 1977.
- 6 *Times*, *ibid*.
- 7 J.C. Guillebaud, "The Dergue's Red Terror", *Guardian*, London, Feb. 26, 1978.
- 8 *ABYOT*, vol. 2, no. 6.
- 9 The Meisone cadre who identified Tesfaye to the squads, Zerihun — now lives in exile in Paris, France. In the shootout which led to Tesfaye's death by suicide, Berihun Mariye, another EPRP member was also killed.
- 10 Nega Ayele co-authored with John Markakis the book *Class and Revolution in Ethiopia*, Nottingham: Spokesman, 1978. Yohannes Berhane, whose corpse the government failed to identify, was a central committee member of the EPRP.
- 11 Testimonies by tortured prisoners who have been released and are now in exile.
- 12 Amnesty International Report on Ethiopia, 1977.

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- 13 Sellasie, Bereket H. "Political Leadership in Crisis", *Horn of Africa*, New Jersey (USA), vol. 3, no. 1, 1980.
- 14 Bereket and other avowedly partisan supporters of the nationalist fronts take pains to minimise the struggle (and the cost) of the Ethiopian democratic forces who fought not for secession but for a democratic change at the centre or for the whole of Ethiopia. Bereket and his friends attach exclusive weight to the nationalist struggles and seem to feel that giving due credit to other organisations may reduce the weight of their own favourites. In fact, Bereket has gone on record alleging that if the Eritrean problem had been solved there wouldn't have been other problems in Ethiopia! (Interview in the VOA Focus Program, September 22, 1984.)
- 15 VOICE, *British Review of Arab Affairs*, August 10, 1979.
- 16 Guillebaud, *ibid.*
- 17 This testimony is excerpted in an abridged form (with the permission of the author), from the unpublished book-length manuscript (in English) by T.K., temporarily titled "If She Wears Panties, Shoot her! - Women Against the Derg", 1985.
- 18 *Enashenfalen* and "*enachenfalen*" both mean "we shall win", but the *she* was used by the Derg and Meisone while the *che* version was used by the EPRP and its supporters. During the red terror anyone who used the *che* version and said *enachenfalen* was automatically taken as an "anarchist" just like anyone who used *labader* to mean proletariat or worker instead of the Derg's word, *wozader*. The different usages of words and vocabularies had "revolutionary" or "counter-revolutionary" implications at the time and the Derg did not take this lightly. Two printing press typesetters who made the mistake of putting D before K in order to write, in an Ethiopian Herald front page masthead, "Ethiopia Tidkem" instead of "Ethiopia Tikdem" (Ethiopia First) were arrested and tortured and have disappeared since. *Tidkem* in Amharic means "let her be weak". A spelling mistake cost two lives in the Derg's Ethiopia!

Part Four

Conclusion



The Red Terror: A Pyrrhic Victory

"...even though you can destroy a man, destroying him does make him cease to exist. On the contrary... he begins to exist all the more. These are paradoxes no tyrant can deal with. The scythe swings, and at once the grass starts to grow back."
Ryszard Kapuscinski (in *Shah of Shahs*)

"The goal and objective of our struggle is ensuring the respect for the human rights of the oppressed and broad masses."
Mengistu H. Mariam, February 14, 1978

Could there ever be winners and losers in a human carnage which killed and maimed thousands and laid waste to a whole nation? Mengistu and his cronies think they are the victors and that the red terror was their effective instrument of decisive combat. To this end they sing eulogies of this cruel period and gloat over their "victory". A Pyrrhic victory if there ever was one!

We have now the additional advantage of hindsight observation and it is clear that the terror may have won in so far as the objective of it was to terrify and kill, but neither has Mengistu won nor the opposition lost. Ethiopia of the eighties is still beset by guerrilla wars and insurrections and the regime, despite outward signs of relative strength, is weak at its centre. It has failed to gain popular support; it has failed to stamp out all opposition. It remains weak at the centre and still weaker at the periphery.

Arguments can be foreworded from the outset that such regimes like the one in Ethiopia never search for voluntary consensus anyway. Their preoccupation is to cow the people by force and to safeguard their power and

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from this is inferred their incessant drive to increase their military might. In the Ethiopian context, this appears to be true. The military regime did not seek support through persuasion, it was even unable to utilise the radical reforms which had been proclaimed to mobilise the beneficiaries and to solidify its base. The reforms proved illusory within a short period; the land reform, which had been hailed, replaced feudal robbery with the merciless plunder of the peasantry by the military government.

Dissatisfaction was sure to spread and it has, precisely because the fundamental problems have not been addressed or tackled in a way which has succeeded to convince or win over the people. In the first period, it was the EPRP and the most conscious sectors who opposed the authoritarian actions and ambitions of the new ruler. At present, the majority of the people are opposed to the military regime and thousands of them are in jail, in exile, or in the forest continuing the struggle.

The struggle waged by the Ethiopian people did not follow patterns set elsewhere despite the rhetoric of the radicals. In this, perhaps we could say that the EPRP and the ones who fought and sacrificed themselves were "guilty" of not heeding the advice of learned sages from abroad. They should have listened to Pajetta of the PCI who said that the *kebelles* did remind him of the Soviets (or was it of the Commune?) and not been influenced only by what they saw as these same *kebelles* murdered them. In fact, they should not have raised arms against these killers and torturers as these people were, in the words of Halliday and Molyneux, the same ones who were advancing the revolution. And what about John Gritten, the British Communist, who wrote and made it clear that paternalist as it may seem for Europe the Derg was democratic in Ethiopian standards? Or haven't they heard of S. Carrillo of the PCE who warned that demanding democracy in countries like Ethiopia is like braying at the moon?

Fortunately, neither the EPRP nor the people listened to such "gems of wisdom". They didn't even listen to Meisone which was advising them that democracy had to

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be given by small doses under its own prescription and supervision. They also refused to forfeit their rights and revolution to the self-declared guardian. And in this they proved their wisdom, their clarity, their consciousness. After all, they know that the State in question was not theirs, would not work in their interest. They didn't have to quote Lenin or somebody else to prove this - their heroic struggle against a brutal power was enough evidence.

The cost was high. But could it have been otherwise? It is evident that the tactics employed by the EPRP could have been changed in such a way as to minimise the damage. But the killings would not have vanished so long as the opposition did not vanish. This is why all the refined arguments which revolve around the buzz word of "provocation" emerge as outright recipes for submission and servitude. We ask: don't the people have the right to be provoked by a dictatorial regime which has usurped power and is out to subjugate them by force? If a ferocious hyena corners you, rushing it head on may not be a wise approach but fighting it is unavoidable.

In the Ethiopian context, the hyena was ferocious from the outset and remained so. There was no way to placate it unless by submitting to be its dinner. The Ethiopian fable goes as follows: a group of donkeys wanted to live in peace with the local hyenas. So when one hyena died they went to the cave of the hyenas to pay their respects and express their condolences. The hyenas looked pleased. After a while, the hyenas asked the donkeys to give their upper lips to feed the gathered mourners. The donkeys who were alarmed but wanted to please, contributed their upper lips which the hyenas swallowed with a relish. Then the hyenas stared at the donkeys and snarled: "How can you sit here and laugh while we mourn?" And they, thus provoked, jumped on the donkeys.

That issue actually is a fundamental point beyond the scope of even the most apt fables or homilies. All the popular sectors who had fought against the autocracy wanted power to devolve in their hands, they wanted democracy. The usurpers of power wanted to be the

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guardians of this power by excluding the people from the active political process. The people were given the option of applauding and satisfying themselves with radical demagoguery. They refused and they staged peaceful protests. The Derg was unable to defuse their protest, it resorted to violence to crush it.

One can almost hear the learned sages pooh-poohing and saying "but this is class struggle, what did you expect?" Good. But who stood for the revolution? Can a revolution be made by massacring the same classes and people who are supposed to be its beneficiaries? What kind of a revolution pits a minority against the majority of the oppressed people? Once the mystification is exploded the regime emerges as the representative of the counter-revolution. The reforms have proved hollow beyond a doubt if we take the condition of the people as our yardstick. The country has no peace, no sovereignty. The reality shows us once again the same people who stood against the imperial regime standing opposed against the military government. We come full circle and the elitist and racist and apologist arguments prove disgustingly baseless and irrelevant.

The yardstick is the reality and, to use another word which the pseudo-radicals belabour, practice. The military regime may declare itself socialist or democratic but, the people see in it a killer outfit, the one which murdered thousands and maimed even more people. "Man does not live by bread alone" is by itself a crude saying in the famine-stricken Ethiopia, but one can add that no one can live for long on a diet of quotations from Marxist classics. For Ethiopians, there is nothing which can beautify the monstrosity of the Mengistu regime. The *kebelles* may invoke for tourists of the Left the memories of the Soviets of Russia during the revolution but to Ethiopians *kebele* spells death and police control. The Soviets and Cubans may appear internationalists to some and even as stabilising forces for those who reason like Andrew Young, but for Ethiopians these *ferenjjs* or foreigners meant and mean domination; they represent the continuation of the murderous regime. Ethiopians, it can be said, are backward people

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and like all such people they believe their own experience and not what is written in books or expressed by the glib tongues of intellectuals. And 75% of them cannot read anyway!

The terror was an expression of the defeat of the military regime, a proof of its inability to acquire a social base capable of sustaining it in power without resorting to violence or to inviting mercenaries from abroad. The terror also highlighted the abortion of the February Revolution, the defeat of the popular movement for democracy and freedom. At a mundane level, it can be said that the terror weakened the EPRP (though the party has not been destroyed and continues the armed struggle) and strengthened the regime (though the government has yet to achieve the stability it seeks to make it able to govern). But this would be missing the point altogether. Addis Abeba is calm but who can deny that it resembles the calm of a graveyard? The regime is neither popular nor stable, the demons continue to haunt it.

The terror was brutal but was there any other way to move Ethiopia forward? This is another argument forwarded by those who believe that backward people (as they say) cannot change unless prodded by the stick. One wonders what if the same medicine is given to them in their own countries!? Still, has Ethiopia moved and to where is the relevant question. One can see beyond doubt now that Ethiopia is in a dire situation both economically and politically. A ruthless and demagogic regime is in power to be sure but this is a change only in its form vis a vis the past. The people are starving, exploitation is rife, wars bedevil various regions, democratic rights are absent, national oppression and struggles against this threaten the country's unity, the Eastern super power dominates the country, the people are forced to flee into exile. Ethiopia has indeed become a prison for the vast majority of its citizens. A character in *Alice in the Wonderland* says one keeps running to stay in the same place. The Ethiopian regime has been running and killing to go backwards in many respects. On the corpses of the thousands who were

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slaughtered no new Ethiopia has emerged. What we see is "the same old Ethiopia" of autocratic rule, repression, famine and death. The cover is new of course as are the monuments which have been erected.

The military regime killed the February Revolution and the Terror buried it: this is the fitting epitaph of the "Red Terror". Between the rulers and the people a gulf of blood exists, a gap which makes all plans of economic development by the regime quite futile. Usually vendettas are the means of settling blood debts in Ethiopia. But one hopes for magnanimity, for a different resolution to the conflict even if the reality indicates that the solution can only issue from the resolution of the war raging between the rulers and the ruled at the present time. Violence was being severed from the Ethiopian body politics by the February Revolution but the Derg reglued it once again. Ungluing it again seems to call for violence. The spiral goes on... and to hope for its end is only proper.

One hopes that the Terror has defeated itself by teaching its opposers and the survivors that never again should such methods be employed whatever the situation or justification. This is the only way to defeat the Derg once and for all, to deny the Terror any chance of resurrection. Till then, unfortunately, the perpetrators of the "Red Terror" should do well to heed the message put across by one revolutionary poet:

*"...the next time around
don't tire to come to us
To break our doors in the night.
The next time around don't tire.
We will come knocking breaking
down your doors
Night or morning."*

For, the scythe has swung and swung, but the grass has grown back. Ever green, ever tall and defiant.

The Difficulty of Repenting
or
The Tragic character of the Ethiopian Butcher
(by way of an open letter to Fikreselassie Wogderess)

If there are those who do not know or have forgotten Captain Fikre Sellasie Wogderess, let me say that he was the right hand man of Mengistu Haile Mariam, and for long the Prime Minister of the barbaric regime. Most Ethiopians knew Fikreselassie as a dandy (as much as he and other Derg officers were also known as corrupt etc...) who enjoyed his three piece suits and whisky while the country was drowning in the blood of its young generation.

Captain Fikre Selassie is now in prison and being tried by the equally criminal clique of the Tigray People's Liberation Front led by Meles Zenawi. Times have changed: the prime minister who presided over the murderous "Red Terror" is now replaced by a former rebel who also put in his share to make the Red Terror against the EPRP a success.

Times have indeed changed and yet many things are also the same in that frustrating Ethiopian way of continued tragedy. Fikre Sellasie refused to acknowledge his crime: his direct and primordial role in the brutal and deliberate murder of more than 250,000 Ethiopians. Not only does he refuse to repent but he tries, again in a criminal way, to accuse a whole generation of being responsible for the bloodletting. In this respect, he gropes and wails as he attempts to incriminate the victim in the crime. "The EPRP was terrorist," Fikre states. "The EPRP was formed and run by the Eritrean front (the EPLF)," Fikre alleges as he panders for sympathy from a populace made bitter by the separation of Eritrea from Ethiopia. "The EPRP killed 1310 people," Fikre accuses, forgetting he presided over a regime which slaughtered more than

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1500 people in Addis Ababa alone in one day (May Day eve). It is sad and pathetic to say the least.

That Fikre Sellassie tries to accuse the EPRP is no news, His regime accused the EPRP of being C.I.A, Trotskite, anarchist, agent of Arabs, feudal, reactionary. bourgeois, right-wing, Maoist, anti-peasant, etc... in order to justify the repression, to sanctify the "Red Terror". At one time, The EPRP was accused of stopping the rain and a zealous Kebele official even went as far as to boldly assert that the EPRP is " the mosquito causing malaria infection". Hence, it is no wonder if Fikre Sellassie tries today to justify his crimes by singing the tune he imagines will best endear him to the public: i.e. presenting himself as a fierce fighter for Ethiopian unity while the youth, "duped" says Fikre Sellassie , followed the EPRP on the path "of secession charted by the EPLF". That the truth lies elsewhere is no matter. That the Derg regime was massacring EPRP members even in Asmara while leaving captured EPLF guerrillas alive is not to be mentioned. That the EPRP and its members fought for the dignity of Ethiopia, for democracy, for a unity on the basis of equality while the regime of Fikre Sellassie sold the country to the Kremilin is not to be invoked. Fikre Selalssie expects all Ethiopians to sleep on their conscience and to listen to him. It would have been much more easier and decent to repent, to ask the people forgiveness, to say I did make a mistake/ I did commit a crime.

But such humility and regret seems to be beyond Ethiopians criminals. Even Mengistu claims he had nothing to do with the "Red Terror"; Tesfay Wolde Sellassie, who personally caused the murder of hundreds of people, says his conscience is clean. Aemu Abebe, the KGB agent and notorious murderer, says the same. So say the torturers and killers like Ergete, Teshome and Kelbesa. Not one has repented, Zegeye Loliso, who threw more than 20 EPRP members to the crocodiles of the Omo river, is now in exile in Kenya claiming he did nothing wrong. And so on and on. Even Meles Zenawi, Abaye Tsehaye, Seyoum Mesfin and

Appendix I

Sebhat Nega, the ones whose organization (the TPLF) participated in the Red Terror to cause the deaths of countless EPRP members in Tigray, deny their crimes and they pretend to be the judges.

Ethiopia's tragedy is endless. The monsters are just that till their deaths. Fikre Sellassie still hopes to play the Ethiopian nationalist tune to gain sympathy as if no one remembers that he was the second man to a regime which sold Ethiopia to the Soviets and sent his pregnant wife to the USA to secure for his baby a foreign citizenship. Not to mention the gold ingots smuggled to India. Worse still, Fikre Sellassie defames the victims, he profanes the memory of the martyrs by accusing their organization of being anti-Ethiopian. Unfortunately for Fikre and Meles, the collective memory of our people is not erased. The people still remember. They know the criminals: they know the killers as they were themselves the victims, The EPLF, whatever its faults, did not take part in the Red Terror. The Derg of Fikre Sellassie did. Fikre took part in the Terror and in the murder of countless Derg members. The TPLF of Meles Zenawi also took part in the Red Terror. In other words both the judge and the accused are criminals. Ironically, both the judge (the TPLF) and the accused (the Fikres) accuse the EPRP (the victim) of also being responsible. The accusation does not hold much surprise.

To repent demands courage. To ask the people forgiveness requires courage. Ethiopian tyrants were and are cowards. Pity the Fikre Sellassies who drown in the slime of their own lies, in their own crimes and who accuse others. No one expects courage and honesty from his likes. In Ethiopia, the monster dies a monster, tail and horns intact. Such is our tragedy. Fikre and Meles consider it a comedy!

BABILE TOLA
January 1996

Appendix II

THE EPRDF AND RED TERROR

(TO RE-KILL A GENERATION?)

"One hopes that the terror has defeated itself by teaching its opposers and the survivors that never again should such methods be employed whatever the situation or justification. This is the only way to defeat the DERG once and for all, to deny the terror any chance of resurrection"

(TO KILL A GENERATION: THE RED TERROR IN ETHIOPIA, P.210)

Ethiopian reality has the habit of dashing many hopes. The worst, that which is dreaded has the habit of happening. This perpetual delusion could well explain the pessimist streak in our national character.

The regime which initiated and carried the Red Terror to its grim conclusion is no more. Its top architects, the bloody and cruel men who killed so many are either dead (like Ali Musa and Getachew Shibeshi), under arrest (Legese Asfaw, etc...), or are in exile (like Melaku Tefera). Times are such that now the kin of the victims are speaking out, those who escaped from the mass killings are telling their stories, bones are being dug up, bottled up passions (not always savory) are being vented.

But the wound continues to fester. There is some jarring note in all the ongoing connected with the Red Terror, something that strikes one as strange, that implies

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a charade. A number of people and publications have cited my (actually "ours" since the effort was collective) book: **TO KILL A GENERATION: THE RED TERROR IN ETHIOPIA**, published in 1989. Some to corroborate, some to dispute. From all this one could get the impressions that the nation is positively assessing those dark years and learning something useful. It would be wrong to assume this.

There is in fact the conscious attempt to use the Red Terror for sectarian aims, to re-kill the victims of the infamous carnage, to use the understandable bitterness of the kin to score political points, to whip up vendettas, to justify mob justice, to isolate (yet again) the organization which was the main victim of the Red Terror. This has made it necessary for me to say that those who are using "our book" to do so for their own purposes, not to seek the truth, not to deny the Terror the chance of reliving, but to spread the hate and violent passions which fueled the Terror in the seventies.

Evidently, there is nothing wrong in assessing the Red Terror - in fact it should be analyzed and exposed in all its bestiality to teach the people and specially the new generation that the lust for power by dictators can submerge a country in the blood of its own people. However, this seems to be far from the purpose and motivations of the new rulers.

We have said that the regime carried out the Red Terror but it wasn't alone. Many of us collaborated directly or otherwise, by commission or omission. Let us take the new rulers, the TPLF or EPRDF. Many of the TPLF cadres in Tigray infiltrated the POMOA (Hizb Dirigit Tschifetbet) and as Derg "supporters" liquidated members of the rival EPRP or other Tigreans deemed hostile to the TPLF politics. The infiltration or the liquidation action was ordered by the TPLF which was led by Meles Zenawi and others. Thus, if we see now the same TPLF pointing accusing fingers at the perpetrators of the

Red Terror we are to be excused if we find the whole thing grotesque and an insult to the memory of the martyrs.

The Derg was for sure responsible for the heinous crime which was called the Red Terror. But, if we are to learn from our sad experience, if we intend to deny the Terror any chance of resurrection, we must also, individually and as a people, look inward, with courage and objectivity. Not for retribution but to be cleansed by our own shame. For, how could we, the whole of us, let the Red Terror take place? How could we let a minority of people cow and massacre the majority? In other words, it's time we admitted that some of us informed on others, some others looked the other way when the innocent got slaughtered, many of us did nothing. Where were we? What did we do when the whole country wailed? How could we let the goons humiliate us to the extent of denouncing ourselves and our kin as counter revolutionaries? How could we sing songs of praise to the regime which murdered our offspring, friends or relatives?

Fear is a weakness, perhaps even an excuse at times. But then again the notorious torturer Sergeant Teshome can also say he was only obeying orders and was afraid he would be killed if he did not torture and maim the enemies of the regime. A weakness, fear is. But not a plea for innocence. The Terror can still rear its head unless this is understood, the weakness in all of us realized so that when we do say "never again" it should not be the flow with the tide (like the media men who were yesterday hailing the Red Terror and who are today tripping over one another to denounce the "criminal red terror") but with a genuine resolve born of shame, of humility, of conquering one's own fear.

The Red Terror is not dead by all accounts, it is just lying low waiting for the right moment to be a vivid "red performance" as the Derg used to say. The Red Terror is in the incubator for now, waiting for the right time. And its chances of yet again gripping the land are quite real.

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We say this for various reasons. Above all because the present rulers are motivated by the same notions of power and violence which moved the Derg to an unprecedented paroxysm of bloodletting. The TPLF is also dyed in the wool Stalinist movement, a group led by people who believe in the supremacy of the gun. A group which has given to itself the mantle of "Mr. perpetually right". The jargons are still there, "the masses", "the all-knowing heroic vanguard", the demagogy is eerily similar with the past and the persons who are reading the messages are actually the same. It has changed and it remains the same.

Leaving aside other political considerations, when we deal specifically with the Red Terror it is clear that the TPLF/EPRDF is also a carrier of the virus. Having a similar stand as the Derg on the question of power and violence, seeing that summary executions are prevalent and that observing due process of law is considered as a luxury, taking into consideration the new rulers' tendency towards the policy of isolating rivals and dubbing them "enemies of the people", the slide towards the Terror will not be rough or long for the TPLF. There is no Red Terror - carnage yet but then again there's no determined challenge as yet to the power holders as the EPRP was to the Derg in those days. And also, it could be said that the Derg did not start out with the Red Terror. Summary executions, arbitrary killings, selective murders, a massacre here, a carnage there, prisons filling up slowly and steadily - - the Derg had also a prelude, a time of "small Terrors". The road leads nowhere but to the Red Terror, it is a one way road with no turning back for those who lust for absolute power whatever their self-declared motivations.

The million dollar question: will the TPLF-EPRDF, given its ideology and obvious passion for absolute power (and its visible disdain for tolerance), act differently from the Derg if it gets challenged by the people as the Derg was in the seventies? the least we can say is

that a negative reply requires from us extraordinary optimism or naiveté to be precise.

Methodology is another revealing factor. Meaning the way the EPRDF is handling - orchestrating - the whole affair. It is to be remembered that the Red Terror was one big orgy of violence, an example of epic lawlessness. It was an open and arrogant denial of any rule of law, any notion of due process. It was summary "justice" and consequently gross injustice. It derived its strength from its being arbitrary: any one could be tortured or killed for any reason. The executors of the Terror were thus omnipotent and from this situation most of them, in reality deranged and puny individuals, got their kicks, they enjoyed the power they wielded, they were mini-Mengistus in their own turf or kebeles.

Negations of the rule of law. Arbitrary and summary measures. Denunciations and self-incrimination. Whipping up the frenzy of murder and vengeance. These and more defined the Red Terror as we have tried to show in the book. One would expect that such methods will be discarded along with all the "logic" which made the Terror a "necessity" for the rulers. However, the EPRDF disappoints us on this score too and aggravates our worry for the future.

The EPRDF has proved to be adept at the notorious practice of summary execution. Of mob justice. To frighten and to please, thieves and traffic policemen alleged to have taken bribes have been summarily shot. No trial, no condemnation - no due process at all. The Red Terror was also made subservient to the EPRDF's desire to gain popularity. Hence, "mass meetings" were organized and the kin of victims prodded to accuse the alleged killers. The media played the whole thing up presenting wailing mothers and relatives accusing someone or the other. The person thus denounced was confronted to confess or deny - the assembly hall or the TV screen were there courts. Denounce the killers, expose the criminals -- the exhortation rang familiar with the "denounce counter-

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revolutionaries" call of the Derg. Same methods. One can argue the end sought is different but this is more than debatable.

With all due respect to the genuine feelings of the relatives of the martyrs, there is no doubt that the EPRDF has been manipulating them and the whole process of analyzing the Red Terror. What the EPRDF has attempted is to hoodwink the whole nation, to divert its attention, to achieve political gains by shedding crocodile tears. There is the persistent and on the whole sound accusation that the EPRDF worked with the former Minister of Interior, colonel Tesfaye Wolde Sellasie. Tesfaye was one of the top "stars" of the Red Terror. This fact and the TPLF's own role in the anti-EPRP Terror makes the EPRDF the least worthy candidate to oversee the case of the Red Terror. Are all those publicly denounced as killers during the Terror really guilty? It is very hard to say and that's one more reason for the cases to be handled with all due process in a legal court. Tesfaye Wolde Sellasie has claimed to be a religious person, kind and innocent. Ergete, a confirmed killer, has denied any role in the killings. Sergeant Teshome, the ace torturer, has also claimed innocence.

These and many others are for sure confirmed murderers. Ergete is on record for asking the draining off the blood of EPRP members to fill up the blood Bank (Major Melaku put this horrid suggestion into practice in Gondar). Many victims of the brutal torture of Sergeant Teshome are still alive. Still the rule of law (which opposes the norm of the Terror) demands that the accused be taken as innocent until proven guilty. Trial and condemnation by media - of even guilty persons - is a negation of the due process of law.

The EPRDF has gone even further. It has arbitrarily released a number of individuals accused by the public of having murdered people during the Red Terror. Some of these were released on ethnic grounds, some others have been found useful for the EPRDF itself. Moreover, a

number of killers and torturers are still free on the grounds that they are bona-fide members of one ethnic organization or another. What is even worse is the EPRDF's manipulation of the Red Terror to accuse its political rivals. Let us cite just one example of such a perfidious practice.

A few months back, the EPRDF-controlled mass media announced that hundreds of people in Sidamo have demonstrated against Ato Wolde Amanuel Dubale calling on the Transitional Government to arrest him for allegedly killing more than 40 people during the Red Terror. Wolde Amanuel is the leader of the Sidama Liberation Front (SLM) which is participating in the Transitional Council. However, the SLM has obviously refused to be a docile tool of the EPRDF and thus an assassination attempt was even made against Ato Wolde Amanuel (the driver died). The EPRDF, which is allegedly behind the murder attempt, has now formed two other "Sidama" organizations to oppose the SLM (setting up phantom groups is another EPRDF specialty).

The "mass demonstration" against the SLM leader was stage-managed by the EPRDF itself. While Wolde Amanuel can certainly be accused for any crime that can be proved, it's known in this instance that he was actually in exile in Somalia. The man really responsible for the said and other crimes is none other than lieutenant Tekle also known as "cento". This man is not only free but EPRDF is about to appoint him to a consular job abroad. Tekle has the right ethnic background and it matters not if he was the "star" of the Red Terror committee for the whole Sidamo region. Those personally tortured or killed by Tekle (such as Girma "keskis", Yikuno Amlack Teferra, Tsega Amlack Teferra, Moges, Mulugeta, Getahun, Marta Ayano, Nebiyu Abraha, Daniel, etch...) are definitely aggrieved again as their killer gets scot-free and another one gets accused instead.

Sergeant Teshome is in jail but sergeant Ijigu Dumo, a killer, has been appointed district administrator. Colonel

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Asrat Ayele, a criminal to boot, is in charge of the committee set up to dig up the bones of the Red Terror victims! The list is long. Many confirmed killers are being appointed, given jobs in Tigray or in abroad, many are free. The situation would make those who run away (like Zegeye Loliso, who threw 20 EPRP members alive into the crocodile infested Omo lake) regret their "hasty" flight. The tragic irony of the whole thing, that which strikes anyone subjected to the media blitz concerning the bones being dug up is the fact that the main victim of the Red Terror, the EPRP, is still being hunted and repressed. In other words, as the EPRDF digs up with fanfare the bones of EPRP members it is burying still other members of the same organization. The one organization which could have adequately supplied information on all aspects of the Terror is still being subjected to repression. The victim is denied a voice and the blood stained ones are the judges. While EPRP leaders like Tsegay Gebre Medhin and Yishak Debretsion are in EPRDF jails, while EPRP leaders like Geleb Dafla and Haile Abay have been killed by the TPLF after it seized power in Addis, it is hard to accept the same TPLF-EPRDF crying about the victims of the Red Terror. It is a grotesque situation best understood by those who grasp the twisted and cynical logic of Stalinist die-hards.

All this and more makes us apprehensive, we see the shadow of the Red Terror appearing. The various components are already in place and the official denunciation of the Red Terror is also part of the lurking presence of the Red Terror which strives to be born. A few determined demonstrations, a united resistance to challenge the power holders, a growing cry calling on the rulers to resign, strikes, mass civil opposition and the TPLF will turn, fast into a ferocious Derg. Once again the Terror looms and the rulers are saying that only way to stop its birth is by submitting to their despotic rule. It was the same choice which we had in the Derg's time.

The only way to bury the Red Terror was by upholding the rule of law, by observing due process, by

negating the use of its methods. Whipping up mass hysteria, concocting cases, resorting to denunciations and mob trials, releasing criminals for political purposes using the occasion to isolate the hapless victims of the Terror, lying through the media, etc. .. all this is part of the Red Terror. How then can we say it is dead and buried and never to rise again?

Once again a deep chasm divides the real victims of the Terror from the EPRDF. Those who lost their kin to the Red Terror are losing more of their relatives in the hills of Gondar and Gojjam as the EPRDF tries to wipe out the EPRP. Hate thrives, conflict abounds. The prisons are again filling up. Yet again, the hirelings, those who scream for blood are hogging the corridors of power. Government spies spread their tentacles even abroad, refugees are being kidnapped, others (like Mebatsion Ali in Nairobi) are being gunned down in cold blood. Monuments are coming down, others about to be erected. The diatribe reminds us of the past, demagoguery is almost identical. Mengistu is gone and Meles in power - the trumpeted change has made Herman Cohen swoon but leaves Ethiopians bewildered. As before. As always. The wound is open along with graves of the martyrs of the Red Terror. The scythe continues to swing and this time around also the victims are no different.

History does teach a lesson but only to those who want to learn. What led to the Red Terror is still alive. The Terror killed a generation and maimed the whole nation. It will do no less if it is let to resurrect. The EPRDF is manipulating the legitimate grief of the people. Let the people make a stop to this. In other words, let us all conquer our fear, let us feel the pain of the victims, let us boldly denounce hypocrisy, thuggery and dictatorial ways. Let us tell the EPRDF to leave our martyrs alone and to cease giving us new martyrs.

It hurts to see the truth being skillfully buried, it pains to see a book that attempted to record history being put to use by the same people who are out to bury the truth. The

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book TO KILL A GENERATION was translated into Amharic by none other than Tsegaye Gebre Medhin who is now suffering captivity in Tigray in the hands of the TPLF. I have come to know that someone else has translated the book in Addis Ababa and is having it published without any permission from me. There seems to be a need for the book on the part of the EPRDF and this need, which costs lives, cannot be expected to respect copyright laws. The least we can say is that we hope there will be no lack of official translators for the book we will definitely write to record the brutalities of the EPRDF.

Let this brief article be my open condemnation of the EPRDF's attempt to use the Red Terror for its own political aims and to strike at the EPRP and the martyrs as a whole. And a warning too: the TPLF-EPRDF carries the virus of the Red Terror.

Babile Tola
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