

WORLD SCENE

Eritrea — Fighting for Freedom

In the Horn of Africa at the moment, the Soviet social-imperialists are backing the Ethiopian fascist junta (the 'Derg') in its effort to occupy Eritrea, which lies on the strategically important Red Sea.

In the early 1950s, US imperialism bulldozed the United Nations, in defiance of its own principle of self-determination into federating Eritrea (a former Italian colony) with Ethiopia. Later, Ethiopia illegally annexed the country, and the Eritrean people began a protracted struggle for their liberation.

Two liberation organisations emerged, Eritrean Popular Liberation Front (EPLF) and Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF). They are at present cooperating. EPLF is the stronger of the two, and follows the line of self-reliance and mobilising and relying on the masses.

Rising superpower

Soviet social-imperialism, now the rising imperialist superpower, has taken over the interests which the US used to have in Ethiopia, including the interest of backing the Ethiopian regime against Eritrea. The war in Eritrea is not an isolated event; it is part of Soviet strategy to control communication lines and sources of raw materials in preparation for a new world war. If it succeeds here it will press ahead with its plans to subjugate southern Africa and then to invade Europe.

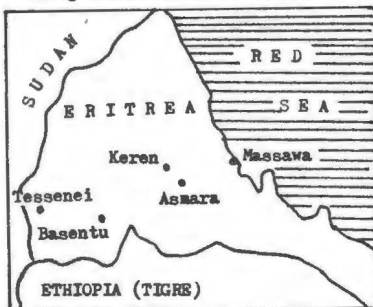
The active support of the USSR and its Cuban stooges made it possible for the Ethiopian junta to launch a large-scale attack against Eritrea, starting at the end of June.

The Derg has the task of relieving Asmara, which is at present garrisoned by 4000 Cuban troops and surrounded by freedom-fighters. The aim of the Derg's summer campaign has been to move on Asmara from three directions. Both of Asmara's main lines of communication are blocked; both on the route to the port of Massawa in the north east, and on the main road to Addis Ababa to the south, the Derg is up against the EPLF.

The Derg consequently put most of its effort this summer

into pushing up from the south along the Eritrean-Sudanese border, so as to relieve Asmara from the west. Eighty thousand Derg troops have been involved on this front, which is more suitable geographically for the use of the sophisticated heavy armament which the Soviet social-imperialists have been pouring in. In addition, the Derg was in this area confronted by the ELF, whom they picked on as the weaker of the two organisations.

The Derg did succeed in capturing Tessenai from the ELF,



and then moved eastward to join the garrison of Barentu, which was heavily reinforced by Cubans last spring.

The Derg also threw 12,000 troops into a big effort to recapture the Red Sea port of Massawa. However, even if they manage to do this, they will have their work cut out to establish communications between there and Asmara.

On the crucial southern front, even the Derg spokesmen have not claimed any successes. Seventy thousand Derg troops are fighting here, under cover of airpower supplied from the Soviet Union. About four months ago, the EPLF scored a big victory over an Ethiopian force of twelve thousand men just north of Adigrat. Fighting also took place to the north of Adwa on the other major road leading from Asmara to the south.

In order to provide backing for this offensive, at the end of the summer the Cubans concentrated about fifteen thousand troops (out of the total of twenty-one thousand Cuban troops at present operating in Ethiopia and Eritrea) in the province of Tigre,

through which Derg troops have to pass on their way to attack Asmara from the south, and where they are subject to harassment from the fighters of the Tigre Popular Liberation Front (TPLF) — one of the groups which is fighting for the equality of the different nationalities in Ethiopia) and the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Army (EPRA — the armed wing of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party).

EPLF firm against offensive

Following the advances of the Ethiopian troops through territory formerly held by the ELF, attempts have been made to raise the siege of Asmara, which is conducted by the EPLF. But attempts to break out of Asmara to the west and to the south have been defeated by the EPLF. One particularly important battle in the middle of August left seven hundred dead among the Derg's troops.

Several important victories were also scored by the EPLF in the area around Keren, despite the participation on the side of the Derg of Soviet Mig 21 and Mig 23 planes piloted by Cubans.

So far, the Derg-Cuban offensive has scored no significant victories against the forces of the EPLF, while those reverses experienced by the other liberation movement, ELF, have only served to accentuate the importance of relying upon the masses, and have confirmed EPLF's position as the effective leading and administrative body in Eritrea.

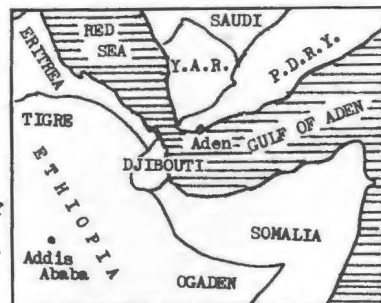
Despite the problems created by the influx of refugees into EPLF-held areas (the population of Derg-held Asmara has shrunk from a quarter of a million to less than a hundred thousand), all correspondents who have visited these areas attest to the fact that food supplies and basic services are efficiently maintained and that, most important of all, there is a lively democratic atmosphere and high morale. Ethiopian prisoners, who number many thousands, are being treated well and educated to help them see how the Derg is oppressing not only Eritrea, but also the working people of Ethiopia itself.

The main Dergue forces are the

'peasant militia' made up of poor toilers who were press-ganged or conned into serving as cannon-fodder in this war, and their morale and conviction have sunk to the lowest possible level. The Derg-Soviet-Cuban military leadership in Asmara and Massawa can now only rely on terror to maintain order in the army, and a number of the peasant militiamen have already deserted to join the ranks of EPLF.

Soviet grand plan doomed to fail

For about the past two years, the Soviet Union has been actively pursuing a strategy of imposing its own domination over the mouth of the Red Sea by



setting up some kind of grouping comprising Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia, the Yemen Arab Republic (i.e. north Yemen) and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (i.e. south Yemen) — the whole thing to be under Soviet patronage, of course.

The new Tears may achieve some temporary successes through the coups and other sinister manoeuvres which they have been carrying out, particularly in the two Yemens. But it is impossible for an imperialist superpower to win against a self-reliant people's war. EPLF may still make some tactical withdrawals in order to lure the enemy in and preserve its own forces, but this will only increase the scope of their victory.

The successes of the Eritrean people led by EPLF will provide a powerful support and example to the people of other countries, including Britain, who are threatened by superpower aggression.