

# **inqaba**

## **YA BASEBENZI**

**FEBRUARY-APRIL 1983**

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# Introduction

In this supplement we reprint an article, written in 1978, explaining the character of the revolution which took place in Ethiopia in and after 1974.

A huge movement of workers and peasants, sparked off by an army mutiny in January 1974, brought the empire ruled by Haile Selassie to the ground, and destroyed the power of the feudal landlords.

The working class was unable to take power; but at the same time the basis of capitalist rule was shattered.

The radical army officers who installed themselves in power (known as the "Dergue") were forced to nationalise such industry as existed and effectively bring the economy under state ownership and planning.

For the 30 million people of the country, the revolution has brought gains in living standards, and big improvements in health and education for the masses. The peasants, 80% of the population, now control the land which they work.

The Ethiopian revolution vividly confirmed the fact—explained by Marxism—that none of the burdens of oppression, poverty and exploitation on the mass of society today can be removed without ending capitalist private ownership.

This was the lesson first proved in practice in the Russian revolution of 1917. But in Ethiopia, unlike Russia, it was not the consciously organised working class which overthrew capitalism and took power.

In Russia, by the mid-1920s, as a result of the backwardness of the economy and the isolation of the revolution, the working class had lost power to a privileged bureaucratic caste, which continued to rule on the basis of a state-owned economy.

In Ethiopia, the revolution occurred in conditions which deformed and distorted it from the outset, as explained in the article reprinted here.

The Ethiopian revolution is one of a series of revolutions which have occurred in the former colonial world since the Second World War. The appalling bankruptcy of capitalism in the "third" world has flung millions of workers and peasants into struggles which, in the particular balance

of forces existing after the Second World War, have culminated in the overthrow of capitalism.

But in none of these has the revolution been carried through by the **consciously organised working class**.

The first of these revolutions, as explained in the material published in the supplement to *Inqaba* no. 8, was in China 1944-49. With the peasantry as the driving force, the Chinese revolution was led by ex-Marxist petty bourgeois standing at the head of a peasant guerilla army.

The overthrow of landlordism and capitalism in China resulted in the establishment of a workers' state, but ruled by a bureaucratic elite with their origins in the guerilla army. The guerilla wars in Cuba, Vietnam, Mozambique, Angola, etc.—though all with their specific conditions and peculiarities—had similar outcomes.

In other countries, similar revolutions have resulted not from guerilla struggle, but from events within the old state machine—in particular, from coups by army officers, sparking off mass movements from below.

As in the case of China, etc., the social base of the movement of transformation has been the peasantry, but under a leadership of army officers. Such deformed revolutions have taken place, for example, in Burma and Syria—and also in Ethiopia.

The Dergue soon proclaimed themselves 'Marxist-Leninist'. Yet in reality they are a self-selected clique, who have consolidated their position through murdering their opponents—including revolutionary workers.

As an instrument of the new ruling bureaucracy, they formed a "Commission to Establish a Workers' Party in Ethiopia"—COPWE. In the Central Committee of COPWE, formed in 1980, 79 out of 103 members were military or police officers, while no representatives even of the officially approved trade unions and peasant bodies were included!

At the end of 1981 the wages of soldiers were doubled while those of workers were frozen. At the Fourth Congress of COPWE in 1982 the

head of state, Mengistu, was compelled to denounce its members for seeking privileges and ignoring the plight of the masses.

In January 1983 it was announced that an "Ethiopian Workers' Party" would be inaugurated in September. It is to have close links with the Stalinist 'Communist' Party of the Soviet Union.

As the article reprinted here explains, the Dergue continued Haile Selassie's war against the Eritrean people, and the subjugation of other national minorities. In 1982 it was involved in new fighting against Somalia.

As a result of its wars, the regime is in debt to the Soviet Union for arms to the tune of over \$2 billion.

The *African Communist*, journal of the SA Communist Party, uncritically supports the Dergue, falsely describing it as "Marxist" and "socialist". Moreover, it shamefully supports the Dergue in their war against the Eritrean people, justifying this in the name of defending the Ethiopian revolution. (*AC*, Fourth Quarter, 1980, page 57-58).

As the article reprinted here shows, that is in fact the opposite of Lenin's revolutionary approach to the national question and the right of self-determination.

Despite its progressive character in overthrowing landlordism and capitalism, the Ethiopian revolution is trapped by the Stalinist dictatorship that has arisen out of it, and by its confinement within bureaucratic and national bounds. One of the poorest countries in the world, Ethiopia is hamstrung by backwardness, and is today faced once more with a famine in the Wollo region which threatens hundreds of thousands of lives.

To carry through the socialist transformation of Ethiopia—and to solve the problems of Africa as a whole—depends fundamentally on the victory of the working class and the establishment of regimes of workers' democracy above all in the industrialised countries. In this, the revolutionary struggle of the SA working class holds an important key.

# What is happening in Ethiopia ?

By Lynn  
Walsh.  
March 1978.

In the last few weeks the Ethiopian regime has begun a massive counter-offensive against Somali-backed forces in Ogaden, the region of Ethiopia claimed by Somalia. From all accounts, vast quantities of Russian arms have been air-lifted in and the Ethiopian army has been stiffened with about 6 000 Cuban advisers.

World-wide predictions in the capitalist press that the Dergue's regime was about to collapse because of the war in Ogaden, the bloody battles in Eritrea and turmoil within Ethiopia, are being confounded.

Quite apart from the massive aid now being received from the Eastern bloc, the Ethiopian regime has acquired an enormous resilience through the land reforms and nationalisation measures which have given it a mass basis, particularly among the peasantry.

United States imperialism is incapable of intervening directly against Ethiopia in this post-Vietnam era. The capitalist powers have had to content themselves with secondary support for Ethiopia's enemies, mainly through the Arab states supporting sections of the Eritrean liberation movement and Somalia.

Yet while the Dergue has been consolidating its position and preparing for counter-offensives on two fronts, the country has certainly been convulsed by violent struggles. There has been a bloody struggle for power within the Dergue itself, while at the same time the Dergue has launched a savage repression against all its political opponents.

What, then, is going on in the Horn of Africa? The key to understanding the complex and rapid events undoubtedly lies in an analysis of the revolutionary changes which have occurred in Ethiopia since the fall of Haile Selassie in 1974.

The Ethiopian revolution was set off in 1974 by a mutiny in the army. Profound discontent among the junior officers and in the lower ranks reflected a deep crisis in the feudal despotism of Haile Selassie. For the young officers—like the students and intellectuals who had already openly demonstrated their opposition to the regime—the Wollo famine, in which over 100 000 died early in 1974, became a symbol of all that was rotten and corrupt in Ethiopian society.

At first, the wider aims of the young officers were vague. Linked to their immediate demands for improved professional status was their desire for the thorough reform of archaic institutions to open the way to the modernisation of the country. But once they toppled the Emperor's own government, they unleashed powerful forces for change, unforeseen and beyond their control.

## Dergue sparks mass upheaval

The Dergue, the provisional military administrative council, quickly took power into its own hands. Like its counterpart in Portugal, the Armed Forces Movement

which brought down Caetano, the radical officers triggered off a revolutionary upheaval. Ferment among the soldiers, strikes by workers, the arousal of the cruelly exploited and oppressed peasantry, and demonstrations by the students, pushed the Dergue irresistibly to the left.

When the Dergue took over, however, they found that the levers of power had gone dead. As with the AFM in Portugal, they faced the complete crumbling away and collapse of the old regime. Far from developing the economy, capitalism and imperialism, in so far as they had penetrated Ethiopian society, had only intensified its problems. Given the enormous pressure for change, bottled up for so long under Haile Selassie, the Dergue was forced to carry out fundamental social changes to ensure it kept its own position of power.

Each move of the counter-revolution, based primarily on the big landlord families which formed the backbone of the old ruling class, only served to push the Dergue forward. As the original, 'moderate' leadership of the Dergue hesitated and stalled they were pushed aside by the radicals, like Lt-Col. Mengistu Haile Mariam, who were prepared to go the whole way. The pace of events, moreover, was accelerated by the crisis in Eritrea and Ogaden and the threat of intervention backed by the capitalist powers.

Thus, utilising the revolutionary energy provided by the mass movement of workers and peasants, the Dergue presided over rapid social changes which spelled the end of landlordism and capitalism and effected a decisive break with world-imperialism.

Early in 1975 land reform measures which ended feudal landlordism and chattel slavery were carried through. All the main industries and the banks were nationalised. Education and welfare began to be extended to much of the rural population for the first time. Peasant associations took over administration in many areas; and workers' and peasants' militias were formed 'to defend the revolution'.

Does all this, it must be asked, add up to a 'socialist revolution'?

## The direction of social change from above

As it implemented sweeping changes, the Dergue increasingly adopted Marxist language. It now describes itself as 'Marxist-Leninist'. In reality, however, the Dergue has nothing in common with the Marxism of Lenin and the Bolsheviks who led the Russian revolution.

The fundamental changes over which the Dergue has presided could not have happened without the intervention of the masses. But the country's barbarously low cultural level, the weakness of the working class and the absence of a genuine Marxist party, have meant the direction of the revolution from above by an officer caste

drawn from the middle layers of society.

The weakness of world capitalism almost automatically ruled out the stabilisation of a new regime on a capitalist basis. Step by step, without any conscious strategy, the Dergue was pushed by the threat of counter-revolution and the pressure of the masses into taking 'socialist' measures. The language of Marxism was adopted after the event, as a rationalisation. Because the changes were directed from above, and were not determined by the democratic initiative and control of the workers and peasants, the Ethiopian revolution has from the very beginning taken a distorted form.

Compelled to break from the chain of world capitalism, the Dergue turned to the ready-made model of the deformed workers' states in Russia and Eastern Europe. From the start, the officers adopted the bureaucratic methods and policies that came to predominate in Russia, after the isolation of the revolution, with the degeneration of workers' democracy and the crystallisation of a bureaucratic ruling caste represented by Stalin.

Not only has the Dergue adopted the Stalinist model, but given the division of the world into two camps, dominated by US imperialism and the Russian bureaucracy respectively, the new Ethiopian regime inevitably gravitated towards the latter and already has become dependent on Russian aid and support. This can only mean that it will increasingly come to replicate its dominant counterpart in Russia.

**The abolition of landlordism and capitalism in Ethiopia is nevertheless a tremendous step forward.** For the first time millions of peasants have been lifted from the position of pack animals to play a part in the development of society. In spite of all the difficulties, the land reforms have undoubtedly given the Dergue an enormous fund of popularity among wide sections of the peasantry.

But the bureaucratic character of the regime makes it certain that the revolution will only be secured at enormous human cost. This has already been made clear in two key respects: (1) by the violent, repressive character of the internal political struggle; and (2) by the bloody national conflicts in Eritrea and Ogaden, which have turned the Horn of Africa into a new "cock-pit of the powers" (albeit by proxy as far as the US is concerned).

## Political repression and bloody purges

In Ethiopia the revolution has been faced with fundamental tasks comparable to those of the Russian revolution of 1917:

(i) the carrying through of a fundamental land reform, historically the task of the capitalist class, but indefinitely postponed because of its extreme weakness and political incapacity;

(ii) telescoped with the first task and all the changes that go with it, the nationalisation of modern industry, the key to socialist development and historically the task of the working class.

In Russia, the Bolshevik party led by Lenin and Trotsky based themselves on the small, but concentrated and well organised, working class which through its programme gained the support of the poor peasantry. The tasks of the revolution were carried out through the

soviets of workers', soldiers' and sailors', and peasants' representatives, the most democratic institutions ever created. This alone guaranteed the defeat of the counter-revolution and the foreign capitalist intervention in the first period after 1917.

The Dergue, however, is using the entirely different methods employed by the Stalinist dictatorship which usurped the democratic workers' control exercised through the soviets. Thus the internal political struggle in Ethiopia since the overthrow of Haile Selassie has been stained with bloody purges and horrifying repression.

## Dergue's terror

In recent months the 'red terror' has reached unprecedented heights. "A figure of 80 000 to 100 000 political prisoners in all would probably fall short of the real number," writes *Le Monde's* correspondent (16th February). Reports coming out of the country indicate that summary trials, public executions and night-time assassinations of the Dergue's opponents are the nightmarish norm.

The Dergue now brands most of its opponents as "members of the EPRP" (Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party). Actively opposed to the regime before 1974, the EPRP, which was based mainly on students, welcomed the Dergue's social measures but expressed opposition to the military leaders' dictatorial methods. In Autumn 1976, the EPRP characterised the Dergue's regime as "fascist" and began to prepare a guerrilla struggle in the countryside.

It was the assassination of leading members of the Dergue by the EPRP which provided the justification for the government's bloody purge against the EPRP or suspected EPRP militants. These mistaken tactics indicate that the EPRP is far from having a clear Marxist perspective. But because it offers virtually the only active opposition to the Dergue's dictatorship within Ethiopia, the EPRP has undoubtedly won significant support from young workers looking for a non-military, democratic road to socialist revolution.

For Marxists, the leading role of the working class, even in a country where they form a minority of the population, is of key importance. In Ethiopia, the trade unions based on the working class concentrated in the big (mainly textile) factories around the capital played a crucial part in destroying the old regime and in providing the steam to implement the Dergue's nationalisation measures.

Yet the Dergue soon showed itself hostile to the independent action of the workers. In December 1975, less than a year after it took over the 75 major companies, the Dergue decreed the abolition of the old Confederation of Ethiopian Labour Unions and its replacement by the state-controlled All-Ethiopian Trade Union, in which opposition to the Dergue was outlawed.

Even in the countryside, where the regime is most popular, measures have been taken to curb the initiative of the masses. When the land reforms were carried out, peasant associations, or 'kebeles', were formed in many areas to supervise the reforms and take over local administration. More recently, these bodies, originally organs of popular power, have been transformed into

agencies of control from above, acting as "committees of public safety" to suppress, exile, imprison, or execute all opposition elements.

Under Mengistu, the Dergue has also moved against the 'Marxist' intellectuals with whom it worked to begin with. When they first seized power, and were groping their way forward, the young officers looked to the intellectuals for support. As in other under-developed countries, the intellectuals exerted a disproportionate political influence. Intellectuals returned from exile in Europe supplied the Dergue with Marxist terminology and ideas. For a time, the Meison (All-Ethiopian Socialist Movement), a 'Marxist' party based on middle class intellectuals, acted almost as a civilian 'politbureau' to the Dergue.

In January 1975, 40 000 students were sent to the countryside to help carry through the reforms, and played an important part in raising the political awareness of the peasantry.

Soon enough, however, the Dergue began to fear the rival influence of the intellectuals and the danger that they would channel deeper-rooted opposition. In the Summer of 1975, the Dergue recalled the rural 'Zematcha' of the students. It began to warn against the "dangers of ultra-leftism" and to identify "law and order" with the security of the revolution.

In October of last year serious fighting erupted in Addis Ababa, provoked by the execution in jail of the leaders of the Meison, which had previously been forced underground. Over 350 were killed in fighting in the capital in the space of a few days.

In November, the deputy head of state, Lt-Col. Atanafu Abate was deposed and executed. He himself had become vice-president of the Dergue the previous February, when Mengistu had replaced the former vice-president, Brigadier Teferi Bante, who had been executed. Thus, through a bloody internal struggle, Mengistu concentrated the leadership of the Dergue in his own hands.

Following this, the Dergue intensified its campaign against the EPRP. Gun battles became a nightly occurrence in Addis Ababa. Various reports suggested that over 3 000 students and workers were killed last November alone. "The purges among members of the EPRP have been much more drastic than the killings six months ago, when bodies, including those of children, were left by the roadside as a warning to the public," stated one report at the end of November.

These developments, continuing now, clearly testify to the bonapartist character of the Dergue and the complete lack of democracy in the new state organs created by the regime.

## The character of Ethiopian regime

What attitude should socialists take to the momentous changes in Ethiopia in the last four years?

First, it is necessary to recognise the fundamentally progressive character of the social changes that have taken place under the Dergue. Landlordism and capitalism have been abolished. The fact that the Dergue was forced to carry through the land reform and the nationalisation of industry is proof of the utter inability of capitalism to develop countries like Ethiopia, and these measures provide the only means by which the country can be pulled

into the modern world.

At the same time, however, it is equally necessary to adopt an implacably critical attitude towards the dictatorial, bureaucratic regime that has arisen from the revolution. Its reactionary, nationalistic position on the national question (which we will come to later) is the counterpart of its repressive role internally.

Ethiopia cannot be regarded as a socialist state, only as a deformed workers' state, in which new social relations corresponding to the interests of the working class have been established in a grotesquely distorted manner.

Some of the basic economic tasks of the socialist revolution have been taken on by military middle class leaders because such terrible social contradictions have developed that Ethiopia could no longer wait for change. Under the conditions of extreme backwardness which prevail in Ethiopia, a bonapartist leadership has been pushed into pre-empting the tasks of a genuine socialist leadership because of the weakness and isolation of the Ethiopian working class—and because of the long delay of socialist revolution in the advanced countries of western capitalism.

With its mass basis among the peasantry and aid from the Russian bureaucracy, it is very unlikely that the regime of the Dergue will fail to consolidate itself in the next period. But the revolution itself can only be taken forward through a struggle for democracy by the working class. Its demands must be:

- \* Freedom of speech, assembly, and the press;
- \* Democratic trade unions independent of the state;
- \* Democratic workers' control and management of the nationalised industries;
- \* Soviets of democratically elected workers', soldiers', and peasants' representatives;
- \* The abolition of the army and the placing of the workers' and peasants' militias under the control of the soviets to defend the gains of the revolution;
- \* The right of the peoples of Eritrea, Ogaden and other national minorities to self-determination;
- \* For a Socialist Federation of Ethiopia and Eritrea and Somalia;
- \* For a Socialist Federation of Africa.

## The national question

The attempt of the Dergue's regime to retain control over Eritrea and Ogaden have nothing in common with genuine Marxism.

When the Bolsheviks came to power in Russia in 1917 they immediately conceded the right of self-determination to the oppressed nationalities which had been shackled up in the old Russian empire's "prison-house of nations". By proclaiming the right to independence, the Soviet government was able to gain the confidence of the exploited classes within the subject nations, and convince them of the enormous advantages of opting for a voluntary socialist federation with full autonomy.

Under Stalin, however, the bureaucracy which usurped the political control of the soviets returned to a narrow, nationalist policy. The Greater Russian chauvenism of Stalinism fanned all the smouldering embers of nationalism, giving new life to national aspirations which



would have soon been satisfied and outgrown in a democratic federation of soviet republics. Today, throughout Russia and Eastern Europe, national sentiments amplify all the grievances of workers in the subject states and nationalities and, in turn, provide a means of expressing opposition to the totalitarian dictatorship which rules over the planned economy.

On this vital issue, as on others, the Dergue has followed the example, not of the Bolsheviks, but of the Stalinist bureaucracy. This is not simply a question of mistaken choice of policy: it reflects the narrow social interests of the petit-bourgeois military caste on which the Dergue is based. Its lack of internationalism and hostility to national aspirations are the counterpart of its determination to direct all social change from above and at all costs to retain power in its own hands.

Far from defusing the explosive national antagonisms which built up under Haile Selasse's empire, the Dergue, by attempting to crush the hopes aroused by the Emperor's fall, actually triggered a critical reaction which has come near to blowing Ethiopia apart.

## Struggle in Eritrea

The armed struggle of the Eritrean liberation movement against the regime in Addis Ababa is now 17 years old. During the war to free Ethiopia from Italian rule in 1941, when the British army backed Haile Selassie's forces, Eritrea, formerly an Italian colony, was promised independence. After the war, however, the United Nations recommended its federation with Ethiopia under the Emperor's throne.

In 1962, the party which dominated the Eritrean Assembly and which reflected propertied interests, decided to take Eritrea into union with Ethiopia. Moves in this direction had already given rise to the Eritrean Liberation Front, founded in Cairo in 1958, which had initiated the armed struggle in 1961.

By 1971, the ELF had established a strong position for itself, and its operations forced Haile Selassie to declare martial law in Eritrea. But in the 1972 ELF split, provoking bloody conflict between the two wings of the movement. The ELF, backed by Sudan and a number of Arab states, claims to be "socialist" but characterises the present struggle as "the stage of national democratic revolution", postponing socialist aims to a later "stage".

The split-away EPLF (Eritrean Popular Liberation Front), however, claims to be "Marxist-Leninist" and appears to have much wider support among the exploited masses and petit-bourgeois in Eritrea. Ironically, the EPLF counts among its heroes the same Fidel Castro who is now supplying its mortal enemies with military advisers. Such are the tragic contradictions.

Both the ELF and the EPLF seized on the collapse of the regime in 1974 to launch a new offensive struggle for independence. After two years of intense fighting, the liberation force took most of the province out of the Dergue's control, occupying most of Eritrea's towns, and cutting off Ethiopia's route to the vital Red Sea ports of Massawa and Assab.

Only the divisions within the Eritrean liberation movement and its lack of a viable political strategy saved the Dergue from complete defeat in Eritrea. The extent of

mass support for the independence struggle is indicated by the fact that, in May 1976, the combined guerrilla forces of the ELF and the EPLF were estimated at 30 000 to 40 000. When the Dergue offered limited autonomy to Eritrea, it was rejected outright by both wings of the liberation movement.

Faced with this, the Dergue began in May 1976 to recruit a peasant force to march in Eritrea against the liberation movement. Drawing on the peasant associations formed when land reforms were carried through, the Dergue assembled a peasant army of 30 000 to 40 000.

Thousands of peasants would undoubtedly have been prepared to mobilise to defend—as the Dergue claimed—the gains that had accrued to them under the new regime. But the Dergue also attempted to whip up support on the most reactionary basis, concentrating recruitment in the predominantly Christian provinces, and waging an hysterical propaganda campaign against Eritreans, accusing them of "selling Ethiopian territory to the Arabs." In such an approach, there is not an iota of Marxism.

The Dergue's ill-prepared and poorly-equipped peasant army disintegrated when it came up against the Eritrean forces. Most of Eritrea still remains outside the Dergue's control. Although the fighting continues, the Dergue appears to be concentrating its military efforts in the south, against the Somali-backed forces in Ogaden.

With the military and economic aid it is now receiving from Russia, and the training of its army by over 6 000 Cuban advisers, it is possible that the Dergue will be able to retake Eritrea. But the reconquest of Eritrea could be achieved by the Dergue only with an enormous toll of death and destruction, which would confirm with the blood of tens of thousands the nationalistic, repressive character of the new regime, in spite of the progressive social changes from which it draws its strength.

Had the new regime offered full independence to Eritrea, while offering autonomous participation in a socialist federation, who can doubt that the land reform measures and nationalisation would have an enormous attraction for the workers and peasants of Eritrea? As it is, the Dergue appears to be as despotic as Haile Selassie's regime, if not more so.

To national opposition is added repulsion at the savage, dictatorial methods of the Dergue. The intensified struggle of the Eritrean liberation movement, moreover, has also had the effect of stimulating renewed separatist demands within Ethiopia, notably among the peoples of Tigre and Afar, who are kicking back at the tyranny imposed on them by the Dergue.

## The war in Ogaden and the character of the Somali regime

In the last few weeks, Ethiopia has launched a massive counter-offensive against the Somali-backed forces in Ogaden—backed by Russia (with Cuba as its military agent), Moscow having abandoned its former support for Somalia. In all probability, Ethiopia will retake Ogaden. Whatever the outcome, however, this war in one of the world's poorest regions unmistakably demonstrates the complete lack of internationalism of the Russian bureaucracy, and the narrow nationalist outlook of its

replicas in the under-developed world.

Ethiopia and Somalia are at war: but the regime in Somalia has the same essential social characteristics as the regime in Ethiopia. While Ethiopia was being convulsed by dramatic and bloody events which attracted the attention of the whole world, Somalia was experiencing similar changes, carried through with little upheaval and almost unnoticed internationally.

In 1975, the military government of Siyad Barre, which had seized power in 1969, completed a radical land reform which eradicated landlordism and satisfied the peasants' demand for land. What little industry there is in Somalia was completely nationalised, and an economic development plan inaugurated.

Proclaiming itself to be a state based on "scientific socialism", Somalia was rapidly adopted as a client by the Russian bureaucracy, which had already given aid and was now eager to assure its access to the naval facilities at Berberer on the Gulf of Aden. The Somali forces began to receive enormous military aid from Russia.

Somalia has long laid claim to Ogaden, a former British "protectorate" handed to Ethiopia by Britain in 1955, but which has a population of about two million (mainly nomadic) Somalis. Ever since its formation as an independent republic in 1960 (unifying British and Italian Somaliland), Somalia has demanded the inclusion of other areas with a predominantly Somali population: north-eastern Kenya (with about half a million) and Djibuti (formerly French Somaliland).

While Haile Selassie ruled Ethiopia, Moscow was quite prepared to approve Somalia's claims to Ogaden—though, ironically, it was Stalin who had vetoed a British proposal at the United Nations after 1945 to hand Ogaden to Somalia!

## Russia changes sides

But the events of 1974 changed the situation. Somalia saw the turmoil in Ethiopia as a golden opportunity to step up the struggle for Ogaden by increasing its supply of regular troops and equipment to the West Somalia Liberation Front. As the Dergue began to move towards more radical measures, however, Moscow began to shift its policy.

The Russian leadership calculated that the social measures would give the new regime a basis, despite the terrible convulsions the country was going through. With its much greater land area and bigger population, Ethiopia has a far greater political and strategic importance in Africa and the Arabian Gulf. First, the Russian bureaucracy tried to negotiate a compromise between Somalia and Ethiopia. But when this failed—demonstrating the cynical basis of their foreign policy—they switched their support to the big battalions, to Ethiopia.

As a result, in November last year, Barre kicked out the 6 000 Russian advisers and ended Somalia's ties with Moscow. He then appealed to the western powers for help. Barre has received some aid from France and West Germany (partly in return for co-operation against the Palestinian hijackers of the Lufthansa jet which ended up at Mogadishu last year). But the US has vetoed any major assistance for Somalia. Apart from their coolness towards the nationalised, centrally-planned economy, and

fear of a new Vietnam-type involvement, they are afraid of the Pandora's box that would be opened by supporting Somalia's claim to Ogaden, which implies a general claim for "ethnic frontiers" embracing all Somalis.

"The United States cannot send arms to Somalia," explains the *Financial Times* (19/1/78) "because, whatever one thinks of Somalia's moral case and the authenticity of the WSLF, virtually every other African state takes the view that Somalia is the aggressor and that its action threatens the principle that borders inherited from colonial times are inviolable. Somalia's contention that the people of the Ogaden are liberating themselves from Ethiopian colonialism are not widely accepted."

## Right to self-determination

Given this situation, Ethiopia will probably retake Ogaden, though it is unlikely to cross the border into Somalia. But could there be a greater condemnation of the grotesque, nationalistic foreign policy of the Russian bureaucracy? Only, perhaps, the war between the regimes of the deformed workers' states in Vietnam and Cambodia after the long, heroic struggle of their peoples against landlordism and imperialism.

The Marxism of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky stands unequivocally for the right of nations to self-determination. Sensitivity to the aspirations of oppressed nationalities goes hand in hand with genuine internationalism.

**Marxists must support the right of the Eritrean people to independence.**

Although the Somali regime has undoubtedly supported the 'West Somali' liberation movement for reasons of its own power and prestige, Marxists cannot but support the demand of the Somalis in Ogaden to decide their own future.

**Similarly, the other national minorities within Ethiopia should be granted autonomy, and the right to independence if they decide to separate.**

But while the satisfaction of national aspirations is a precondition for the resolution of the conflicts now raging throughout the Horn of Africa, the formation of a number of small new independent states, even with the abolition of landlordism and capitalism, would in itself by no means provide a solution to the terrible problems facing the impoverished and exploited masses of the region.

**Full recognition of national rights must be linked by Marxists to the call for a socialist federation of Ethiopia, Somalia, Eritrea and if they decide on independence, other small states in the region.**

Even this, however, must be viewed as a step in the direction of a socialist federation of Africa, the only means by which the continent will escape from the stifling legacy of colonialism and the continued domination of imperialism.

These demands must be taken in conjunction with the demands for workers' democracy, explained above in relation to Ethiopia, and which also apply to Somalia.

In the case of Ethiopia and Somalia, both the dictatorial character of the regimes and their complete lack of internationalism arise from the confinement within narrow national boundaries of the fundamental social

changes over which they presided. On the basis of the extreme backwardness that still prevails, with the survival of feudal conditions and only a very limited development of modern industry, it is impossible to establish genuine socialist relations. Socialism, as Marx explained, requires a level of technique and culture high enough to abolish scarcity and want.

The attempt, under exceptional conditions, of petit-bourgeois military leaders to tackle social tasks which are objectively those of the socialist revolution—thus giving rise to **deformed workers' states**—can be explained only from the point of view of the international balance of class forces.

The revolutionary developments in Ethiopia and Somalia, as in other countries like Cuba, are as much the product of the world situation as of the class struggle within these countries. The regimes which have emerged are the result of the international dead-lock in the class struggle which has prevailed in the post-war period.

While capitalism experienced a long, unprecedented boom in the advanced countries of the west and Japan, it proved incapable of developing the ex-colonial, underdeveloped areas of the world. The postponement of the socialist revolution in the west, where the industrial working class is concentrated, produced intolerable contradictions in the backward countries.

When crisis erupted, triggering the complete collapse of the old ruling class and especially in Ethiopia, provoking the sweeping movement of the workers and peasants, the military leaders at the head of the movement were not only forced to clear away the remnants of the old ruling class, but were compelled to break with private property relations in order to find a way out.

Under Mengistu in Ethiopia and Barre in Somalia, bonapartist leaderships, which in a past era would probably have taken certain limited measures against landlordism and foreign big business in order to foster the growth of their native capitalism, have been pushed by events to carry through the abolition of landlordism and capitalism. They could establish a firm basis for their power in no other way. They have been able to take measures which, historically, belong to the proletariat, because of the extreme weakness of the working class in these countries, and because the working class of the advanced countries, the key to the socialist revolution in-

ternationally, has not yet moved decisively to carry out the socialist transformation of society.

Given the world balance of forces, these bonapartist regimes which have begun proletarian tasks in their own distorted manner, have inevitably turned for support towards the much more powerful deformed workers' states in Russia and Eastern Europe (and in some cases China) which constitute a heavy counterweight to imperialism. The bureaucracy of the Stalinist states not only provides economic and military aid—as they did formerly to Somalia and now to Ethiopia—to allow them to survive in a hostile capitalist world, but provide these new regimes with a ready-made prototype on which to model their own state apparatus. Inevitably, there is a tendency for these relatively weak regimes to become clients of the Russian bureaucracy.

In the case of Somalia, which received enormous military aid, the national interests of the ruling caste have come into conflict with the Russian bureaucracy's wider foreign policy interests in the Horn of Africa. Rooted in the isolation of the Russian revolution, the Stalinist bureaucracy is incapable of surmounting the national antagonisms created by capitalism and imperialism.

But the class deadlock of the post-war period which has produced the distorted transitional regimes of Ethiopia and Somalia is breaking down. The world economic crisis has already provoked enormous movements of the workers in Portugal, Spain and Italy. Tomorrow, there will be similar movements in France, Britain and other advanced countries, including the United States. The socialist revolution has been placed on the agenda in the metropolitan heartlands of capital. Events in Russia and Eastern Europe have also brought much nearer the political revolution in the Stalinist states.

The establishment of workers' democracy and planned production in the advanced countries would transform the world situation. Then the progressive changes now being carried out under such distorted conditions would become the basis for the rapid transformation of these desperately poor countries on the basis of international working class collaboration. The material and cultural standards of the toiling masses would be immeasurably raised and in a manner that fully satisfied national aspirations and the desire to democratically decide for themselves.

**(Reprinted from *Militant*, the Marxist weekly paper in the British labour movement, Issues no. 395 and 396, 3 & 10 March 1978.)**