

ETHIOPIA**“The major objective of our revolution remains development with equity”****Chairman Mengistu Haile Mariam**

Ethiopia has just celebrated five years of revolution which have brought many changes to the old feudal order which prevailed under the empire. The Ethiopian head of state, Lt.-Col. Mengistu Haile Mariam, chairman of the Provisional Military Administrative Council of Socialist Ethiopia, took this opportunity to explain to the *Courier* what the revolution has meant to his country.

► *What broad changes were brought about in the field of development policy by the Ethiopian revolution?*

— Unlike former development planning which was centred on private interest, today's development strategy gives priority to the aspirations of the broad masses and aims at building a free and strong economy; it is not diffuse but coordinated through centralized planning and although it concentrates on agriculture and small scale industry, with a view to solving urgent and more immediate problems, our policy provides for laying the basis for heavy industry as well. Since the basic policy of our development policy is to initiate development from the rural to the urban areas, the major objective of our revolution remains development with equity. Our revolution has brought about fundamental changes aimed at destroying a system which permitted the exploitation of man by man and replacing it by a system conducive to development and growth and characterized by a completely new life pattern, by justice, and which expedites the process of bringing to the broad masses educational, health, social, transport, communications and other services which until now were denied the people because they were provided piecemeal through a haphazard and facile system. The measures taken include the revolutionary and drastic proclamation which transferred all rural land to public ownership; the nation-

alization of the means of production, distribution and exchange; the proclamation nationalizing all urban land and extra houses; and the labour proclamation.

In addition there was the directive providing for the establishment of rural peasant producers' cooperatives, a directive providing for the establishment of handicraft producers' cooperatives, and steps have been taken to establish peasants' associations and strengthen and arm them. These measures have intensified the revolutionary process and the class struggle in the rural areas and at the same time removed feudalism from the face of Ethiopia.

New makers of history

The broad masses, who in Ethiopian society were in the past mere spectators of and never active participants in activities and events of significance, have today become the makers of history and the vanguard and activists of the revolution, as well as its major beneficiary. The Ethiopian revolution has thus not only created conditions conducive to development and growth strategy but also removed the fundamental obstacles to development and growth. The broad masses of the Ethiopian people, committed to building a new order anchored on justice, have therefore embarked on the economic development campaign with revolutionary spirit and dedication by following a new path and new direction which are favourable to sustained development and growth policy.

► *What has the socialist revolution meant for the vast majority of Ethiopians who live in the rural areas, and how have they reacted to the change?*

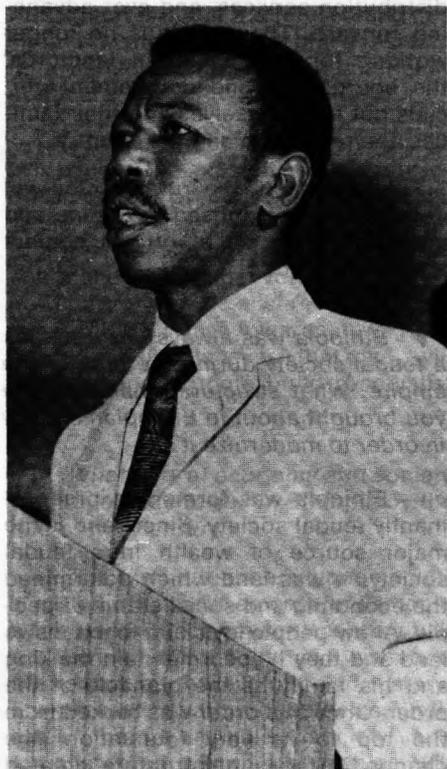
— As you may well be aware in regard to our revolutionary process, what is taking place in our country at the moment is a national democratic

revolution which we have yet to complete before embarking on the path of socialist revolution. What we mean by this is that we are currently in the process of laying down a firm and secure basis for the eventual task of socialist construction.

The present programme of the national democratic revolution, which will lead us to the socialist revolution, is of tremendous significance to the broad Ethiopian masses in the rural areas. The following few but major examples may be mentioned:

Having assumed genuine democratic rights through its revolutionary struggle, the rural sector of the population is tackling and solving, through newly created mass organizations and in accordance with objective realities, political, economic and social questions and has begun building at the grassroots its historic future on the strength of true democracy which is springing from and blossoming among the masses.

The rural masses are being given precedence, albeit on a priority basis, in essential services such as those related to education, health, the supply of clean water, transport and communications and other infrastructural facilities, all of which they were denied in the past.



Chairman Mengistu Haile Mariam speaking to the crowds on the 5th anniversary of the Ethiopian revolution



Chairman Mengistu during a visit to the southern regions

The rural masses, through getting organized into peasants' or handicraft producers' cooperatives and mobilizing their resources, energy and enterprise, are promoting social causes, freeing themselves from exploiters and intermediaries in the production and distribution services, and ever advancing forward. They are thus no longer working for the benefit of landlords, the bourgeoisie and government officials but for themselves and their families, the revolution and the country.

This being so, the rural sector will never again be exposed to famine and starvation because of official neglect and indifference.

► *Ethiopia was always described as a feudal society during the time of the empire. What structural changes have you brought about in Ethiopian society in order to modernize it?*

— Ethiopia was formerly a predominantly feudal society. Since land is the major source of wealth in a feudal society, it was land which determined the economic and social status of people. A few people lay claim to extensive land and they helped maintain the king and his family as the pinnacle of the order. Once this order was rocked from the top to its very foundation, the change in the superstructure created conditions favourable for the revolutionary structure which came into being. This transferred authority from

the hands of the minority to those of the majority. This in turn laid down a popular and democratic foundation. The organization of the masses into rural peasants' and handicraft producers' cooperatives, urban dwellers' associations, women's and youth associations at the district, provincial and national levels and, profession-wise, into the All-Ethiopia Peasants' Association and the country-wide Ethiopian Teachers' Association brought about new and favourable structural and institutional changes. With the freeing of the productive forces from the feudal order to which they were previously fettered, development activities in both the rural and urban areas are being intensified. The broad rural masses are today engaged in building irrigation dams, afforestation, soil conservation and other activities in a major drive to tackle common problems.

Encouragement of cultural diversity

► *Within the unity of Ethiopia there are many distinctly different cultural groups. What role can this diversity play in the country's development in the future?*

— The existence of ethnic groups with different cultures within a unified Ethiopia is similar to conditions in other countries. Our revolution there-

fore regards as a blessing the existence of diverse cultures in our country. It is well-known that the former feudo-bourgeois order used the diversity of culture in the country as an instrument for dividing the people along ethnic, religious, sex and other lines, created rivalries based on hate and wove intrigues in order to perpetrate itself and serve selfish ends.

It is clearly indicated in the programme of the national democratic revolution that, by contrast, the revolution of the broad masses stands for the respect, preservation and enrichment of the cultures of the various groups, and for complete religious equality and freedom throughout Ethiopia. This has greatly encouraged Ethiopian nationalities with different cultures to know more of each other and cooperate and support each other.

The revolution has provided the various ethnic groups with unlimited opportunities to channel their creative potentials, rich experiences and special talents towards the progress of the people and the development of the country. While the Ethiopian revolution has been brought about by the full participation of all groups of society, one of the reasons why Ethiopia has always been admired by the world lies in the fact that although numerous nationalities with diverse cultures and traditions inhabit it, the country has throughout the ages inspired burning patriotism in these component groups

to rise up in unison and bleed and die shoulder-to-shoulder in defence of its freedom and territorial integrity. Neither the active participation nor the positive role of different cultural groups within the territorial confines of revolutionary Ethiopia in the progress and development of the country is open to doubt.

► *Change often brings difficulties in adaptation. How are you educating the Ethiopian people to the changes brought about by the revolution?*

— Since it is the broad masses themselves who through their struggle started the revolution and spread it to every corner of the country, the assumption that change often brings difficulties in adaptation does not have much relevance in our country. We say that the revolution was spontaneous because it was born of the suffering and misery of the people. The people own the revolution and it is they who are making history. The remnants of the former oppressors and exploiters of the broad masses who engaged in a futile effort to subvert the revolution from within the country were foiled by the broad masses through revolutionary defence squads.

When attempts were made to derail the revolution through external invasion and internal terror, the broad masses mobilized within a short period half a million sons and daughters towards the front as part of the revolutionary army and was able to defend Ethiopia's unity and territorial integrity and the revolution against the conspiracy of their enemies. Since the people, in the revolutionary perspective, are practically demonstrating that they are greatly committed to improve their lot and livelihood, it does not take them long to absorb new ideas and apply new methods.

We face no problem worth mentioning in this regard. On the contrary, the people have been found to be so far ahead in their ideas that the problem is not one of difficulties in adaptation but rather of enough trained manpower and financial resources to cope with the demand for new techniques and educational guidance.

The deployment among the broad masses of emissaries of change (activist members of the National Development Campaign through "Cooperation and Work" ("Zemetcha"), and cadres), the establishment of discussion forums, the role of the mass media in explaining revolutionary programmes in different dialects, the dispatch of production and political cadres to the rural and urban areas, the intensification of the class struggle and the removal of



The principal guest for the 5th anniversary of the revolution celebrations was Premier Alexei Kosygin of the USSR

obstacles to change have all contributed to the enhancement of the revolutionary process. There have thus been no difficulties of adaptation on the part of the people.

► *What scope do you see in the future for regional cooperation in this part of Africa?*

— In our part of Africa, there are tremendous opportunities for cooperation between and among countries of the region. The question is whether or not there is enough desire to exploit this opportunity. As far as Ethiopia is concerned, we made our position regarding the matter quite clear immediately following the upsurge of the revolution. We appealed for common endeavour and lasting peace as a prerequisite for regional economic and social cooperation in order for countries in the area to be able to exploit their natural resources for the progress and prosperity of our peoples.

By this we mean that we adhere to the principles of good neighbourliness, the respect of the territorial integrity of one country by the other, and non-interference in the internal affairs of others in accordance with the charters of the United Nations and the Organization of African Unity as well as the principles of the non-aligned movement. We are in favour of joining forces to eradicate enemies of mankind like disease, ignorance, and hunger. As the entire world knows, the response of the neighbouring republic of Somalia to this noble call for cooperation and mutual endeavour was armed violation of our territorial unity. The spirit of

good neighbourliness, brotherhood and cooperation nonetheless prevails with most of our other neighbours.

The duty of the industrialized world

There is great scope for joint effort in the development of transport and communications, the harnessing of rivers and lakes and the conservation of forests. The programme calls for not only trained manpower but also investment. In this task, the industrialized parts of the world have the duty and obligation to encourage regional cooperation in this part of the continent and of extending assistance. Since the revolution in our country has removed reactionary and decadent practices which hamper cooperative endeavours with our neighbours and since the present situation is favourable for expanding the area of mutual effort, we have a positive outlook.

► *How do you see a socialist revolution developing in a country like Ethiopia where so few of the population are urbanized?*

— Ethiopians residing in urban centers cannot be more than 3 percent of the total. Around 97 percent of the population lives in the rural sector. This does not however mean that a socialist revolution cannot take place in a society of this nature. We learn from history that the Great October Revolution erupted and blossomed in a situation where Soviet peoples residing in urban areas were not numerically dominant.

This certainly does not mean that we will bypass the present stage to introduce socialist production relationships. While what is now taking place in Ethiopia is the programme of the national democratic revolution which is both part of the socialist revolution and a transitional phase towards it, we have no doubt whatsoever that we will through our struggle build a socialist society.

► *What sort of economy and society would you like to see in Ethiopia by the end of this century?*

— The kind of economic and societal order which will emerge in Ethiopia by the end of the present century will not be determined by my wish and desire but by the evolution of history. The present situation nonetheless indicates that a socialist society and socialist production relationships will be created by then. □

Interview by
IAN PIPER