

HOW STRONG IS **THE DERGUE?**

Amidst the complex political tangle in Horn of Africa, few questions are more difficult to answer with any certainty than that of the strength of the government which presently rules Ethiopia from Addis Ababa. Run by a military committee (called 'the Dergue') that emerged in the revolution against Haile Selassie's feudal regime in 1974, the Addis government has had to cope with numberous armed insurrections and profound ideological struggles, as well as drought, famine, and all the chronic economic problems of oil-importing. African states. The Dergue has survived all this, but some of its challengers carry on their battle:

Part II The Nationalist Challenge

government's The vulnerability stems in large part from conflicts with roots extending deep into regional history conflicts largely resistant to, though affected by, larger geopolitical concerns. Best known are the disputes over Somalispeaking areas in the east and south, and the long fight for independence from Ethiopian rule by the former Italian colony of Eritrea in the north. Both conflicts continue, the Somali struggle now at a rather low ebb of guerrilla action, the Eritrean conflict focusing militarily on numerous unsuccessful Ethiopian efforts to oust the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF), and secondarily the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF), from strongholds

in northern and western

growing in importance, revolutionaries that supare the opposition ported the Dergue until movements in Tigre prothe two groups clashed in vince and among the August, 1977.

Oromo people in eastern and southern Ethiopia. In many among the Oromo Tigre province, bordering came to see the new Ethio-Eritrea, the Tigre People's pian government as a Liberation Front (TPLF) reproduction of Haile now claims to control Selassie's 80% of the rural areas of dominated the province, which has a another guise. The Oromo population of some five peasantry in the south, million people. The Tigre which had been incorarea, though linked - as porated into the Ethiopian is the Amhara heartland empire in the late 19th - to ancient and medieval century, was released Ethiopian history, has a from feudal obligations tradition of resistance to that had imposed a close Amhara control crushing burden - and since the expansion of the they still retain an in-Ethiopian empire under dependence, and capabili-Menelik in the late 19th ty to keep their, agricultural century. The TPLF, which adwhich they did not have

vocates self-determination before. But the military for Tigre and equal nagovernment's exactions of tional rights within an conscripts for the army Ethiopian state, was and militia, along with founded in 1975. It has disputes over control in had to fight not only the peasants' associations, against the Addis governhelped to maintain old ment but against a consergrievances and build new vative movement based in ones. Several prominent Tigre (the Ethiopian members of the Dergue of Democratic Union), and Oromo region were purgagainst the EPRP, which ed in February, 1980, acfor a time established a cused of ties with the rural base in the area. But Oromo Liberation Front, now it appears to have further increasing feelings won substantial support that the Oromo were not among the peasantry, and represented. to have gained military

strength from an alliance a larger following for its with the EPLF of Eritrea. In recent months, say TPLF sources, Ethiopian government forces in the province have reached some 40,000 but they have only been able to regain control of a number of towns in major campaigns in April and August. And the government repression, the movement's leaders say, has won their cause new support among

the peasantry. right to independence. Also little-known out-Illustrative of Oromo side Ethiopia is the movegrievances is the widelyaised literacy people, who constitute some forty per cent or more of the population in present-day Ethiopia and are also scattered over a wide area, from Wollo province in the north to around the Amhara heartland on the east, south and west. Oromos were active in the 1974 revolution, and prominent, for example, in the All-Ethiopian Socialist Movement (MEISON), an organization of civilian

for their language, and the OLF has developed its own set of literacy texts, in Latin script, used in areas With time, however, they control.

Amhara-

surplus,

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Conflicting Claims

A Weekly Digest

African Affairs

of

To Legitimacy The extent of OLF operations is hard to determine, but the movement says it has carried out guerrilla attacks in Arussi, to the southeast of Addis Ababa, and Western Shoa (where they claim a stronghold near Gedo), as well as in the provinces of Hararghe, Bale and Sidamo. In western Oromo areas (Gamu Goffa, Kaffa, Wollega), they claim political backing, but no armed actions.

In Bale and Sidamo, the Somali-backed Somali Abo Liberation Front (SALF), a rival group, had attempted to win support from Oromo people as well as Somalis. But the movement is now apparently in decline, the majority of its central having committee



YUSUF AND FRIENDS

Music majors at St. Augustine's College, Raleigh, join Yusuf And Friends, a dynamic jazz group based in Durham. The occasion was the closing program in St. Aug's Black History Month observance. L-R: Salim Ibn Malik, bassist; Ms. Renee Davis, a senior music major: Yusuf Salim, pianist; Eve Cornelious, vocal stylist; Hassan Ibn Dawud, percussionist; and Ms. Elaine Hobbs, a sophomore music major.

defected to the OLF. which has gained support from some sectors of the government of Somalia.

Ethiopia's leaders now appeal not only to traditional Ethiopian (their opponents say Amhara) nationalism, but also to Marxist-Leninist theory to support their legitimacy insurgent against movements calling for self-determination for oppressed nationalities. Lenin's legacy is am-

biguous, both in theory and in practice, but in the Soviet Union, where in some cases dissident nationalities were retained by force, their incorporation has been aided by significant economic development, as well as by education and political organization of the minority nationalities. In Ethiopia, questions remain as to whether the central government will be able to deliver sufficient

bulwark against opposing movements, thus counter-Amhara domination.

ponents, however, have comparable problems in establishing a credible prospect for winning their goals. International and African support is minimal, since their objectives defy the established concensus that existing na-

tional boundaries are

benefits to build such a ing the historic legacy of The Dergue's op-

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sacrosanct. Eritreans, it is true, can point to the fact that their territory, too. was a colonial entity, incorporated forcibly into Ethiopia. And the Tigreans would apparently be satisfied with autonomy rather than independence, provided it was 'genuine.' The other opposition movements. however, must fight an even steeper uphill diplomatic battle. They also claim that the case of 'Ethiopian colonialism' is unique, but most African nations, with their complex mixtures of ethnic groups, are understandably reluctant to see a precedent established for creation of new states.

Ideologically, the EPLF and the TPLF base their claims for solidarity abroad not only on national rights but on their own efforts to build new socialist societies in the areas they control - efforts they claim are more genuine and successful than those of the Ethiopian government. And both movements, while opposing Soviet and Cuban aid to their opponent, have retrained from identifying those countries as 'strategic enemies.' The OLF and the Western Somali Liberation Front (WSLF) seem to have less idologically defined. populist and nationalist perspectives.



Anut 41, 1981

Most observers agree that in spite of some military successes, the Addis Ababa government has in both arenas failed to convince large numbers of people that their future; lies within Ethiopia. Instead, the brutality of the war has reinforced opposition to Ethiopian control and produced a massive refugee flow (as many asone million to Somalia, some 500,000 into Sudan). Less well-known, but

Eritrea:

program itself. In its first stages, the program was directed primarily at the urban and small town population, disproportionately Amhara, while the rural phase is just getting under way, its success yet to be evaluated. And Oromo critics say in fact little teaching goes on in Oromigna; furthermore, the script used is the Amharic script. Oromo nationalists say the Latin script is more appropriate.

The OLF has thus won

advocacy of independnece

for Oromia, their term for

areas. Though 'earlier it

might have opted for in-

clusion in a revolutionary

Ethiopia, the movement

now bases its claims on the

view that the Ethiopian

empire established by

Menelik has the same

status as did European

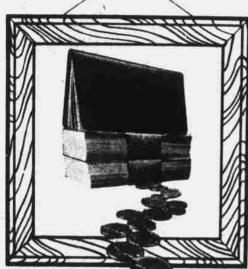
colonialism, and that the

areas colonized have the

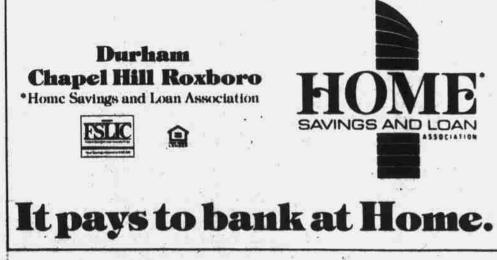
Oromo-inhabited

the

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