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* Long live the Programme of the National
Democratic Revolution !

* An interview of a militant of ME'ISONE

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Long live the Programme of the National Democratic Revolution

For a few weeks, the western press has been dealing repeatedly with the political crisis in Addis-Abeba. With a few exceptions, most newspapers do not seem to have grasped the reasons and the true meaning of this crisis. Several ministers, administrators, high-ranking officials, leaders of the "Provisional Office for Mass Organizational Affairs" (POMOA) and teachers of the Political School went to clandestinity in less than two days. In view of these facts, the western press went so far as to conclude that these high-ranking members of the government had left the country. But what happened in fact? The truth is that these people did not leave the country and their action was not carried out spontaneously.

They are all members of the marxist-leninist organization ME'ISONE. The breaking off with the government was achieved according to the decisions of the organization and this, not to leave the country, but to proceed with clandestine revolutionary struggle. The "Voice of the Masses" n°61, the organ of the movement which was issued at the end of last month, clearly explained the reasons of this action.

What is ME'ISONE? ME'ISONE is a marxist-leninist organization. It was founded by leading members of the student movement under Haïle Selassie's regime. The aims of ME'ISONE are for ever to destroy feudalism, imperialism and bureaucratic capitalism, to establish a People's Democratic Republic and to lay the political, economic and social foundations of socialism.

which, one day or the other, would be led to betray. Consequently, the revolutionary forces rejected this reformist position as well.

What was the revolutionary position, advocated by ME'ISONE? The position of the organization was clearly synthesized in the expression "critical support". This means to stimulate systematically the carrying out of progressist measures by the regime, to mobilize and organize the masses in the struggle for the application of these measures. Because ME'ISONE supported these measures and fought for their application, they drew a clear line between themselves and the reactionary elements, hostile to these measures. Besides, ME'ISONE paid particular attention to show that only the people, conscious, organized and armed, could make sure that these measures would be really applied. Fighting for the political education, the organization and the arming of the masses, and to obtain democratic rights, ME'ISONE constantly denounced the anti-democratic nature of the DERG. Thus, drawing a clear line between itself and the reformist group, placing its total confidence in the masses, and not in the DERG, ME'ISONE went ahead.

This position also offered many possibilities for legal work. When the "Provisional Office for Mass Organizational Affairs" (POMA) was settled, allowing us to make political work among the masses, to organize and arm them, under the Programme of the National Democratic Revolution, ME'ISONE enlisted several militants in this organization. Some petty-bourgeois revolutionarists tried to libel this position, saying that "legal struggle is not a form of revolutionary struggle". They accused ME'ISONE of being opportunist. However, our organization chose to combine judiciously legal and illegal struggle, secret and open struggle. Today, in view of the difficulties we have to face to carry on legal and public struggle, ME'ISONE called some of its militants back into clandestinity.

At a moment when ME'ISONE thought it good to change tac-

tics to develop the revolutionnary movement, we must look back and raise a few questions. Under what conditions did ME'ISONE urge a few hundreds of its militants to do legal work and to "collaborate" with the military regime? How far did this "collaboration", this legal work and open struggle contribute to develop the revolutionnary struggle? Why this change of tactic? Finally, while they were working legally and fighting openly, did ME'ISONE prepare to clandestine, illegal struggle? We shall try to answer all these questions shortly.

1) In what conditions did ME'ISONE urge some of its cadres to do legal work and to "collaborate" with the provisional military government?

From the very beginning, ME'ISONE made a clear analysis allowing to determine the class nature of the DERG. It explained that the DERG, of petty-bourgeois origin, could not, in any case, carry on the revolutionnary struggle to the end. So, it never stopped explaining that its "collaboration" with the DERG was only temporary and tactical. Moreover, before urging some of its cadres to do legal work, ME'ISONE fought for the settling of a public platform used as a basis for unity of action between the revolutionnary forces and the provisional military regime. The Programme of the National Democratic Revolution was worked out for this purpose and was brought up to the military regime. After a discussion which lasted more than five months, the government finally accepted this programme in April 1976.

What was the tenor of this programme? It is clearly stated that the aim of the programme is the total destruction of feudalism, imperialism and bureaucratic capitalism, the founding of a people's democratic republic which will lay the foundations of socialism under the leadership of the working-class party with the help of the peasantry and of all the forces opposed to feudalism, imperialism and bureaucratic capitalism.

However, the mere definition of such an aim doesn't imply the victory of revolution. To achieve this end, one must follow a scientific line of action. We must be able to guide the forces of revolution towards this end. So, the revolutionary forces didn't stop fighting after the results of the negotiations they had with the military regime. They strived to make the DERG follow a line of action which would allow them to achieve this end, and to make this line tally with the programme itself. Thanks to these efforts, the DERG publicly pledged itself to support the effort to build a strong proletarian party, a united front of all the democratic parties and mass organizations under the leadership of the working-class party, and a revolutionnary popular army. ME'ISONE started "collaborating" with the DERG after such a programme was accepted. It worked with the military regime to achieve this end only: to apply the programme, to raise the political consciousness of the masses, to organize and arm them. This work was possible only as far as the DERG would respect the fundamental points of the programme. As long as ME'ISONE considered this programme as a platform for common action, the organization clearly stated that it would remain faithful to the Programme of the National Democratic Revolution, not to the DERG itself. Each time the DERG was in contradiction with the masses, the militants of ME'ISONE were on the side of the people, in spite of imprisonment, tortures and executions.

2) How far did this "collaboration", this legal work and open struggle contribute to develop revolutionnary struggle?

In April 1976, when the Programme of the National Democratic Revolution was published in order to mobilize, politicise, organize and arm the masses, in the struggle to apply this programme, our organization urged some militants to do legal work with the help of the "Provisional Office for Mass Organizational Affairs" (POOA) in the capital and in the districts as well. Thanks to its militants doing legal work as well as to those working in clandestinity, ME'ISONE made a con-

siderable contribution to the development of revolution. This legal work had many good results.

As far as the development of the political consciousness of the masses is concerned, the publication of the Programme of the National Democratic Revolution itself represented a great victory. The aims of the struggle are clearly stated and the line of action clearly drawn in this document. This programme has been published in booklets and official newspapers, broadcasted on the radio and television, and discussed in thousands of public meetings organised all over the country. This helped considerably to raise the political consciousness of the masses. So we can declare today that no counter-revolutionary violence will be able to destroy this political consciousness of several millions of citizens.

With the publication of the pamphlet called "Revolutionary Ethiopia", a fortnightly agitation and propanganda review, it was made possible to popularize the ideals of scientific socialism adapted to the concrete situation in Ethiopia. With the help of the Political School set up at the prompting of ME'ISONE militants, 5000 cadres have been trained in less than a year and sent to do grassroot work. In a country where three years ago, all the marxist litterature was systematically destroyed, it was possible to bring in several millions of marxist books within the course of two years. In a country where three years ago, you could not find a single marxist book in local language, it was possible to translate and publish several millions of works popularizing the classics of marxism.

As far as the organization of the masses is concerned, the results were important as well. Under Haïle Selassie's regime, peasants' organizations were forbidden by law. Under the new conditions, and thanks to the effort and the sacrifices of the young ZEMATCHS' in particular, there are today more than 25000 peasant associations, gathering several millions of pea-

sants, 2000 KEBELE associations (urban dwellers associations) and thousands of associations for women and young people. The reactionary trade-union (CELU)² formerly controlled by the CIA is replaced by a democratically set up union (AETU)³. In the course of the development of political consciousness, other marxist-leninist organizations, apart from ME' ISONE, have appeared. Our organization took part and still takes part in the setting up and strengthening of these organizations.

On the question of arming the masses, in several provinces reactionary elements were disarmed. Peasants associations organized armed defence committees. In the present time, the peasant militia, organized by peasant associations, gather half a million of militiamen. In the towns, the districts, factories, schools and public administrations, militia troops have been organized. Thus, several thousands of militiamen have been armed. This represents a great victory for the militants of ME' ISONE engaged in legal work, and creates a difficult situation for counter-revolutionary forces.

As a whole, legal work enabled the masses, the only force that could apply the Programme of the National Democratic Revolution, to progress rapidly in the development of their political consciousness, of their organization and military preparation. These victories are the fruit of a hard struggle and of great sacrifice. In the towns, in the country, in the districts, factories and schools, several members and sympathizers of our organization fell and are still falling in the thick of the struggle.

3) For what reasons did ME' ISONE change tactics and break off with the provisional military government?

As it was said before, ME' ISONE did not "collaborate" with the DERG with the illusion that it would carry on the revolutionary struggle to its end. It was with the intention of using the legal ground, even if it was temporary, in order

to support the development of revolution. ME' ISONE never stopped explaining that this "collaboration" was just tactical and temporary.

When we explained that the provisional military government was unable to achieve the national democratic revolution, it meant that, at a particular stage, it would be led to reject its own Programme of National Democratic Revolution. If it was stated in the programme, which was accepted by the government, that only a popular revolutionary front led by the party of the working-class was to carry on the national democratic revolution to its end, it's because our greatest care was to avoid that the masses might keep any illusion about the provisional military government.

If, today, ME' ISONE has changed tactics, it is because the historical part of the DERG is drawing to a close, and that it is already questioning its own Programme of National Democratic Revolution. Our organization worked out new tactics of struggle to proceed with revolutionary struggle in better conditions and at the expense of the DERG, and to apply the Programme of the National Democratic Revolution, a programme which was accepted by the masses of Ethiopia and for which thousands of peasants, workers, soldiers, women, people of the oppressed nations, students, intellectuals, and patriotic officers died.

For a few months, the DERG has been challenging this programme. This betrayal is understood by several people. In a near future, this tendency will certainly develop. Yet, if the revolutionary and patriotic forces do not strengthen their unity and reject opportunism, this situation will inevitably lead to some kind of fascist coup.

The democratic rights promised in the Programme are simply ignored. Now, not only does the DERG refuse to meet the new democratic claims of the masses, but the rights which existed

one year ago, the freedom to criticize the government, to denounce bureaucracy, etc..., do not exist any more. Several militants have been imprisoned because of their work of agitation among the masses. The regime has completely forgotten his promises to establish the rights for free expression, free speech, the right to organize, the right to make public demonstrations, etc...

The question of the necessary creation of a genuine party of the working class, firmly stated in the Programme of the National Democratic Revolution, has been left out for the benefit of a systematic agitation for the setting up of a one-party system serving the interests of the petty bourgeoisie and of the bureaucracy. But the peoples of Ethiopia and the revolutionnary forces will reject such a party, artificially set up by the DERG. The democratic rights allowing a public debate, which is a necessary condition for the foundation of a genuine party of the working class, are quelled.

The right to organize other democratic parties apart from the party of the working class is not respected, even though this right is stated in the Programme. The mass organizations as well as the trade-unions, which are part of the revolutionnary popular front, undergo constant pressures. In the present time, and more particularly in the regions where oppressed nationalities live, chauvinism is growing, and the peasant associations, set up at the cost of heavy sacrifices, are being destroyed while their leaders are shot down by the reactionary forces. In the towns, the KEBELE associations are stifled by the intrigues of the bureaucracy. Their leaders fall in great numbers, shot down by the reaction. Revolutionnary militants, involved in organizing women and the youth are imprisoned, tortured, and put to death at the prompting of the bureaucracy.

The Programme of the National Democratic Revolution promised to arm the masses and disarm the reaction. Today, little

by little, they are doing exactly the opposite. In the South, they are proceeding to a redistribution of the confiscated weapons to the most reactionary and chauvinistic elements. In the same way, in some regions, peasants, comrades who are members of the peasant defence committees, and revolutionary cadres are disarmed. Moreover, the patriotic peasants and workers recruited today to defend their country cannot be guided by revolutionary cadres. Consequently, they are under the control of the bureaucracy.

The oppressed nationalities to which the right to self determination is granted in the Programme of the National Democratic Revolution are deprived of their right to equality. Their leaders are now the victims of repression, imprisonment and exile. This situation being the result of a new outbreak of chauvinism, at the same time, it has paved the way to the development of a narrow nationalism which increases the confusion among the oppressed masses.

We are facing today a policy of rapprochement of the regime with the enemies of our people: feudalism, imperialism and bureaucratic capitalism. For the sake of the "national unity" necessary to defend the country, it recruits feudal forces; for the sake of "the balance of power" it is carrying out a rapprochement with U.S. imperialism, the sworn enemy of the peoples of the world; under the pretext that "we are at war" the government is more and more relying on the bureaucracy. And, what is worse, thanks to this alliance with the bureaucracy, it expects to crush the revolutionary forces, and to create a "party of the working-class".

That is why ME'ISONE, remaining faithful to the Programme of the National Democratic Revolution, has chosen to break off with the DERG, and to proceed with the clandestine struggle in order to carry on fighting with a correct political line.

4) Has ME'ISONE been enough prepared to carry on the struggle in clandestinity ?

ME'ISONE has been stating on several occasions that it was always preparing for such a possibility. Since it got involved in legal work, ME'ISONE has fought to prepare the necessary conditions to carry on the struggle and get over the betrayal of the petty-bourgeoisie. To achieve this end, we paid particular attention to the development of our underground network. Two years ago, ME'ISONE was an organization without much influence among the masses. Thanks to its correct political line, our organization now exercises an important influence upon peasants, workers, soldiers, students, oppressed women, oppressed nationalities, intellectuals and revolutionnary officers. As all the marxist-leninist organizations, during the two years when it practised legal work, ME'ISONE gathered strength by combining legal and clandestine struggle. Today ME'ISONE is quite capable of carrying on the struggle under the new conditions.

LONG LIVE THE PROGRAMME OF THE NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC REVOLUTION !
 DOWN WITH THE CUPORTUNISTS AND PSEUDO-PROGRESSISTS !
 LET US STRENGTHEN THE UNITY OF THE MARXIST-LENINISTS OF
 ETHIOPIA !
 DOWN WITH FEUDALISM, IMPERIALISM AND BUREAUCRATIC CAPITALISM !
 REVOLUTIONNARY ETHIOPIA OR DEATH !
 THE CONSCIOUS, ORGANIZED AND ARMED STRUGGLE OF THE PEOPLES
 OF ETHIOPIA WILL BE VICTORIOUS !

We hereafter present an interview of a militant of ME'ISONE by the french newspaper LE MONDE (September 17th 1977).

LE MONDE: Why did you suddenly break off with the military regime ?

ME'ISONE: The All Ethiopian Socialist Movement /ME'ISONE/ is a marxist-leninist organization. As shown in our programme, to promote revolution ME'ISONE will use the different forms of struggle (open and secret, legal and illegal) and the different tactics required by the circumstances. Under Haile Selassie's regime, our struggle was totally clandestine. When the military took over, we were able to carry on a semi-secret, semi-legal struggle. Today, things have changed again. In order to go further in the revolution, ME'ISONE has gone back to clandestine activity.

When engaged in a semi-clandestine struggle, we have sometimes been accused of being opportunist and eager for power. Other people said that we were just "schemers". In fact our "critical support" was a tactical alliance.

As far as our "collaboration" with the DERG is concerned, a few points must be recalled: first, we made it clear from the very beginning that the DERG, because of the very nature of the class it represents, could not carry through the revolution, and that the masses should cherish no illusions on that point. Secondly, before our "collaboration", we demanded that the common platform agreed on by the revolutionary forces and by the DERG should be made public. This led to the proclamation of the National Democratic Revolution Programme by the military regime in April 1976. We have explained again and again that the basis of our co-operation consisted in sticking to that platform.

Thirdly, while we were "collaborating" with the DERG, we have carried on our preparations so as to strengthen our secret network in anticipation of an inevitable breaking off of the agreement. For a few months now the DERG has been trying to slow down the revolutionary process in order to "stabilize the situation". The points on which we had come to an agreement: the proclamation of democratic rights, the guarantee of equality for all nationalities, the struggle against bureaucracy, the growth of mass organizations, the right to create political parties, in a word, the main points of our common platform, have been challenged by the military regime since last March. The DERG tends to get closer to the reactionary forces. Consequently, things are about ready for a counter-revolution. So, in order to carry on the struggle for democracy and socialism under the best possible conditions, ME'ISONE has decided to go into clandestinity. The struggle is going on.

LE MONDE: Basically, as far as Erythrea and Ogaden are concerned, do you share the official views about territorial integrity ?

ME'ISONE: Our programme recognizes the right to self-determination for the nationalities of Ethiopia, up to and including the right to secession. Moreover, our organization is fighting for the creation of a democratic Ethiopia, where unity will have to be based on the different nationalities free determination-to co-exist in the strictest equality.

Granted this, at the moment, the issue of the revolution is closely bound up with the question of territorial integrity in our country. As far as Erythrea is concerned, the DERG seems to favour most a military settlement, whereas we believe that the problem should be settled through pacific negotiations with the progressive forces in Erythrea. A constant work of agitation must be done in order to enable the oppressed peoples to or-

ganize and play a part in the revolution. Which doesn't mean that we advocate the secession of Erythrea in the present state of affairs. The Erythrean question should not be considered in itself only, but also in the more general context of Ethiopia and of the whole region.

Of course, under the former regime, all the reactionary forces were opposed to the secession of Erythrea, whereas we supported that struggle because it helped to weaken Haile Selassie's regime and consequently made the revolutionary side stronger. Such was the position of progressist forces all over the world. Today, things have changed. Even the ex-Crown Prince supports the independence of Erythrea. This shows clearly the change in the disposition of forces. The aid provided by the Arab reactionary regimes to the Erythrean fronts reveals that this change has been going on an international scale as well. Under such circumstances, our organization is today opposed to the secession of Erythrea.

As far as the Ogaden is concerned, we are opposed to Somali invasion. The view according to which this is a fight for national liberation is completely groundless. We have never seen so far a liberation movement equipped with tanks and aircrafts.

LE MONDE: You are said to be rather hostile to the engagement of the Soviet Union and its allies on the Ethiopian side. Why ?

ME'ISONNE: At the moment, the Ethiopian revolution must face very powerful enemies, inside as well as outside. That's why we need the support of every progressist forces. ME'ISONNE is said to be opposed to the engagement of Soviet Union and its allies on the side of the Ethiopian revolution. It is not true. We do accept and appreciate any aid that can promote our revolution. Yet, we insist on the fact that, in order to go further in the revolution, the peoples of Ethiopia must first of all rely on their own forces. Foreign aid can only play a secondary part.

LE MONDE: Just to mention the most important, there are now three clandestine movements who are fighting against the military: yours, E.D.U. (Ethiopian Democratic Union) and E.P.R.P. (Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party). Isn't a tactical rapprochement between these movements inevitable now ?

ME'ISONNE: ME'ISONNE, being on the forefront of the struggle of the peoples of Ethiopia, is engaged in carrying through the Programme of the National Democratic Revolution, which means we are fighting against all the forces which reject that programme, and particularly such organizations as EDU and EPRP as well as the bureaucratic forces, who oppose the agrarian reform which has liberated millions of poor peasants. Forming an alliance with such forces against the military regime is out of question.

LE MONDE: There is much talking today about a possible pro-american coup in Ethiopia. Do you believe in it ?

ME'ISONNE: The Ethiopian right wing is in a better position to answer this question. What we can say is that today the progressist elements within the DERG are getting weaker whereas the right wing is getting stronger. So you can see that U.S. imperialism which had lost all hope last February is now changing its tactics and seeking a rapprochement with Ethiopia. There is a real possibility of a pro-american coup now. This coup could find a support among the reactionary bureaucracy and the people who lost their privileges by the attainments of a three year struggle. The progressist elements within the DERG do not seem to realize how serious the danger is.

LE MONDE: While you were "collaborating" with the military, your opponents and most of the international opinion have accused you of approving the massacres and the repression carried out by the DERG.

ME'ISONNE: Three things at least should be mentioned here: first, those who raise this question don't realize the importance of the Ethiopian Revolution. Without making too much of it, we still can say that for three years, Ethiopia has been involved in a movement which has, at the same time, the characteristics of the 1789 French revolution, the 1917 Russian revolution and May 1968. The situation is very intricate and the class struggle gets very acute.

Secondly, when people talk about violence, they seem to remember only the violence exerted by the forces fighting to preserve the victories of the revolution. Counter-revolutionary violence, political assassinations, and white terror are ignored. On the revolutionary side, numberless poor peasants, soldiers, students, women and intellectuals have been shot down by the reactionary forces. So, before accusing us as well as the DERG of repression and massacres, it must be realized that Ethiopia is now in a state of civil war.

Last but not least, this situation is deliberately given an exaggerated importance in order to deceive international opinion. The "news" about the 50 dollars the victims' relatives should pay for the bullets used, and about the "incredible number" of bodies lying in the streets of Addis-Abeba, all these "news" are just brainwashing and nothing else.

LE MONDE: Don't you think that, Ethiopia being now threatened from outside, a temporary slowing down of the revolutionary process could be justified?

ME'ISONF: This question is one on which we take divergent views from the DERG. It makes a pretext of the war for getting closer to the right wing and stopping the revolutionary process. Slowing down this process even for a short time means neglecting the political education of the masses and delaying their organization and military preparation. Such a situation is in favour of the reactionary forces and gives them time to build their strength again. It is already a definite situation in the regions where the war is raging, specially in Harrarge, Sidamo and Bale.

Indeed, some foreign powers, panic-stricken in front of the development of the Ethiopian revolution, try to quell the revolution before an irreversible situation is created. But to achieve their purpose, they rely mainly on the reaction inside the country. We think that the only way to oppose foreign threats is to speed up the revolutionary process and thus to make the home front a stronghold of the revolution.

LE L'ONDE: The tribal question is often put forward to account for certain aspects of the Ethiopian civil war. Thus, ME'ISONF would essentially rely upon the Oromos (Gallas) while your opponents of the E.P.R.P. would be mostly Amharas. Isn't there some truth in this analysis, however compendious it may be ?

ME'ISONF: Several people, as soon as they talk about the struggles in Africa, hasten to analyze them through the tribal question. Some do it because they are unable to understand the real situation, while others do it consciously to spread confusion and to distort the revolutionary meaning of these different struggles in Africa. As far as ME'ISONF is concerned, its name already shows the national vocation of the organization (All Ethiopian Socialist Movement). However, some persist in

trying to make people believe that we would represent one nationality only. In fact, they don't even agree on the nationality that we should represent! And indeed, as you mentioned it, some people say that our organization relies mainly on the Oromos. You must understand that these rumours come from the chauvinistic elements among Amharas and Tigraï. On the side of the narrow nationalist Oromos, others will say that ME'ISONE is an organization of the Amharas and of Tigraï.

The truth is that ME'ISONE, thanks to the struggle it leads from the North to the South of the country, enjoys a growing support of the masses, and fights for the freedom, the equality and the unity of all the oppressed peoples of Ethiopia. Not only among our militants and supporters, but also among the leaders of our organization, you will find comrades of all nationalities.

N.B.

The last two questions were not reproduced by the newspaper LE MONDE.

Notes.

1. ZEMATCHS: Participants in the ZEMETCHA, the National Work Campaign for Development Through Co-operation which was launched on December 21, 1974.
 2. C.E.L.U : Confederation of Ethiopian Labour Unions.
 3. A.E.T.U : All Ethiopian Trade Unions.
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