

Recent months in Ethiopia have been unforgettable. The country has been going through a revolution - so far practically bloodless. Our friends are full of hope.

The famine situation is now much better. Aid has been pouring in from many countries. But there is a vast job to be done - roads through impossible mountains, dams, grain-storage, land reforms, an agricultural revolution. What is tragic is that hundreds of thousands of lives could have been saved if the Government had more openly spoken about the seriousness of the need, and if the 'developed' nations had acted more promptly when they did hear. (They were many months too late. It is scandalous that we have not yet got a properly organised International Disaster Relief Force). What gives hope is how keenly Ethiopians felt about the famine when the facts did come out (this was one of the factors which led to the change of Government and the start of the reforms now being launched); and the quality of the heroic service, little publicised, given by individual Ethiopians. We know some of them; they say they will never be the same again.

We were in Asmara when the Ethiopian army 2nd Division mutinied on February 25th. Under the leadership of a group of N.C.O.s they locked up their senior officers, occupied the radio station, the banks, the airport and blocked all exits to the city. There was no violence - we were amazed at their discipline and orderliness. From Asmara radio they broadcast their demands for better pay and conditions to the nation. The rest of the army in different parts of Ethiopia mutinied in turn. In Addis there was disorder and rioting. There had been a teachers' strike. The students were on the streets demonstrating. Then the taxi-drivers struck (over the cost of petrol) and stopped all the buses. Militants in the air force dropped leaflets on the city. On several occasions there could have been big bloodshed - it was touch and go. But amazingly it was averted. The army resisted the political demands of the militants and declared their loyalty to the Emperor, sending the old Ministers to him "for suitable action."

On 28th February the old Government resigned, and at that point the Emperor took a historic decision. He appointed Lij Endalkatchew Makonnen, the Minister of Communications Prime Minister and left him free to choose his own cabinet. Formerly all ministers had been responsible only to the Emperor, but he declared that there would be constitutional reforms making the cabinet responsible to parliament. If the difficult transition from one-man monarchical rule to parliamentary government can be achieved without bloodshed, it will be the crowning act of statesmanship of his life and a contribution in our age of violence from Ethiopia to the world.

The new men chosen by the Prime Minister are an outstandingly able group - most of them known opponents of the old regime, who had been 'banished' to posts overseas. Two of them are particularly popular. They were with the Prime Minister at Oxford 25 years ago - Dedjazmach Zewde Gebreselassie, now Minister of the Interior, and Lij Michael Imru until recently the Ambassador in Geneva. Interestingly, all three men had the experience of the international conference at Caux when they were students. They are now engaged in a major clean-up of the corruption of the former government, in administrative reforms, land reforms and constitutional reforms. They have been dealing with emergencies, night and day, from the start - a chain reaction of strikes, disorders in the provinces (where peasants have been burning the houses and property of absentee landlords or corrupt officials) and an attempted coup, when militants in the air force wanted to bomb the palace where the old ministers had gone to the Emperor for protection. At every point, so far, by a narrow margin, the new government has survived, and the Emperor, who is 82

next July, fearlessly shows himself to the people and is greatly respected.

In the midst of all this, our friends have been marvellously used. You feel that in an extraordinary way God has prepared and trained them for this hour. Their courage has been a pattern for other nations.

Mammo Wodneh, Director of Press and Public Relations in Eritrea, is an Amhara official in a Province where Amharas are mostly hated. But his profound change in recent years has made him an exception - he is trusted and loved. He began to feel increasingly the sterility of a policy of simply military suppression in Eritrea. The guerrilla rebels demanding a separate state continue to operate in the mountains and the chief sufferers are the wretched villagers. He broke the official silence by publishing (without permission from Addis) three articles in his paper suggesting that the time had come to try another way, a policy of 'winning hearts and minds' and starting talks with the rebel leaders. These were followed by three more articles by Dejazmatch Gebreyohannes, a senior Provincial Councillor, describing how solutions had been found to similar situations of conflict (in Assam, in the South Tyrol etc) through men inspired by MRA. All this caused a considerable stir. Both men were reprimanded by the Government and Mammo was threatened with 'disciplinary action' and at one point looked like losing his job, but stood firm.

Suddenly the whole position was changed by the fall of the old Government. By a strange chance the N.C.O.s leading the mutiny knew Mammo through his writings on military history and trusted him. He met them secretly and his advice at certain points was crucial. Now he has been transferred to Addis, where the new Minister of Information is an old friend. He has already published articles in The Ethiopian Herald and other papers on the new thinking and living needed for the new Ethiopia. He feels that it has been the guidance of God which has brought him to a position where his views on the situation in Eritrea are sought by the new Government. He and Dej. Gebreyohannes and other friends may have a key part - as their courageous statesmanship has already done.

P.V. Abraham, the Deputy Director of the Prince Makonnen School in Asmara (2800 pupils) has been having a series of meetings in his flat for students and teachers. There has been trouble in the school with certain Amhara teachers who hate teaching Eritreans and are hated by them. At one point all the 10th Grade classes went on strike, demanding the removal of a teacher. When it became serious, the Education Department told the Director: 'Rather than allow this trouble to spread, better transfer this teacher.' Next morning Abraham had the clear thought, as in quiet he sought guidance before going to school, "This is wrong. It is appeasement and you must not go along with it." He talked it over with his Director, who agreed and let him try his hand - at the risk of incurring official wrath. Abraham called the 10th Grade and spoke to them, telling them stories of deadlocks in different countries and situations which had been resolved on the basis not of who is right, but what is right. He left them not knowing what would happen. He was told next day by the Amharic teacher, amazed, that the boys had come to him and apologised, asking him to return and teach them. "This man also has changed his methods considerably," said Abraham. (By the way, do get his booklet 'Teenagers in Revolt', published by Himmat, 15p, full of down-to-earth stories of great interest to teachers in Britain).

Through this and other incidents, several of the Amhara teachers in that school have begun to change radically. This is important for the country, for the Teachers' Union is controlled by militants who have been leading a strike to overthrow the new Government.

The work in which we are engaged consists largely in supporting the inspired initiatives of our Ethiopian friends. It is run by a 'Committee for Moral Re-Armament' in

Asmara. Last Christmas they took a decision: 'No longer a Committee of six, but a team of thirty! They made a list of the names of the men they wanted to enlist and began to bring their senior friends in to the centre. We had a series of fascinating evenings, with films for them. They included the Deputy Mayor, the Director-General of Education (both Amharas) the President of the University, the ex-Governor of a Division who is now a Provincial Councillor, and others. These men spoke to us with extraordinary frankness as we got to know them. They began to be a team. The University President, supported by his Deputy (an American nun, Sister Luella), wants us to show the films of MRA and give training based on the Black and White Book in the University, if there is a demand for it from the students.

Before we left Asmara the team met. As they talked over the new situation in Ethiopia they felt that it had been a miracle of God that it had happened without bloodshed and during the Emperor's lifetime. They sought guidance on the next steps and their conviction was: "We have no excuse for hopelessness or cynicism any more. We were wrong to become depressed about Eritrea. God has done a much bigger thing - and for the whole country! Our job now is to win the men who can undergird the new government and to create the moral climate in which the reforms can be carried through successfully."

What they have been doing in Asmara has now spread to Addis. Two elderly 'retired' British teachers, Elizabeth Falk (teaching in Princess Sophia's school) and Joan Pedley have a flat there, near the square where you get a grandstand view of all the student demonstrations and the police in action. It is an apartment where friends drop in at all hours. We frequently see some of the University students. They pant in full of slogans like: "The Prime Minister must be removed. He is one of the nobility and therefore one of the corrupt governing class. No change is possible without violence." We found it profitless to argue with men saturated in the Marxist/Maoist thinking around them. But again and again, when we suggested a time of quiet to listen to God (or to the 'Inner Voice' for those who did not believe in God), clear, constructive thoughts for practical action would come to them. As they carried them out, they changed, and in some cases found the courage to refuse to go along with the mob.

The Technical School in Addis has a nucleus of young men who meet regularly to plan how to build a morally re-armed school. The Director, Ato Yilma, gives them full support. He says, "It was some of my students who changed me." He has already been used, with these students, to settle a serious sit-in strike. Now these young men and women are preparing a play to bring their ideas to other schools and to senior people in Addis, based on the theme "to cure corruption the country needs a wave of honesty in which all can start with themselves." Theirs is one of the only two schools which has not been on strike recently.

Each of our friends in Addis has played a significant part during the crisis. Ato Abebe Kabede, Head of the Haile Selassie Foundation, has spoken on TV (they say it was 'inspired') and is arranging for the Foundation to pioneer land reform by giving some of its lands to be shared by tenants on a cooperative farm basis. Another, Ato Bekele, the Deputy City Engineer, has been centrally engaged in negotiations with the Municipal Workers and, because they trust him, has so far prevented the threatened strike. Another, Ato Negussie, is a technical worker in the Electricity Corporation. He had the courage last year to go to his Chief Engineer, apologise for certain dishonesties in the past, and tell him of his change and new commitment. He is trusted by the management. Recently, when a militant Trade Unionist tried to call a strike, the electricity workers in his area came to him for advice and appointed him their spokesman. So far there has been no strike.

He is one of those who have written articles in 'The Ethiopian Herald' calling for

this new spirit in the nation. Under the old Government there was no press freedom. Now it is free. It is hard to describe the exhilaration felt by Ethiopians as a flood of outspoken letters and articles are published daily in what used to be a dull, official paper. It is now so interesting that it is sold out by 10 am daily.

The situation in Ethiopia is still dangerous. We who take our democratic freedoms for granted need to ponder how greatly Ethiopians look to Britain for a democracy that works. The heady wine of new freedom can either be captured and used by the ideologies which will destroy freedom in the name of 'government by the people,' or it can bring the changes which can lead to real democracy. How to express these ideas and get them widely to the country at this critical moment? 'The Black and White Book' was translated last year into Amharic, but although the Tigrinya version was passed and has been published in Eritrea, in Addis the censors were nervous about the possible consequences of a 'Handbook of Revolution.' Recently a friend who is an Assistant Minister in the Ministry of Information and who wants to see the book published in Amharic took us to see the censors. The Chief Censor was disarmed when his colleague on the Board spoke up strongly for it. He has now passed it, initialling every page! Our friends are arranging for printing and are contributing to a fund for publication. We hope it will go widely. It is a book that might have been designed for this hour.

*Hugh Smith*  
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