

UNIT SIX

Ethiopia: Internal Developments and External Influences from 1941 to 1991

Restoration of the Imperial Rule and External Influences

1. The Restoration of Emperor Haile Selassie

In May 1941, Emperor Haile Selassie was restored to his throne with the help of the British, who had liberated Ethiopia from Italian control. However, the British, initially seen as liberators, soon took on an occupying role, influencing Ethiopia's political and economic landscape. This led to significant tensions between Ethiopia and Britain, as the Ethiopian government sought immediate sovereignty, while Britain viewed Ethiopia's independence as a long-term goal.

2. The Anglo-Ethiopian Agreements

1942 Agreement:

- **Sovereignty vs. Dependence:** This agreement recognized Ethiopia as a sovereign state but emphasized British dominance. British officials held key positions in the military, civil administration, and financial sectors.
- **Military Control:** The British were involved in organizing and training the Ethiopian army, and strategic areas remained under British administration.
- **Limited Ethiopian Authority:** The Emperor required British approval for major decisions, including declaring war.

1944 Agreement:

- **Restoration of Rights:** This agreement partially restored Ethiopian sovereignty by lifting some British controls. It ended British dominance in diplomatic and military appointments and returned some territories to Ethiopian control.
- **Partial Autonomy:** The Ethiopian Ministry of War took over command of the Ethiopian army, signaling a shift towards greater Ethiopian self-governance.

3. Territorial Administration Issues

Ogaden and Eritrea:

- **British Plans:** The British proposed dividing Eritrea and the Ogaden, which caused significant concern in Ethiopia. They considered uniting parts of Tigray with Eritrea and incorporating the Ogaden into Greater Somalia under British trusteeship.

- **Ethiopian Resistance:** Ethiopia opposed these plans, claiming the Ogaden and Eritrea as integral parts of its territory.
- **Diplomatic Struggles:** Ethiopia sought to reclaim these territories through international diplomatic channels, culminating in the return of Ogaden in 1954 and the federation of Eritrea with Ethiopia in 1952.

4. The American Era

Post-British Influence:

- **American Alliance:** After the British left, Ethiopia sought a closer relationship with the United States to counterbalance British dominance. This led to the establishment of the Kagnew communications station and significant American military aid.
- **Economic and Educational Assistance:** The United States supported Ethiopian infrastructure, communication, and education, shaping modern Ethiopian development. However, this American influence was viewed negatively by some Ethiopians, who saw it as a form of American imperialism.

Socio-Economic Conditions and Social Organizations

1. Agriculture and Land Tenure

Economic Importance:

- **Agricultural Sector:** Agriculture was crucial to Ethiopia's economy, contributing over 60% to the GDP and employing 80% of the labor force. Despite its potential, agriculture was underdeveloped due to factors like drought, low productivity, and neglect by the government.

Land Tenure System:

- **Northern vs. Southern Systems:** The northern highlands used a communal land system called **rist**, while the southern regions experienced privatization and tenant farming, leading to widespread land ownership issues.
- **Land Tenure Types:** Various tenure systems included **gult** (land granted by the monarch), **samon** (land granted to the Orthodox Church), and **maderia** (land granted to officials).

Post-Liberation Challenges:

- **Privatization and Land Tax:** The privatization process and high land taxes further complicated land ownership. The northern **rist** system resisted privatization, while southern peasants often became tenants.

2. Agricultural Development

Early Efforts:

- **Limited Attention:** Before the 1974 revolution, the imperial government neglected agriculture, allocating less than 2% of the budget to this sector. The agricultural sector grew slowly compared to the population growth rate.

Government Initiatives:

- **Commercial Agriculture:** Expansion included government involvement and foreign concessions. Programs like the Minimum Package Program (MPP) aimed to improve agriculture through credit, infrastructure, and cooperatives but were largely ineffective.

Land Reform Movement:

- **Growing Pressure:** By the 1960s, drought and famine increased calls for land reform. University students led the movement, culminating in the 1974 revolution that highlighted the need for significant land reform.

3. Trade and Industry

Economic Role:

- **Limited Industrialization:** Trade and industry were minor components of Ethiopia's economy, with agriculture dominating exports. The industrial sector was small, and most economic activities remained self-sufficient and localized.

Modernization Efforts:

- **Development Plans:** The government attempted to transition to an agro-industrial economy with development plans created by international technical missions. However, these plans often failed to achieve substantial results.

- **National Economic Council:** Established in 1954/55, this council aimed to improve productivity and living standards through coordinated development plans.

This period reflects the complex interplay between internal and external influences on Ethiopia's development, from British and American interventions to efforts in economic modernization and land reform.

Consolidation of Autocracy and Opposition to the Monarchy

Emperor Haile Selassie's Absolutist Rule

Absolutist State: Emperor Haile Selassie I ruled Ethiopia as an absolute monarch from 1930 to 1974, concentrating power in his hands and shaping a centralized state. His administration was characterized by a large, secular bureaucracy and strong control over provincial administration, military organization, and fiscal matters.

Military and Security:

- **Imperial Bodyguard:** Reorganized with Swedish help, this elite force was used to control other military units but lost prestige after the 1960 coup attempt.
- **Police Force:** Established in 1942 and trained by British, German, and Israeli experts. The Department of Public Security was crucial in spying and suppressing opposition.
- **Army:** Initially trained by the British and later by Americans, the army was central in defending the country and repressing internal dissent.

Administrative Divisions:

- The emperor revised administrative divisions to enhance central control. The structure included provinces, sub-provinces, districts, and sub-districts, with most key positions held by high-ranking nobles.

Educational System:

- **Secondary Schools and Universities:** Institutions like Haile Selassie I Secondary School, General Wingate School, and Haile Selassie I University were established to produce bureaucratic personnel and promote the emperor's image.

Revised Constitution of 1955

- The 1955 Constitution revised the 1931 Constitution, introducing universal adult suffrage and a bicameral parliament (Senate and Chamber of

Deputies). Despite some human rights provisions, the emperor's power remained supreme, and his position was deemed sacred and inviolable.

Opposition to Imperial Rule

Key Groups:

1. **Returnees:** Exiles who returned with the emperor.
2. **Collaborators:** Those who worked with Italians.
3. **Patriots:** Resistance fighters who felt sidelined.

Notable Figures:

- **Dajjach Belay Zeleke:** Led a rebellion in Gojjam but was eventually defeated and executed.
- **Bitwoded Negash Bezabih:** Conspired to assassinate the emperor but was betrayed and imprisoned.
- **Blatta Takele Wolde-Hawaryat:** Long-term opponent of the emperor, executed after numerous attempts to overthrow him.

1960 Attempted Coup:

- **Leaders:** Brigadier General Mengistu Neway and his brother Germame Neway.
- **Events:** Initial success in the capital but failed due to lack of army support and loyalist opposition. The coup was aborted by December 17, 1960, and the Neway brothers were eventually captured.

Peasant Rebellions

Common Causes:

- Increasing taxes, land privatization, and commercialization of agriculture led to widespread discontent among peasants.

Major Rebellions:

- **Woyane Rebellion (1943):** Occurred in Tigray, briefly successful but crushed by the imperial forces.
- **Bale Peasant Rebellion (1963-1970):** Fueled by land and tax issues and opposition to settlement policies. It involved intense fighting and was eventually suppressed by the military.
- **Gojjam Peasant Rebellion (1968):** Triggered by new taxes and mismanagement. It was notable for its prolonged and organized resistance.

Armed Struggle in Eritrea

- **Federation with Ethiopia (1952):** Dissatisfaction led to the dissolution of the federation in 1962, making Eritrea a province.
- **Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) and Eritrean People's Liberation Forces (EPLF):** Key groups fighting for Eritrean independence, with significant support from radical Arab states.

Mecha-Tulama Self-Help Association (1963):

- **Purpose:** Promoted Oromo identity and self-help.
- **Conflict:** The regime saw it as a threat, especially after its leader, General Taddesse Birru, criticized government policies. The association was banned, and Taddesse was imprisoned.

The Ethiopian Student Movement and the 1974 Revolution

The Ethiopian Student Movement

Origins and Early Phases:

- **Expansion of Education (1950s-1970s):** The Ethiopian student movement emerged alongside the expansion of secondary and higher education. The University College of Addis Ababa was established in 1950, followed by other colleges in cities like Harar and Gondar. This expansion increased the number of educated students who became increasingly aware of political and social issues.
- **Early Grievances (1950s):** Initially, student protests focused on improving learning facilities and services. The main organization was the student council, which addressed issues at universities.
- **Radicalization (Mid-1960s):** By the mid-1960s, the movement became more radical. Influenced by the 1960 coup attempt and the Eritrean resistance, students began to demand broader political and social reforms. The "crocodiles," a radical student group formed in 1964, embraced Marxist ideas and played a crucial role in this phase.
- **Major Protests (1965):** In February 1965, students protested outside Parliament against the feudal land tenure system with the slogan "Land to the Tiller!" This marked the beginning of more intense demonstrations.
- **Student Repression (1969):** The movement faced severe repression after the killing of Tilahun Gizaw, president of the University Students Union of Addis Ababa (USUAA). This event led to violent clashes between students and security forces, drawing international attention.

- **International Links:** During this period, student organizations such as USUAA, the Ethiopian Students' Union in North America (ESUNA), and the Ethiopian Students' Union in Europe (ESUE) emerged, providing a global platform for the student movement.

The 1974 Revolution

Popular Uprising:

- **Economic and Political Crises:** Rising inflation, corruption, and famine contributed to widespread dissatisfaction. This unrest led to strikes and protests involving various groups, including students, teachers, workers, and soldiers.
- **Mutiny and Strikes (February 1974):** The revolution began with a mutiny by soldiers in Negele-Borena, which spread to other units. Demonstrations against increased fuel prices, low teacher salaries, and curriculum changes occurred in Addis Ababa. The movement expanded as soldiers, students, and civilians unified in their demands for reform.
- **Government Response:** Prime Minister Aklilu Habte-Wold resigned on February 28, 1974, replaced by Endalkachew Mekonnen, who promised reforms but failed to address underlying issues. The unrest continued, with a significant general strike in March 1974 that paralyzed the nation.

Formation of the Derg:

- **Military Takeover:** By June 1974, dissatisfaction with the existing government led to the formation of the Derg (a Ge'ez word for "committee"), a new military organization. Major Mengistu Haile Mariam became its chairman. The Derg began dismantling the imperial system, arresting officials, and eventually deposing Emperor Haile Selassie on September 12, 1974.
- **Derg's Measures:** The Derg suspended the 1955 Constitution, dissolved Parliament, and established a Provisional Military Administrative Council (PMAC). General Aman Andom was initially appointed head of state but faced conflicts with the Derg.
- **Violence and Suppression:** The Derg's attempt to maintain power led to violent repression of both civilian and military opposition. On November 23, 1974, known as "Bloody Saturday," the Derg executed numerous officials from the old regime, further tarnishing its reputation.
- **Leadership Shifts:** Following "Bloody Saturday," Brigadier General Tafari Banti became the head of state, but real power remained with Major Mengistu, who consolidated his control and emerged as the key figure in the Derg.

Socio-Economic and Political Reforms of the Military Regime (Derg)

1. Development through Cooperation Campaign (Zemecha)

In December 1974, the Derg, a military regime, launched the Zemecha campaign. Its goal was to support the land reform decree by mobilizing students and teachers to work in rural areas. They educated peasants about socialism and helped with land registration and distribution. However, the campaign was cut short in June 1976 due to infiltration by opposition groups like the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP) who used the campaign to incite resistance against the Derg. Subsequent campaigns included the Green Campaign (1978), Literacy Campaign (1979), and Red Star Campaign (1982). Among these, only the Literacy Campaign had notable success.

2. Proclamation of Ethiopian Socialism

The Derg, initially promoting the slogan "Ethiopia Tikdem" (Ethiopia First), changed its slogan to "Ethiopian Socialism" to align with its socialist policies. By March 1975, the Derg abolished royal titles and planned a socialist order. The government nationalized industries, large farms, and financial institutions, replacing feudal systems with socialist structures. The radical land reform of 1975 eliminated private land ownership, established limits on land holdings, and formed peasant associations for land distribution. Urban land and extra houses were nationalized, and kebeles were created for urban governance.

3. Political Reorganization and Control

The Derg faced internal and external challenges. It created the Union of Marxist-Leninist Organizations (Emaledah) in 1977, including groups like Meison, Wezlig, and Malerid, to unify Marxist factions. However, the Derg eventually eliminated rival groups through violence and imprisonment, leaving Mengistu's Abyotawi Seded as the sole recognized party. The Workers' Party of Ethiopia (WPE) was formed in 1984, consolidating Mengistu's power. The regime reorganized mass organizations, replacing independent unions with government-controlled ones to tighten its grip on society.

4. Resettlement and Villagization

The 1984/85 famine highlighted the Derg's failure in managing agricultural policies. In response, the regime initiated forced resettlement, relocating about 1.5 million people from drought-stricken areas to more fertile regions. The program was poorly executed, leading to health crises and deaths among relocated populations. Villagization, starting in 1985, aimed to consolidate rural settlements for better service delivery and resource management. However, it

faced criticism for its execution, which led to further suffering and inefficiency among peasants.

5. Decline of the Derg

By the late 1970s, the Derg faced intense opposition from various groups, including the EPRP and Eritrean insurgents, and external threats from Somalia. The Derg's response involved violent purges and a crackdown on dissent, including the infamous "Red Terror," which saw the killing of thousands of perceived opponents. The regime's failure to address economic and social issues, combined with internal strife, contributed to its eventual downfall.

Power Struggle within the Derg

Background: By late 1976, the Derg (the Provisional Military Administrative Council) had experienced significant internal conflicts. These power struggles were marked by intense ideological and political battles among its members.

Key Events:

1. Elimination of Rivals:

- In the summer of 1976, Mengistu Haile Mariam, a prominent member of the Derg, began consolidating his power by removing rivals. Major Sisay Habte, Lieutenant Bewketu Kassa, Major Kiros Alamayahu, and Brigadier-General Getachew Nadew were among those executed. These officials held significant positions within the Derg and were seen as threats to Mengistu's dominance.

2. The Palace Coup (February 3, 1977):

- A pivotal event occurred when Colonel Daniel Asfaw and his security guards stormed a meeting of the Central Committee. They arrested and executed key figures including General Teferi Benti, Chairman of the PMAC, and several other high-ranking members. This coup effectively solidified Mengistu's control over the Derg.

3. Consolidation of Power:

- After the coup, Mengistu declared himself the chairman of the Derg in February 1977. By November 1977, he eliminated his last major rival, Atnafe Abaate, thereby securing undisputed leadership. Mengistu's consolidation of power allowed him to implement the "Red Terror" campaign.

4. The Red Terror:

- This campaign was a violent crackdown aimed at eliminating perceived enemies of the regime. Initially targeting the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP), the campaign later expanded to include other opposition groups. It resulted in widespread executions and forced many opposition groups into hiding.

5. Impact on Opposition:

- By the end of 1978, the Red Terror had severely weakened the EPRP and other dissident organizations. Surviving members of the EPRP retreated to rural areas, such as the mountain of Asimba in Tigray, to continue their resistance.

Summary: The internal power struggle within the Derg led to significant purges and political instability. Mengistu Haile Mariam's rise to absolute power was marked by ruthless actions against rivals and opposition groups. This consolidation of power enabled the Derg to pursue aggressive policies, but it also set the stage for future conflicts and challenges.

The Somalia-Ethiopia War (1977-1978)

Background: In 1977, Somalia, led by President Siad Barre, sought to annex the Ogaden region of Ethiopia, leading to a full-scale invasion. This conflict, known as the Ogaden War, was driven by Somalia's irredentist ambitions and the strategic value of the Ogaden region.

Key Events:

1. Somalia's Invasion:

- Somalia launched its invasion in July 1977, taking advantage of the Derg's internal issues and its troubles in Eritrea. Ethiopian forces were initially outnumbered and struggled to defend the Ogaden, leading to significant territorial losses.

2. Mobilization and Counter-Offensive:

- In response, the Derg issued a general mobilization call. The Ethiopian public rallied to defend the country, and a large militia force was rapidly trained. This mobilization bolstered Ethiopian defenses and allowed them to launch a successful counter-offensive.

3. Battle of Kara Mara:

- On March 5, 1978, Ethiopian forces achieved a decisive victory at Kara Mara, near Jigjiga. The battle was marked by significant Ethiopian military achievements, including the destruction of Somali tanks and the defeat of Somali troops.

4. International Support:

- Ethiopia received crucial support from the Soviet Union, Cuba, and the Democratic Republic of Yemen. The Soviet Union provided military equipment and advisers, while Cuban troops were deployed to assist Ethiopian forces. This international support shifted the balance of power in favor of Ethiopia.

5. Outcome:

- By early 1978, Ethiopian forces had successfully repelled the Somali invaders and regained control of the Ogaden region. The war

resulted in a significant realignment of power in the Horn of Africa, with increased Soviet influence in Ethiopia.

Summary: The Somalia-Ethiopia War was a critical conflict that tested the Derg's ability to defend its territory. The successful Ethiopian counter-offensive, bolstered by international support, secured the Ogaden region and reshaped regional power dynamics.

The Derg and the Armed Struggle in Eritrea

Background: Following the Ogaden War, the Derg turned its focus to the Eritrean secessionists, who had made substantial territorial gains by late 1976.

Key Events:

1. Counter-Offensive Against Eritrean Secessionists:

- In June 1978, the Derg launched a major military campaign against the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF). The campaign aimed to reclaim territory and weaken the secessionists' hold.

2. Military Achievements:

- The Ethiopian military successfully ousted EPLF forces from major towns and reopened key supply routes. However, the EPLF retreated to its stronghold in Naqfa and continued to resist.

3. Limitations of the Campaign:

- Despite initial successes, the Ethiopian military struggled to fully dislodge the EPLF from Naqfa. Subsequent campaigns, such as the Red Star Campaign of 1982, failed to achieve lasting results.

4. Temporary Breathing Space:

- The temporary military victories provided the Derg with a brief respite to focus on other issues, including consolidating power and addressing internal legitimacy.

Summary: The Derg's campaign against the EPLF in Eritrea saw some initial successes but ultimately failed to achieve a decisive victory. The struggle against secessionist forces continued to challenge the Derg's stability and effectiveness.

The Downfall of the Military Regime

Background: By the late 1980s, the Derg faced mounting pressures both domestically and internationally.

Key Events:

1. International Changes:

- The collapse of the Soviet Union and Mikhail Gorbachev's policies of glasnost and perestroika shifted global power dynamics. The U.S.,

now the sole superpower, became more critical of the Derg, while the Soviet Union reduced its support.

2. Internal Struggles:

- The Derg's inability to control dissenting groups and the defection of top officials weakened the regime. A failed coup attempt in May 1989 further destabilized the government.

3. Northern Insurgency:

- The Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) intensified their opposition. Key victories, such as the capture of Massawa and the advance into Tigray, accelerated the regime's downfall.

4. Final Collapse:

- In May 1991, with the capital under siege and the government's position increasingly untenable, Mengistu Haile Mariam fled to Zimbabwe. The EPRDF entered Addis Ababa, and Eritrea declared independence.

Summary: The downfall of the Derg was the result of internal strife, international shifts, and successful insurgent campaigns. The regime's inability to adapt to changing conditions led to its eventual collapse and the emergence of a new political landscape in Ethiopia.