ETHIOPIA IN 1991--PEACE THROUGH STRUGGLE

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1. INTRODUCTION

At the conclusion of the London talks on 29 May 1991, Meles Zenawi, the leader of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), telephoned me in Washington and invited me to Addis Ababa to observe the transition to a new Ethiopian political system. With the support of RAND and the National Endowment for Democracy, I spent five weeks from 13 June until 19 July in Ethiopia, meeting with the new leaders, discussing forms of advice and assistance the country needs to facilitate recovery and the transition to democracy, and making wide contact with people in all walks of life.

In all, I spent three weeks in the capital and two weeks traveling in other parts of the country. I made four trips into different parts of the Shoa countryside and traveled for a week and a half through the northern provinces of Wollo, Tigre, Gondar, and Gojjam.

This trip report is based on briefings before the National Endowment for Democracy on 26 July 1991, the Africa Subcommittee, House Foreign Relations Committee, U.S. Congress on 30 July 1991, and the Department of Defense (International Security Affairs) in the Pentagon on 7 August 1991. It also includes, and expands on, observations that I made in a special newsletter, published 1 August 1991, for members of the Friends of Ethiopia voluntary organization.

Remarkable changes took place in Ethiopia during summer 1991—changes that were incompletely reported in the press and misunderstood and misrepresented by some Ethiopian exile organizations. This paper summarizes my observations based on firsthand experience of the new Ethiopia. It will be followed by a more comprehensive RAND research report that will include evaluation of the new government's actions and policies.1

1It continues a reporting pattern established in my earlier RAND papers: Ethiopia--Contrasts and Contradictions, RAND, P-7389, October 1987; Ethiopia in Early 1989--Deepening Crisis,
2. A NEW BEGINNING

Ethiopians are rejoicing that the country is at peace after long years of seemingly endless civil war. The people of the country are enjoying a new feeling of freedom. There is widespread support—in many places enthusiasm—for the principles and policies the new leaders have enunciated. There are high expectations that real democracy will now prove possible and that hopes for accelerated modernization and a more open society that prevailed briefly in 1974 can at last be realized.

As in Eastern Europe, there appears to be very little misunderstanding of democracy as a basic principle. Mengistu Haile Mariam's People's Democracy is universally regarded as fraudulent. There is no popular constituency for a continued, revived, or camouflaged Workers' Party of Ethiopia (WPE).

Change in mood from sullen depression, then anxiety, and finally to optimism about the future is apparent in Addis Ababa, as well as in most other parts of the country. People talk without looking over their shoulders. They no longer assume that their phones are tapped. Political groups meet publicly, and several political parties are in the process of coalescing.

Writers are planning new newspapers and magazines. Meles, the new president, has held long discussion sessions with important intellectuals on prime-time evening TV. He is widely acclaimed both for the quality of the ideas he expressed and the language in which he


²From eastern and western border regions there were still reports of disturbed conditions during June and July. These appear to have resulted primarily from refugee movements. Reports of strong resistance by elements of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP) and MEISONE (All-Ethiopia Socialist Party) in outlying parts of Gojjam and Gondar provinces do not appear to have been well founded. In all the heavy populated parts of the north, center, and south, peaceful conditions prevailed. There was no significant resistance to the EPRDF coalition.
expressed them. Evening newscasts in Tigrinya and Orominya have been introduced on TV and precede evening programming in Amharic.

Ethiopian citizens can now obtain passports on demand without having to pay bribes. Political exiles (who until a few weeks ago would have been jailed on arrival in the country) circulate in full freedom and host cocktail parties at major hotels. Hundreds of emigres returned for the national conference convened during the first week of July to create the framework for a transitional government.

MOVE TOWARD DEMOCRACY

Instead of being dominated by Marxism, political dialogue in Ethiopia is now characterized by a strong interest in Western democracy, federalism, and open economic systems. EPRDF leaders have committed themselves to such democratic ideals as a multiparty democracy within two years, a pluralist society with a free press, a free-market economy, respect for human rights, and the rule of law with equal status for all peoples of the country.

Throughout the country there is a palpable sense of relief at the changes that took place in quick succession following the flight of Mengistu Haile Mariam on 21 May and the arrival of EPRDF forces in the capital on 28 May. Citizens of the capital, accustomed to Derg arbitrariness, were happily surprised at the considerate behavior of the young guerrilla soldiers (including perhaps 5 to 10 percent females) who have been maintaining security in both Addis Ababa and country towns since that time, but who will soon be replaced by a reconstituted democratic police force. Random violence, arrogance, and officious behavior of government functionaries toward citizens have quickly gone out of style.

Young men no longer fear the draft, for the armed forces of the Derg have, in effect, dissolved. The EPRDF has shown no tendency to expand its own guerrilla forces. EPRDF leaders speak of keeping the future Ethiopian army within the range that prevailed during Haile Selassie's time—about 45,000 men in all (Derg armies exceeded 400,000). They show little interest in a reconstituted air force. Having suffered
Derg bombing and strafing and then won without air power, they harbor no kindly feelings toward Mengistu's air force.

THE FLAG AND AMHARIC

Except in Eritrea (where the two Eritrean flags are said to be visible everywhere), the red-yellow-green traditional flag flies throughout Ethiopia. Tigrinya has not replaced Amharic as the national language. The proceedings of the national conference which took place from 1-5 July in Addis Ababa were in Amharic with Meles Zenawi in the chair. The Charter the conference agreed upon has two equally definitive texts: the English and the Amharic. Meles impressed participants and television audiences (conference proceedings were broadcast) with his command of Amharic. It remains to be seen whether the new government's policy of encouragement of use of other languages will be more successful than the Derg's similar approach. Tigrinya, as the most widely understood language in both Tigre and Eritrea, will certainly gain wider use in those parts of the country. The status of Orominya as a written language may prove to be more problematic.

THE U.S. EMBASSY

After three years of distinguished service, Robert Houdek was replaced by Marc Baas as charge d'affaires in Addis Ababa at the end of June. In early August, Houdek took up new responsibilities as deputy to Assistant Secretary of State Herman Cohen in Washington, where he will continue to be closely involved in Ethiopian affairs. Immediately after his arrival in Ethiopia, Baas met with President Meles and is in frequent and direct contact with senior officials of the transitional government. He hosted almost 1000 guests at this year's Fourth of July reception. The long, lean period when the American Embassy in Addis Ababa was the object of harassment and petty slights by Derg officialdom is clearly past.

There is talk of expanded USAID and USIS operations, as well as the possible assignment of Peace Corps volunteers again. In my talks with them, several members of the new government recalled with pleasure their own experience of Peace Corps teachers in the 1960s.
LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Rains have been abundant so far this krempe season. Farmers are plowing and planting with confidence, traders are expanding their activities, and prospects for a good harvest seem excellent. International relief operations have greatly eased the threat of famine in most food-deficient areas.

Churches are full, as are mosques. The Falasha problem is regarded as essentially solved, though many Ethiopians regret the Falashas' hurried exodus to Israel as the remnants of the Derg regime fell apart. There is embarrassment over the $35 million payment Israel made to Ethiopia as the Derg was collapsing, but satisfaction that it did not actually fall into the hands of Mengistu or Kassa Kebede. The few thousand Falashas remaining in Ethiopia are free to leave if they wish.

The awkward problem of people who claim to be the descendants of Falashas forcibly converted to Christianity during the eighteenth or nineteenth century remains. It is an issue best left to Israel and Ethiopia to settle. Whether they are real or forced converts, these people are unlikely to suffer any discrimination by the new government.

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3 The heavy rainy season equivalent of winter.
4 The money was transferred by Israel into an Ethiopian government account in Citibank in New York during the last half hour of the banking business day on Saturday, 25 May 1991. By Monday, when banking transactions could again be made, the rump Derg government headed by General Tesfaye Gebre Kidan had collapsed, and the provisional government established by the EPRDF on arrival in the capital on 28 May came into control of Ethiopian government accounts abroad. As of the time I left Ethiopia, this money had not, however, been used, and some officials of the new government favored returning it to Israel on the grounds that it represented "blood money" paid for the export of Ethiopian citizens. Kassa Kebede himself was smuggled out of the country on 25 May with one of the last Falasha flights--carried on the plane on a stretcher under a blanket--supposedly a Falasha too ill to be disturbed. He carried a passport with an Israeli transit visa. The manner of his escape generated some rancor between the EPRDF and the Israeli Embassy in Addis Ababa. Some discreet fence-mending (which may already be under way) will be required before Israel's relations with the new government can be restored to a level of real warmth. After a brief stay in Israel, Kassa Kebede departed for Switzerland.
nor do they have a demonstrable claim to having been discriminated against by the previous regime.

The country is moving toward the consolidation of peace, opening of roads, resumption of domestic telephone, postal and air service, and reestablishment of secure conditions of life and trade with minimal governmental interference. Is all this too good to be true? Can it last? Are there no problems? Is no one unhappy?
When EPRDF leaders took over the government in Addis Ababa, they found that the Derg had left behind a mere $3.6 million—an average of 15 cents per person—in foreign exchange. The treasury contained only 96 million Ethiopian Birr—the equivalent of less than $20 million at a realistic rate of exchange. Just paying the most urgent bills, officials' salaries and other demands on the state budget has required great exertions. There was no money to pay for petroleum imports or other essential supplies from abroad. A European Community (EC) consortium set up a $38 million credit to cover fuel imports; by the time I left at the end of the third week of July, vehicles were again moving on the roads and intersections in the capital were crowded with traffic.

The center and north of the country are littered with incredible quantities of wrecked tanks, trucks, rocket launchers, armored vehicles, and other military debris. Soviet military aid worth $12 billion lie strewn over the landscape. In many places Derg bombing destroyed bridges and buildings. Some roads are still mined. I was unable to drive to Alem Ketema in Merhabete, e.g., because the highway across the Jama River valley had just been discovered to be mined and two vehicles had been blown up the day before I attempted the route.

Vast quantities of ammunition remain to be disposed of in many parts of the country. Mengistu had a mania for tanks and explosives. He had dozens of tanks concentrated on the grounds of the National Palace in Addis Ababa. Wrecked tanks were still standing all around the periphery of the old Menelik Gibbi in Addis Ababa when I left. Most Derg military camps were torn up and the wood, tin and equipment carried away by local inhabitants.

The great explosion of the Nefas Silk arms depot in Addis Ababa in early June (the new government says it was calculated sabotage by Derg remnants) caused more than a thousand deaths, rendered over 10,000

5When the Derg took over from Haile Selassie in 1974, it fell heir to about $800 million in the old emperor's well-managed treasury and the country had no debts in arrears. The extent of Ethiopia's indebtedness to the Soviet Union and other communist countries for military deliveries has not yet been determined.
homeless, and caused property damage that will take months, if not years, to repair. The United States Embassy donated $25,000 for emergency help to the victims in July and has requested demolition experts to advise on cleaning up explosives here and elsewhere that menace the population.

Despite the widespread sense of relief at the changes which have brought peace and the promise of a better future, the country looks shabbier than it did 20 years ago. Infrastructure is run-down. Just about everything needs refurbishing and repair.

The new leaders have shown a keen sense of priority in working to reestablish essential public services and leaving until later the cleanup of all the WPE iconography, triumphal arches, and slogans that deface the towns. The public has taken the initiative in dealing with portraits of Mengistu—most pictures have been shot through, smeared with mud, or ripped. They stand as stark evidence of the love the "broad masses" held for the erstwhile Communist leader.

New EPRDF officials seldom occupy Derg quarters or offices, either in the capital or in provincial towns. In both Makelle and Gondar, I found the EPRDF administrators of the province working out of modest houses. The ostentatious building that served as WPE headquarters in Addis Ababa stands empty.

Many kinds of people are unhappy in Ethiopia. The destitute and the beggars seem more numerous than ever before. Many families are divided and bereaved. Hundreds of thousands of wives still do not know where their husbands and sons are, or if they are alive at all. Some students have missed two, three, and more years of education. Many Shoan centrists resent the end of their era of dominance. Amhara are not being discriminated against as such, however. Many northern Amhara have joined the EPRDF. In travel through areas where it became predominant, I was able to see that the Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement (EPDM) had gained the support of a significant part of the population of Wollo, Gondar, Gojjam, and northern Shoa.

The new leaders talk of smaller government and honest government. They use no titles but Ato (Mr.) and Woizer (Mrs). They talk of federalism, local responsibility, and encouraging local initiative.
They will need time to educate the population in these concepts and to
establish effective local institutions. I found what has been done in
areas where the EPRDF has been in charge for two or three years (Tigre
and parts of Wollo) nevertheless a good beginning.

At the same time, habits of dependence on the central government
for services are deeply ingrained and the only way of restoring some
services in the countryside is to assign central government bodies the
task. Needed services include getting the schools working again,
repairing highways, and reestablishing telephone and postal
communications. I was surprised—and impressed—to see fertilizer being
distributed to farmers by Ministry of Agriculture officials in some
areas I visited.

Some Ethiopians fear that no matter how good their intentions and
how sincere their promises, new leaders may not be able to deliver.
They fear that frustration will cause them to lapse into old ways of
doing things. They also fear the residual effects of Marxism on
guerrillas who once claimed to admire Albania. These are understandable
concerns. Can Ethiopians rule themselves democratically? Can they
create a just society? Can the ethnic tensions that the Derg in its
final years fanned and tried to exploit be contained? Can the idealism
that the new leaders profess be put into practice?

Who can say? They have no alternative but to give the new leaders
the opportunity to prove their good intentions and to live up to their
promises. They won the internal struggle under the slogan Selam ba
Tagal—Peace Through Struggle. Throughout the north, one sees this
slogan on posters and painted on walls. It obviously had meaning to the
population.

The detestation of Mengistu and the oppressive, intrusive system he
tried to force on the country is dramatically evident in the paintings
that decorate the streets and squares of most northern towns. They show
a rapacious Mengistu devouring the country's youth, mothers mourning
over the bones of their sons, Derg bureaucrats oppressing the peasants
and townsmen. I was most impressed by a street painting I saw in Gondar.
It depicted rows of officials being pushed aside under the slogan: "We
have had enough of bureaucracy!" This is a healthy attitude.
Ethiopians recognize that Derg policies—and Mengistu’s inability to change—brought the country to the brink of disintegration. The insurgents won with far fewer resources than the Derg. Most people realize that if EPRDF forces had not entered Addis Ababa on 28 May, an appalling bloodbath might have ensued, for order in the capital had broken down.

The acting Derg president, General Tesfaye Gebre Kidan, telephoned American charge d'affaires Houdek on 26 May and told him that he could no longer control his troops or even his own bodyguard. It was in response to Houdek’s information that U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Herman Cohen in London concurred in Meles Zenawi’s proposal to bring EPRDF forces into the capital without further delay.

People in Addis Ababa no longer express resentment of alleged U.S. facilitation of the EPRDF takeover of the capital. They are embarrassed over the stoning of the U.S. Embassy and recognize that the New Ethiopia has no better friend in prospect than the United States. I found no Ethiopians inside the country who expressed a desire to go on fighting for any cause. No outside source of arms or supplies could be found to sustain further civil war. The EPRDF has been collecting arms all over the country and impounding them.

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Their attitude contrasts with that of emotional emigre activists in the United States who continue to misrepresent—and exaggerate—the U.S. role in facilitating Mengistu’s downfall.
Mengistu's communist party—the WPE—has been dissolved. Leaders who did not flee are interned in the Yekatit '66 party school under circumstances that contrast sharply with those that prevailed in Derg prisons. All other WPE members and certain categories of former officials are required to report their whereabouts to local authorities every week. In some provincial areas party members and former officials (including in some cases heads of peasant associations) have been interned and assigned to work on cleanup and reconstruction projects.

The Ministry of State Security has been abolished and its personnel are interned at Sendafa. I heard appalling accounts of corruption among high WPE and State Security officers from EPRDF officials reviewing the files and interrogating these people and some of their victims.

The new government plans to sort serious offenders from the rest, put them on trial in the presence of international observers and free the others. The same principles are being applied to former military and police officers, some of whom may eventually be restored to duty.

I was impressed to hear guerrillas who won by force of arms declaring over and over again that they have no intention of ruling by force or fear. Only time can tell whether they can maintain this commitment, but there is no reason to believe that it has been made dishonestly.

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8Chances that it will be maintained are greatly enhanced by the fact that there is no longer any place for an authoritarian regime to turn for support if it violates, or tolerates violation of, widely recognized international standards of human rights. The Soviet Union can no longer support regimes that claim to champion the “broad masses” but in actuality brutalize them and implement policies contrary to their interests. The Soviets have far too many problems of their own, and the EPRDF leaders are well aware of them. They have no illusions that they could obtain
The plight of former party members and officials does not cause great anguish among most Ethiopians. They are happy to be freed of the party, the military, and the bureaucracy. Some Ethiopians are criticizing the provisional government, in fact, for treating interned party types too well.

The fate of hundreds of thousands of ex-soldiers and expellees from Eritrea is a much more urgent problem. I saw thousands of conscripts, mostly young southerners, being transported southward by Red Cross trucks to camps at Nazareth and Debre Zeit for processing for release. But available transport has been inadequate to handle the exodus. Perhaps as many as two hundred thousand ex-soldiers and civilians had been gathered in makeshift camps in Tigre, Wollo, Gondar, and Bahr Dar as of mid-July.

During the same period, I drove among further tens of thousands trekking along highways in Tigre and on routes to Gondar and Bahr Dar. Some retained their uniforms and boots. Many did not. Some walked barefoot. The heavy rainstorms that hold so much promise for this year's harvest throughout the northern highlands are disastrous for the ex-soldiers and displaced civilians, for they have little shelter, even in the camps, against the wet and cold.³

On the road to Adowa I met a 12-year-old from Gamu Gofa who had been in the army for a year. I talked to many 16-year-old "veterans." The average age of these ex-soldiers is probably not much more than 20, though occasionally a man in his 40s turns up among them. They are overwhelmingly from the south, especially the southwest. All want to get back to their native regions and families as fast as possible.

The EPRDF has been putting these former soldiers through a brief "reorientation" and then releasing them. But implementation, given the enormous numbers of men who have to be dealt with, has been erratic. As

³For a good account of this exodus, which has otherwise been almost totally ignored by the international press, see Jane Perlez, "Ethiopian Troops Left in Misery After Lost War," The New York Times, 22 July 1991.

significant support from China. They see Castro's Cuba as analogous to Mengistu's Ethiopia.
5. ERITREA

I did not visit Eritrea, but hope to do so during another trip to the Horn before the end of the year. Isaias Afewerki, leader of the Eritrean Popular Liberation Front (EPLF), undertook a commitment in February 1991 to defer a referendum on the future of Eritrea for two years. He reiterated this commitment after the fall of the Derg government at the end of May.

The EPRDF provisional leadership in Addis Ababa also declared its readiness to accept the results of an internationally supervised plebiscite on the future of Eritrea. This position was endorsed—not without objections by some of the participants—by the national conference that took place 1-5 July. In mid-June, Meles and Isaias had reached agreement on the Ethiopian use of Assab as a free port, over which difficulties had arisen in the wake of the EPLF takeover and flight of Derg armed forces and officials over the Djibouti border.

EPRDF leaders have made no effort to exert administrative authority over Eritrea. They may, in fact, be relieved at not being expected to extend overtaxed services (such as those of the Highway Authority) to Eritrea. The EPLF is administering the region autonomously. Without resumption of military operations or EPLF acquiescence, neither of which is at present remotely conceivable, no Addis Ababa government in the foreseeable future could aspire to dominate Eritrea. Nevertheless, in respect to all international agreements and arrangements, Eritrea remains part of the Ethiopian state.

When I left Ethiopia on 19 July, air, telephone, and postal services with Eritrea had not been reestablished. From Eritrea, in contrast to other parts of Ethiopia, one hears no reports of moves toward political democratization. This situation has disquieted Ethiopians, including Eritreans living in the capital and other parts of the country, especially the large Eritrean business community. I hesitate to draw any conclusions about the course of Eritrean developments at this early stage without firsthand observation of the situation there.
6. FOOD AND FAMINE

Many foreign and international agencies continue to provide famine relief. They are doing a good job. Noteworthy is the work of the Joint Relief Partnership (JRP), a consortium of three Ethiopian churches (Orthodox, Catholic and Mekane Yesus) with the Catholic Relief Service and Lutheran World Federation. This group was set up to cross combat lines and supply food to needy areas in the center and north of the country. Its work was temporarily hindered by the slowing of deliveries through Assab following the defeat of Derg forces but has been greatly eased by the cessation of military operations.

In a six-hour drive from Makelle to Woldia on 12 July, I encountered 33 food-laden JRP trailer-trucks moving north. Cross-border food operations from Sudan have ceased. Most parts of the north were still being supplied with petroleum products from Sudan in July. Some of the international relief agencies have had difficulties in their relations with the EPLF administration in Eritrea.

The reforms Mengistu reluctantly decreed in March 1990 had a rapid and favorable impact in the center and parts of the south. In Arsi and southern Shoa, producer cooperatives quickly dissolved and peasants began to leave the odious villages into which they had been herded a few years before. The Agricultural Marketing Corporation's authority to levy delivery quotas was abolished and farmers were freed to sell as they pleased as private traders resumed operations.\textsuperscript{12}

In the northern regions that they liberated from Derg rule from 1988 onward, the component organizations of the EPRDF told farmers that they were free to do as they pleased. Shortly after I arrived in June, Meles Zenawi described the new government's approach to me as follows:

\begin{quote}
We don't have the means to provide much assistance to the farmers yet, and we hope eventually to attract foreign help to speed up development. Meanwhile we will apply what we learned in Tigre: to listen to the
\end{quote}

farmers. They know best how to plant and cultivate. Agriculture is not a field where bureaucrats should give orders. We are going to stay off the backs of the farmers of this country, encourage them to plant as they wish and sell without hindrance. This should bring us through the next couple of years successfully. By following this course, we can feed ourselves and start accumulating a surplus for export.

_Belg_ (March-April) rains were good in 1991 in most parts of the central highlands. I watched energetic farmers cutting and threshing fields of barley, wheat and teff with good yields. Markets throughout the north (as well as other parts of the country) are well supplied with dried peas, beans, corn, vegetables and potatoes.

Great price disparities persist, however, especially between rural areas and Addis Ababa. Chickens sell for B2.50 in Tigre and Gondar but cost B15 Addis Ababa. Teff was B140 per quintal in Gojjam in mid-July but almost twice as high in Tigre and Shoa. Salt is still expensive in the center and south, but private truckers are starting to bring supplies down from Tigre, where salt extraction and the salt trade are picking up momentum.

Livestock are in oversupply in most parts of the country. Herds multiplied, as Derg bureaucrats could never muster the courage to risk collectivizing peasants' cattle, sheep and goats. Ethiopia is estimated to have more than 80,000,000 head of livestock. No hotel or _megeb bet_ (eating house) at which I stopped during my northern travels failed to have less than two meat dishes on the menu. But overgrazing is a serious problem in many areas and animal quality is often low. Ethiopia's livestock is nevertheless a resource waiting to be exploited as a source of supply for agroindustry and export, for example, meat-processing and leather manufacture.
7. EXPORTS AND THE NEED FOR FOREIGN EXCHANGE

The problem of finding exports to generate a rapid inflow of foreign exchange is urgent. Coffee sales were delayed by the government change and transport to ports can still be a serious obstacle to rapid shipment. Except for coffee and livestock, Ethiopia has little to export until the next harvest is brought in. Then a surplus of pulses (peas, beans, lentils) might find markets in the Middle East. Very few state farms are producing exportable produce. A state farm growing cut flowers (which have become a highly successful export in Kenya) on the shore of Lake Zway is said to have been so mismanaged that it has cost far more than it has earned.

In spite of heavy requirements for support of Derg military operations in Eritrea, Ethiopian Airlines (EAL) appears to have finished up its 1991 fiscal year in the black. EAL's new general manager, Captain Zeleke Demissie, a former pilot who has come up from the ranks after starting as a trainee 30 years ago, has a clear set of goals: expansion of international services (a new service to Muscat was inaugurated in June) and revival of tourism to Ethiopia as a major foreign exchange earner. The airline is one of the very few Ethiopian enterprises with capital reserves that can be used for investment in revenue-producing undertakings, such as hotels.

At Lalibela and Axum I inspected the splendidly designed hotels built ten years ago when the Derg still had illusions of being able to earn money from tourism. They have been looted and their fittings wrecked, but the attractive stone buildings are intact and, with a few million dollars, could be refurbished and put into operation to make the Historic Route a major tourism money earner again.

The new hotels in Bahr Dar and Gondar, equally attractive, had almost no guests when I stayed in them but are in good condition to welcome visitors. To be profitably and effectively run, however, they need to be placed under private management. The National Tourist Organization, a bureaucratic monstrosity, is unlikely to survive for
long. Six private tour companies have been reactivated and are preparing for operations.

The Addis Ababa Hilton remains one of the finest hotels in the Third World. The capital's other major hotels have declined in quality, but will no doubt undergo renovation and expansion as both business and tourist travel increase. Addis Ababa will need new international-level hotels in many categories during coming years. Local investors are already building smaller hotels to accommodate domestic demand in Addis Ababa and provincial towns.

TRAVEL IN SHOA AND THE NORTH

I will save detailed accounts of various parts of the country that I visited for my subsequent, more comprehensive report and here mention only a few highlights. On day trips I visited several parts of Shoa, including Tegulet, Jirru, Ensaro, Selale and Minjar. Everywhere farmers were busy and happy, market towns were lively, and new local officials who had been popularly elected were carrying out their functions with a light hand.

A few EPRDF fighters (generally called Woyanes in the south, Tagays in the north) were maintaining security in country towns without friction or tension with the inhabitants. In Debre Berhan, e.g., a single Woyane, a young Tigrayan from Makelle, was patrolling the great Saturday market, which attracts thousands of Amhara and Oromo from the surrounding districts. He said he found the local people friendly and peaceful. He showed no unease at all making his way among them.

Another Woyane at the local administrative headquarters happily posed for photographs in his sporty black leather cap and black American T-shirt emblazoned with the slogan "Guns and Roses." Only his Kalashnikov over his shoulder and grenade belt marked him as a guerrilla soldier.

During a ten-day trip through four northern provinces (all of which are being administered in their traditional fashion as single regions, ignoring the Derg reorganization), I visited Dessie, Lalibela, Alamata, Korem, Makelle, Adigrat, Axum, and Adowa and then crossed via the "Chinese Road" (in the best condition of any highway I traveled in
Ethiopia) from Woldia, via Debre Tabor and Addis Zemen, to Woreta and up through beautifully green, hilly countryside to Gondar. From Gondar I went to Bahr Dar and back to Addis Ababa via Mota, Bichena, Fiche and Debre Libanos.

The monuments of Lalibela and Axum have suffered no molestation. I attended morning services in St. Mary of Zion at Axum and observed the priests and monks carrying the tabot (sacred tablet) through the town in a ceremony of prayer for rain. The downpours I experienced making my way through Wadla Dalanta and Gaynt during the next few days led me to conclude that their prayers had been answered almost to excess. Parts of Lasta and Wadla Dalanta had suffered drought during the spring and crops had failed. Otherwise crop prospects looked good.

I met with the EPRDF provincial administrators in both Makelle and Gondar and was impressed with their dedication to the same policy principles the EPRDF has proclaimed in Addis Ababa. They are acutely aware of the need to speed up economic development, improve infrastructure and restore and expand educational and social services.

CONCLUSION

After five weeks in the new Ethiopia, including frequent and detailed conversations with the new government leaders, almost 5000 kilometers of travel in the center and north of the country, and talks with hundreds of peasants, students, small-town merchants and traders, as well as university professors, businessmen and professional people in the capital, I left feeling more optimistic about the country's future than I have been able to feel at any time in the past 17 years.

The atmosphere is very different from the summer of 1974, when even before the revolution turned bloody, the Derg operated in total secrecy and no one knew who the new leaders were. At a very early stage, Derg rhetoric turned anti-Western and all political debate shifted to a leftist mode.

Now political life is open. The new leaders are known and accessible. They hold press conferences and appear on TV in natural circumstances. Political and economic discourse takes place across a broad spectrum. The country is quickly opening up to the world.
President Meles Zenawi is already the most popular public figure in Ethiopia. His style is the opposite of Mengistu's in every respect. He is a sociable, intelligent human being who is widely read, likes to meet people and talk openly, and avoids mouthing dogma or pontificating. Whatever his earlier beliefs and whatever his intentions when he set up the Marxist-Leninist League of Tigre a few years ago, he makes no concessions to Marxism now in public utterances or private conversation. He chaired the 1-5 July national conference with patience, humor and political skill. This conference included a broad range of organizations and individual representatives from within Ethiopia as well as from abroad.

The transitional government that is now being formed under the umbrella of the 83-member Council of Representatives will face difficult challenges. Among them will be the problem of coming to terms with ethnicity, which has been elevated to a representational principle in Ethiopian political life and may prove difficult to contain. Another will be the central, crucial problem of economic policy and actions to spur recovery and development.

At middle and lower levels, the EPRDF appears to contain people still sympathetic to radical nationalist and etatist ideas. Their influence could complicate the task of coming to terms with the World Bank and the lending and development institutions with whom cooperative relations are going to be essential for the success of the new government and for the establishment of real democracy in the country.

Nevertheless, if mistakes have been made, the transitional government will have ample time to correct them. The new leaders show no signs of the stubborn arrogance that characterized Mengistu and most of his close Derg associates which, in the end, destroyed them because they could not seriously embrace a genuine reform process and change course.13

It will be surprising if the transitional government performs with a high degree of efficiency in all the tasks it undertakes. But if it

retains the spirit of openness and common sense with which it has begun, it will learn quickly from experience. It will include professionals as well as insurgent leaders. Insurgent leaders have learned in the tough school of "Peace Through Struggle." They have all Mengistu's mistakes to serve as examples of what not to do.

Ethiopia remains fortunate in having large numbers of well-trained technocrats and specialists who are dedicated to work for the good of the country. If a fair proportion of those who left during the Derg era return from abroad, bringing their talents and their money with them, they will give an enormous boost to the pace of recovery and development. The new leaders appear to appreciate that Ethiopians abroad will return and stay only if policies and practice in the country measure up to the promises they have made.

Suddenly, in the wake of what appeared likely to be a disastrous bloodbath, Ethiopia has emerged into an era of hope and expectation. In spirit, the transitional government is by far the most democratic the country has known in its 3000-year history. The best way friends of Ethiopia on the outside can ensure its transformation into a stable democratic system is to help it implement its commitments and to call it to account if there is slippage or backsliding.

I was quoted in a Washington Post dispatch (6 July 1991) as commenting: "It's hard to think of anywhere else in Africa where, in the wake of a brutal dictatorship and devastating civil war, there has been such an incredible dawning of good sense." For the time being, I stand by that observation.