

CIA Dethrones Haile Selassie

Sept. 20 (IPS) — Waving good-bye to his de-fanged lions and to one teenage youth who responded by yelling “Hang the thief!” Haile Selassie was unceremoniously packed into the back seat of a Volkswagen last week and whisked off by Ethiopia’s CIA-trained “progressive” military.

Despite his confinement, Selassie has been spared, at least temporarily, a worse fate. Britain’s *Daily Telegraph*, in an article prior to his downfall, wondered about the dilemmas of the Ethiopian Armed Forces Co-ordinating Committee (AFCC) in consummating their oft-interrupted act of coup d’etat (what *Le Figaro* called a “creeping putsch”) and speculated that the aged potentate “might die a natural death before the ponderous and cautiously executed military revolution reaches its conclusion.”

The AFCC sputtered along for seven months, stage-managing a scenario whose script was written 20 years ago by the CIA. It is no accident that the international press has referred frequently to the 1952-54 Nasser-Naguib maneuvers in Egypt in covering recent Ethiopian events. Refining the machinations and processes surrounding Nasser’s “Free Officers,” the CIA created a complete philosophy and modus operandi for “progressive military governments,” to be used whenever conditions are ripe.

Two, Three, Many Egypts

In the past five years, CIA-defined necessity has brought the “progressive” military tactic into frequent play. Under conditions of worldwide economic collapse, potential revolutionary ferment has been co-opted consistently by brutish military regimes peddling radical rhetoric. Africa is dotted by such regimes. In recent months, the experiment has been brought to the semi-advanced sector, like Greece and Portugal. Now advanced countries are slated for the same treatment — with Britain the first target.

In Ethiopia the AFCC quickly identified and isolated the nodal points of Selassie’s power base: the Coptic Church, a reported 100,000-man “Patriotic Association” loyal to the Emperor, and the backward peasantry. From the beginning, each element could attempt, at best, only a pathetic “Maginot Line” defense against a multi-flanked offense. At worst, they grew demoralized and terrorized — the near-unanimous mode of response. At the

slightest resistance (as when some “Old Guard” senators humbly pleaded for mercy for their jailed colleagues in mid-June) the AFCC ruthlessly squelched it; in this case by rounding up practically every aristocrat in the country and tossing the whole bunch into detention. As the *New York Times* of Sept. 20 described it: “*The recipe is to move slowly and deliberately, with a mixture of toughness and persuasion, and to discredit opponents in the eyes of the citizenry.*” Such precision has been essential to undermine by stages a complex belief structure centered on the person of the Emperor.

During the past seven months, the AFCC encouraged demonstrations of students and workers, calling them off at will, and crushed them if they became troublesome, as did a communications workers’ sit-in in April and this week’s student unrest. In these public manifestations, the AFCC were aided by Maoist crazies in the student and intellectual circles and by “labor leaders” in the CIA-dominated Confederation of Ethiopian Labor Unions, well-trained in manipulating worker ferment. These staged maneuvers had the combined effect of letting off steam, channeling rage, terrorizing the opposition, and creating enough chaos and confusion to establish that the military was the only stable reality.

Ethiopia First

Simultaneously, an ideology was manufactured. Labeled “Ethiopia First,” it combines all the characteristics of a typical “progressive” military regime: extreme nationalism emphasizing the special qualities of “national heritage,” complete “moral integrity” to contrast with the old regime’s bankruptcy, “anti-imperialism,” virulent anti-communism, and vague lip service to international “Third Force” third world “solidarity.” This new religion saturates the controlled national media.

The only obstacle to the operation was the AFCC’s own hesitation to rule. They tiptoed around the final seizure of power. Finally, the AFCC let Lt. General Aman “Crazy Mike” Andam (whose peculiarities are detailed in the Africa Report in IPS No. 19) out of the bag as temporary front man. The necessity of participating in the CIA’s reorganization of the region and coping with complete national economic breakdown and residual unrest will force the AFCC to play a stronger hand.