

## A CRITIQUE OF THE ETHIOPIAN REVOLUTION

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The Ethiopian military's accession to power in 1974, and their subsequent proclamation of a programme of land reform and nationalisation, evoke a number of parallels in the Third World on which its study could shed light. But the military's claim to espouse socialism and its allegiance to the Soviet Union—however these are interpreted—situate its policies within the even broader context of the struggle for socialism and by reference to what is but an aspect of this struggle, the debate on what constitutes socialism. Halliday and Molyneux's study, *The Ethiopian Revolution*,<sup>1</sup> gives expression to an increasingly influential position in this debate; it both reflects on and represents political forces which are challenging anew the demarcation that Marxism has drawn between itself and reformist currents on the characterisation of socialism.

The political developments that have followed the overthrow of Emperor Haile Selassie, provide a critical vantage point on several of the more contested areas of Marxist analysis; the relation between class and state, the place of national self-determination in the struggle for socialism and the role of the Soviet Union in the Third World. *The Ethiopian Revolution* intervenes in each of these issues.

Halliday and Molyneux embark on their analysis of the current Ethiopian regime by an examination of the social order over which Haile Selassie presided. The contradictions within that order unleashed an urban protest movement that created the conditions in which a radicalised section of the army was able to overthrow the Emperor.<sup>2</sup> Once in power, the military carried out, they argue, a radical social transformation, dismantling the economic basis of the landed aristocracy that had been the mainstay of the Haile Selassie regime. In Halliday and Molyneux's view, the emergence of a centralised state that made this transformation possible, at the same time, brought about the conflict between the state and the nationalist movements based on the Eritrean, Tigray, Oromo and, in the Ogaden, Somali peoples. Since 1974, the military has been in a state of war with these nationalist movements,<sup>3</sup> which see the regime as a continuation of the Amhara domination that was established in the 1880s and 1890s, when the ruling class of the Shoa kingdom subjugated the surrounding kingdoms, forming the basis of the present day Ethiopian political entity. The military's efforts to repress the national struggles is

portrayed by Halliday and Molyneux as arising from the formation of a centralised state that was necessary to carry out a policy of social transformation that they see as having taken Ethiopia in a socialist direction. Their central thesis is that the Ethiopian military regime has brought about a 'revolution from above' which could, on condition of overcoming certain obstacles, initiate the transition to socialism.

It is this thesis that is subjected here to a critical examination, both in its general implications for Marxist theory and its specific application to Ethiopia. The analysis through which it is developed rests, as I will try to show, on the theory of non-capitalist development. Although Halliday and Molyneux are apparently anxious to affirm a judicious distance from this theory, advancing its relevance to Ethiopia with some reservations, they diverge from it only on a secondary point and embrace its problematic. I will first indicate those aspects of the problematic of non-capitalist development that will help to illuminate the theoretical underpinning of their study and then discuss how this leads them to abandon Marxist concepts for sociological categories which abstract social developments from the class struggle and imprison their account of post-1974 Ethiopia within the ideology of the Ethiopian state.

The theory of non-capitalist development, as advanced by Soviet writers, contends that the existence of the socialist system gives the opportunity for Third World countries 'to bypass the more advanced forms of class-antagonistic relations, the capitalist socio-economic formation above all' (Andreyev 1977, p. 30).<sup>4</sup> It argues that an alliance between world socialism and national democratic forces which incorporate workers, the peasantry and the urban petty bourgeoisie can lay the basis for socialist development in the Third World.

Soviet writers trace the genesis of the theory to Marx—to his comments on communal property relations in Russia forming the basis of a direct transition to socialism; and to Lenin—to his remarks that the establishment of soviets in Russia opened the possibility of the peasantry rallying to communism in the predominantly agrarian countries of the colonial world. Irrespective of the question of whether these postulates have been borne out by events, they indicate that Marx and Lenin, while holding to the view that the general historical tendency was the emergence of socialism from the contradictions of capitalism, were nevertheless prepared to hypothesise that some societies might proceed directly from the pre-capitalist to the socialist stage. It is only to the extent that the theory of non-capitalist development postulates that societies do not have to pass through capitalist development that the texts of Marx and Lenin referred to can be marshalled in their support. They do not, however, lend weight to the particular economic and political features that are ascribed to the non-capitalist path.

In so far as the theory can lay claim to any classical heritage, it is to the post-revolutionary texts of Lenin on state capitalism. There Lenin appears to suggest a continuity between the nationalised sector in its state capitalist and its socialist forms. As Bettelheim remarks, Lenin's writings on this issue,

**do not make clear whether upon transition to the next stage of the revolution, the apparatuses of State capitalism are destined to play a role also in the building of socialism. . . some of his formulations in that period might suggest that the same apparatuses are destined, without being revolutionised, to play a part in socialist construction.<sup>5</sup>**

The limitations of Lenin's thinking on this question stemmed from his exclusive concentration on the task set by the principal contradiction in the immediate aftermath of the revolution: how to reduce the labouring time of the masses to allow them to take control of the affairs of the state. 'At that stage, the centre of gravity of the masses taking power was the state not the process of productive work.'<sup>6</sup> The obstacles presented by the capitalist organisation of the labour process—with its separation between mental and manual labour and the tasks of decision-making from the work of execution to workers forming themselves into the collective masters of the new society—was at the time beyond Lenin's theoretical horizon. The continuity between state capitalism and socialism existed for him by virtue of the proletariat holding state power. He neglected the importance for the advance of socialism of the transformation of the social relations of production in the state sector not because he ignored the need for the proletariat to exercise power but because he considered it purely in its political form, its control of the state. The same cannot be said for the theory of the non-capitalist path of development, in which the continuity between state capitalism and socialism is established without any regard to the issue of working class power either in the form of control of the state or in the form of control of the direct process of production. Ulyanovsky writes:

**Many of the economic principles that lead in the direction of socialism and have been tested by time are being put into practice by these countries. These include nationalisation of the basic industries, expansion and strengthening of the state sector, the introduction of agrarian reforms that favour the peasantry and gradual industrialisation.<sup>7</sup>**

The economic evolution towards socialism, 'the socialist orientation', is alleged to take place when 'the state capitalist sector has been transformed into a national democratic sector of socialist orientation'.<sup>8</sup> This comes about not as a result of the transformation of social relations of production but from the character of the state: 'the social nature of the state sector', writes Ulyanovsky, 'is derived from the social nature of the state

power, from the class basis of the state, and from its domestic and foreign policy.<sup>9</sup> While this position is formally analogous to that of Lenin, in essence it is quite different, for here the state sector is situated on a continuum leading to socialism even from the stage when the proletariat does not hold state power.

The social base of the state, the classes which support the 'socialist orientation', consists of the working class, the peasantry, the working intelligentsia, the petty bourgeoisie and in certain instances part of the middle bourgeoisie.<sup>10</sup> However, it is not these classes that are in control of the state but radical petty bourgeois leaders, usually army officers, who are, Soviet writers argue, largely autonomous from social classes:

**A characteristic of many of the Afro-Asian countries over the past 15-20 years has been the considerable increase in the independent role of the state superstructure. From 1960 to 1975 there were roughly 90 military coups or attempted coups. By 1975 more than 20 of the 46 African states were under the rule of military regimes. In this sort of situation we usually find that the state apparatus is rarely subjected to direct control of class organisations. . .**<sup>11</sup>

Thus, although the social character of the state was held to determine the social character of the nationalised sector of the economy, the state, too—by virtue of its 'independent role'—escapes class determination. Having first discarded the question of the type of relations of production that prevail in the nationalised sector of the economy on the grounds that its social content is determined by the state, the state itself is then detached from any reference to class domination. The state's 'socialist orientation', therefore, cannot be given any other determination than its own volition. The result is, that while the theoreticians of the non-capitalist path take care to mention the need to democratise the state, to strengthen the organisations of the working class and even to develop new state structures, in order to 'firmly secure socialist orientation from encroachments by reaction from home and abroad',<sup>12</sup> they do not identify these transformations with any particular social force. This lacuna is camouflaged by the argument that the transformation of the state depends on strengthening the organisations of the working class, through the raising of its political consciousness which, in turn, depends on the formation of a 'vanguard party'. But the original problem is merely displaced to **resurge** elsewhere, for in the absence of conceptualising state and class in the context of class struggle, the party is sociologically unanchored, it can emerge for its ideological task out of anywhere, even from the state—a process underway in Ethiopia, reportedly, at the behest of Soviet advisers.

What is absent from the theory of non-capitalist development is the position basic to Marxism that the formation of the working class into an independent political force is the *sine qua non* of the socialist

revolution and transition. The failure to take into account the necessity of the proletariat to constitute itself into a historical force in its own right severs the dialectical unity between socialism and democracy. For it is only from the standpoint that 'the emancipation of the working class must be conquered by the working classes **themselves**',<sup>13</sup> that the struggle for democracy can be seen as inseparable from the struggle for socialism. This is to be understood not only in the sense that democracy provides the best conditions for the self-organisation of the oppressed but, more fundamentally, in the sense that the struggle for democratic rights of the oppressed sections of society is, itself, part of the transformation of the social relations which maintain the disorganisation and subordination of the masses. That is why Lenin argued that 'the proletariat cannot perform the socialist revolution unless it prepares for it by the struggle for **democracy**.'<sup>14</sup>

The prospects for a socialist transition are assessed by Soviet writers not by developments that enhance the ability of the oppressed classes to seize state power, but by the extent to which the state's policies approximate to a model of socialism of which the main components are nationalisation, land reform and close relations with the Soviet Union. This last criterion is presented as the crucial indicator of a state's orientation and in practice has been the basis of Soviet categorisation of Third World states, as the revisions in successive lists of socialist oriented countries show.

The ideological effects of the failure of the theory of non-capitalist development to render account of social transformation in terms of the struggle of the oppressed classes and, in particular, of the consequent severing of the internal connection between socialism and democracy, can be seen clearly in Halliday and Molyneux's analysis of post-1974 Ethiopia. It leads them, as we shall see, to a conceptualisation of the socio-economic structure on the basis of juridical relations and—as its concomitant—to a statist conception of socialist politics, in which democracy is contingent to socialism.

Halliday and Molyneux develop their main thesis, that a 'revolution from above' has been carried out in Ethiopia, through two lines of argument. First, that the military government that came to power in Ethiopia implemented **from** above a transformation of class relations that merits the term 'revolution'. Second, that this 'revolution from above' constitutes an advance on the path to the transition to socialism, interpreted by the authors, in line with the theory of non-capitalist development, to mean that it has 'created a state sector—in industry, finance and agriculture—and has through the mass mobilisation and planning system increased its overall ability to direct the **economy**'.<sup>15</sup> Although Halliday and Molyneux give considerable attention to the first argument, to establish

that the Ethiopian revolution was one of 'the most radical from above', it is only by relation to the second, on the basis of determining the class relations that 'the revolution from above' has brought about, that such terms as 'radical' and 'far reaching' can be rendered theoretically and politically meaningful. If the transformations carried out are separated from the question of what type of class relations they established, then the issue of whether they amount to a revolution or not boils down to one of formal definitions. Yet, it is precisely this separation that Halliday and Molyneux operate. After pointing to the fundamental social transformations carried out by the state in Germany and Japan in the second half of the 19th century, they add:

**The concept of revolution from above is therefore one which sparingly used has a valid application: whether such revolutions can be socialist as well as capitalist and whether the Ethiopian revolution can legitimately be included in either category, are separate matters.**<sup>16</sup>

In this way the ground is prepared for 'the revolution from above' in Ethiopia to be linked to a social force that is presented as indeterminate in class terms, the military bureaucracy. It comes into being as 'an autonomous and radical sector of the state apparatus'.<sup>17</sup>

The autonomy that Halliday and Molyneux attribute to the military governs their entire analysis of the developments in post-1974 Ethiopia. They attribute its origin to the manner in which the society ruled by Haile Selassie finally exploded in a contradiction within the state apparatus. The structure of the imperial state had not been able 'to transform itself into a functioning modern administration. The Emperor took all the major decisions and his power in the provinces was weak'.<sup>18</sup> In the countryside, the dominant class was made up of the large landowners who retained control of the administrative organs and it is to this fact that Halliday and Molyneux attribute the fragmentation of Ethiopian society, which, they argue, has had a crucial bearing on political developments under the military. The outmoded state apparatus was swelled at the centre by its involvement in the capitalist sector:

**bureaucratic capitalism did denote a tangible phenomenon in the following senses: (a) the state played a significant role in promoting certain capitalist enterprises, investing more heavily than any local bourgeoisie, if less than foreign capital; and (b) these enterprises were organised in part to yield extra benefits to those state employees with access to them.**<sup>19</sup>

The imperial state based on an alliance between bureaucratic capitalism and the landowning class, was unable to carry out the agrarian reform that capitalist expansion required. The fundamental cause of the imperial state's overthrow, Halliday and Molyneux conclude, lay 'in the failure

of the regime to resolve the agrarian crisis, to develop the country's productive forces in such a way as to improve the population's living standards and even, in the provinces ravaged by famine, maintain previous subsistence levels.<sup>20</sup>

The state was enmeshed within an insoluble contradiction on the one hand it was the agent of capitalist development, on the other, it was linked to the landowning aristocracy of the provinces, whose existence was antithetical to that development. Emphasising how this contradiction coalesced within the state, the authors write:

the state apparatus became a partial promoter of capitalist development and, at the same time, the site of a conflict between groups associated with this capitalist development and those associated with the pre-capitalist order. The gulf thus created within the state was to be more than a reflection of the conflicts within the socio-economic formation as a whole; it became the politically most acute contradiction within Ethiopian society, the conflict that was to determine the fall of the *ancien regime* and the nature of the new post-revolutionary system.<sup>21</sup>

The movement that led to the overthrow of Haile Selassie began in the army, in February 1974. A series of mutinies by soldiers over their conditions was followed by a widescale urban protest movement, based largely on the students and white collar workers. This ferment was, after a lull, reinvigorated by visibly more permanent politicisation of the armed forces.<sup>22</sup>

On the relative importance of the mass protest movement and the movement of the armed forces, in the overthrow of the regime, Halliday and Molyneux, comment: 'The attack on the nobility and ultimately on the Emperor came not from the civilian bodies but from the radical junior officers in the armed forces.'<sup>23</sup> When the military finally overthrew the Emperor and seized power in September, only the aristocracy had been dislodged.

No social revolution had yet occurred. But it was partly because of the imminence of. . . a political counter-revolution that the new government felt pressed to take a series of radical measures designed to undermine the economic and social power of those who might have favoured a return to some version of the previous regime.<sup>24</sup>

Having seized power, the military (the Derg) implemented an economic programme consisting of nationalisation and land reform:

On February 3 seventy-two industrial and commercial companies were fully nationalised, and the state assumed majority control in twenty-nine others. By late 1976 two-thirds of all manufacturing was under the control of the Ministry of Industry. On March 4th, 1975, the most important reform of all, a **land reform**, was announced: all rural land was nationalised, tenancy was prohibited, and the peasantry was to have the right to till plots of only ten hectares maximum.<sup>25</sup>

These measures are represented by Halliday and Molyneux, as by the theory of non-capitalist development, as the economic preconditions of socialism. But, since, according to this theory, it is ultimately the policy of the state, its anti-imperialist policy internally and its political alignments externally, which determines the society's socialist orientation, this does not prevent Halliday and Molyneux from identifying the limits of the transformation in the social relations of production brought about by the military.

Although hiring of labour was henceforth forbidden, the weakness of the state purchasing body, combined with the reliance of the peasantry on their former landlords for their subsistence goods, opened the door to new forms of exploitation of the peasantry by richer peasants and merchants. Overall, the richer peasants were able not only to gain a disproportionate amount of land to continue exploiting the poorer ones, but also to ensure that it was they who controlled the new Peasants' Associations, their credit, equipment and distribution.<sup>26</sup>

A little later they conclude:

By **1980** there were just forty producer cooperatives in existence, mainly of the initial malba variety, and another **130** were under consideration. But state farms and cooperatives combined accounted for only 6 per cent of agricultural output and **20** per cent of marketed production: the Ten Year Plan declared the need for **collectivisation**, but set no targets for it.<sup>27</sup>

In the nationalised industrial sector, the transformation of the social relations of production similarly did not go beyond the establishment of capitalist relations. 'By 1976, widespread demands were being raised for shop-floor control over production. These were repelled with the appointment of powerful state managers, and with the imposition of a new trade union structure.'<sup>28</sup>

If therefore 'the revolution from above' in Ethiopia laid the preconditions for a socialist transition, as Halliday and Molyneux following the theory of non-capitalist development argue, this is not because the 'radical' transformation the military imposed has gone beyond the establishment of capitalist relations of production but because the policies of the state—what Soviet writers term its 'socialist orientation'—can, on the basis of the nationalised sector, lay the preconditions for the socialist transition. To attribute to the state this capacity to override the balance of class forces, it has not only to be detached from the economic structure—from the class relations on the economic level—but also from the class struggle on the political level or, to be more precise, the struggle of the political forces around the state has to be abstracted from the class struggle.

The terms of this problematic are set in motion by Halliday and Molyneux's discussion of the political forces which is organised around

the conceptual couplet, the military-civilian forces. This leads them to trace the history of the military's consolidation in power principally through the relation between the military and the political groups of the left, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP), All-Ethiopian Socialist Movement (ME'ISON) and a number of smaller groups all of which were mainly based on the urban petty bourgeoisie. In the process of adjudicating among the policies of these rival groups, the repressive policies of the military are evaluated entirely by reference to these groups. Hence the criticism that Halliday and Molyneux levy against the Derg is the 'abandonment of legality'<sup>29</sup> and the 'violations of legality'.<sup>30</sup> These terms echo the official Soviet criticism of Stalin's rule—they were given currency by Khrushchev at the 20th Party Congress—and they are equally inadequate and mystifying with relation to the Derg. For they abstract repression from its effect in the class struggle, to categorise it instead by relation to law.

The repression of the organisations of the Left took place in the context of the Derg's offensive against the organisations of the working class and of the peasantry. Halliday and Molyneux, themselves, remark that at the same time as the 'red terror' was carried out against the EPRP, the 'working class opposition was crushed'<sup>31</sup> and, similarly, the power of the peasant associations, the *kebeles*, that had been formed to implement the land reform, was emasculated. 'The *kebeles* were taken over by political forces that the Derg had to disown. The result was that by the end of 1978 the power of the *kebeles* had been greatly reduced.'<sup>32</sup>

By divorcing the conflict between the EPRP and the Derg from its wider implications in the class struggle, Halliday and Molyneux obscure the real significance of the division between the two. Although the EPRP was undoubtedly ultra-leftist, as indicated by their policy of urban terrorism which was conducted over the heads of the masses, the principal issue on which they clashed with the Derg was fundamental to the entire course of the struggle in Ethiopia. What Halliday and Molyneux describe as the EPRP's demand for 'immediate civilian rule' was, in fact, a demand for basic democratic rights.

It is also on the issue of democracy that the other main leftist organisation, ME'ISON, diverged from the military, though the former allied with the Derg to work for its objectives from the inside, an endeavour that lasted until 1977, when it, too, was eliminated. The programme of the Derg for the 'National Democratic Revolution' (NDR) was based on that of ME'ISON but, as Lefort notes, it differed on two essential points. It did not recognise the right of self-determination, including the right of secession, to the nationalities within Ethiopia and it did not aim at the destruction of the old state apparatus and its replacement by popular organs of power. ME'ISON demanded that:

. . . to secure government by the people for the people, the organs of popular administration. . . be placed under the auspices of mass organisations. . . The bureaucratic apparatus, anti-people and corrupt be dismantled and replaced by a revolutionary and democratic apparatus.

Lefort adds: 'There was nothing of this in the NDR. No reform of the state is envisaged in it.'<sup>33</sup> Whether the policies of the EPRP, ME'ISON—or, indeed, of the Confederation of Ethiopian Labour Unions (CELU), the leadership of which in 1974 was strongly influenced by the EPRP—were correct or not, is of secondary importance, what is far more significant for the analysis of the political developments is that these groups, however inadequately, gave ideological expression to the struggle for democratic rights—for the nationalities and for the Ethiopian masses—and it is that struggle that the Derg crushed.

In September 1975, for example, CELU published a document calling for free speech, **free** press, freedom of association and union organisation. They were demands that had been formulated by the teachers' association but it had strong support from sections of the working class and when some workers were arrested for distributing these demands strikes broke out in a number of **factories**.<sup>34</sup>

It is the consequence for the socialist struggle of the Derg's repression of democratic rights that is obscured by Halliday and Molyneux. And this is a direct consequence of the fact that for them, as for the theoreticians of the non-capitalist development, the emergence of the oppressed as an independent political force is not essential for preparing the conditions for the socialist transition.

Halliday and Molyneux do not deny the absence of democracy under the Derg, but they evidently believe that 'autonomous decisions'—a term used by them—for the oppressed classes and nationalities are not organically related to the realisation of socialism. They are even prepared to concede that 'the non-capitalist path of development' could prepare the ground not for a socialist transition, but for a strengthened capitalist **system**,<sup>35</sup> but in the case of the Derg, the absence of democratic rights under it for the past six years, is assessed by them by criterion devoid of any reference to class forces. The Ethiopian state, they write, has an 'authoritarian' and 'centralised' structure and has a 'novel' and 'pervasive' character:

The new regime's relation to the population as a whole was marked by a number of distinctive characteristics. First this was a far more centralised and interventionist state than the old. . . The second major change was in the relationship to the people. Once the regime was established, few **could** imagine that Ethiopia was a politically democratic country, in the sense of permitting those at the base to express their views openly or to take autonomous decisions: this was true neither for classes nor nationalities nor individuals. But this authoritarian structure

should not obscure the fact that a new system of mobilisation and communication had been established, through the political organisations of the regime. It was through these mediations that a centralised state ~~was~~ being created, however haltingly... Again, recognition of the authoritarian structure of these mechanisms is quite consistent with the assertion of their novel and pervasive character: over seven million people in the Peasant Associations, up to half million in the Trade Unions, several million in the Women's Associations...<sup>36</sup>

The characterisation of the state by its formal institutional features rather than by its relation to the oppressed classes—in this case principally by its anti-democratic nature—follows from the analysis of the state having been detached **from** the question of what class relations it serves to reproduce. Halliday and Molyneux's list of the number of people incorporated into the so-called 'mass organisations', beyond showing the 'novel' and 'pervasive' character of the state, **suggests**, given the absence of internal democracy, that they are a powerful instrument of domination. 'Politics', the authors defensively add, 'however much it was directed from above, was being brought to the population in a way not previously seen in Ethiopian history'. But politics is not a thing, it is defined by relations of power. The literacy campaign is a case in point. Halliday and Molyneux mention how 'the literacy campaign in particular was designed to bring the people into political **life**',<sup>37</sup> but they ignore that the literacy campaign is conducted almost entirely in Amharic and as such, within the existing power relations, serves as an instrument for imposing the culture of the dominant nationality on the rest of the population.

The failure to situate the anti-democratic character of the state by relation to the class struggle has particularly far reaching effect on Halliday and Molyneux's understanding of the struggle of the oppressed nationalities and, more especially, of the one that continues to pose the most serious threat to the Ethiopian state, the Eritrean struggle.

Halliday and Molyneux argue that although the Eritrean struggle is justified in principle, it is undermined in practice, in the present historical context, by the fact that it has little prospect of succeeding and by the political nature of the Eritrean movement, which in its strengths and weaknesses mirrors the Derg.

**In its dimensions, both human and political, Eritrea has been a tragedy of great proportions, in which no simple attribution of responsibility or of socialist credentials is possible.**<sup>38</sup>

The difficulty that Halliday and Molyneux have in attributing 'socialist credentials' between the oppressors and oppressed stems from their theoretical framework which, as we saw, divorces the struggle for democratic rights from the struggle for socialism. Before returning to this

point, it is worth detailing how having detached the Eritrean struggle from the context within which its significance for the class struggle could be evaluated, the authors proceed to establish a symmetry between the two opposed forces, which gives a distorted picture of the Eritrean movement.

The Eritrean liberation movement, they argue, has been characterised by 'factionalism' and 'mutual anathemas' which, 'are merely the public face of feuding that continues invisibly within the fronts themselves and which has periodically to be purged by expulsions, excommunications and liquidations'.<sup>39</sup> That the authors characterise the divisions within the Eritrean movement as 'factionalism' follows from their view that there is no substantial difference among the three Eritrean forces.

**The relative strengths and distribution of the three groups indicate that while the claims of all three about their own following must be discounted, none was an insignificant force at that time, and none could be categorised as just being the expression of one confessional-geographical bloc. The cross-currents of Eritrean society were reflected both in their leadership and in the composition of their guerrilla forces. The political programmes of the three indicate further differences, but, again, these are less significant than their own controversies suggest.**<sup>40</sup>

In reality, the relative strengths of the three forces are barely comparable. The Eritrean Liberation Front—Popular Liberation Front (ELF—PLF), led by Osman Sabbe Saleh, never a serious rival to the other two fronts, has virtually disintegrated. In 1980, it broke up into two groups and: 'Neither has guerrilla units of any substance inside Eritrea. . .'.<sup>41</sup> As to the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF), during 1981, its main area of operation, the Barka region was taken over by the Eritrean Peoples' Liberation Front (EPLF) and by the time of the Ethiopian 6th offensive, launched in February 1982, it had ceased to exist as an effective military force and took no part in the fighting.<sup>42</sup> It is not merely that Halliday and Molyneux's account has been rapidly surpassed by the events, their account is inadequate for the period they describe and therefore fails to identify tendencies which have been evident for some time. Despite promising a 'materialist and critical analysis of the Eritrean movement,' their discussion does not go beyond locating the regional influences in the origin of the three forces and the differences in their programmes, the significance of which they belittle.

But more serious than the inadequacies of their account of the Eritrean liberation movement, is their assessment of what the Eritrean war reveals of the Ethiopian state. The oppression of the non-Amharic nationalities in Ethiopia—who form approximately threequarters of the population—and the denial of the right of secession to Eritrea, signifies for them not a particular form of class domination being established but the formal institutional feature of the new state, evidence of its centralised nature:

Yet, if the pre-revolutionary state has rested upon the disunity of the country and on the balance of its various separate components, the revolutionary state based itself upon a centralised system: in that process of transition, from a centrifugal equilibrium to a new fusion, conflict was inevitable.

The absence of self-determination for the nationalities is referred to as the inevitable result of the transition from one mode of production to another. But whereas the decentralised state, in the **Haile Selassie** period, had been presented as linked to a particular form of class domination, the new centralism is not linked, even tendentially, to any form of class domination. As we saw before, once the character of the state is disconnected from its relation to class domination, the importance of its democratic or undemocratic character for the struggle for socialism is also obscured. The 'socialist credentials' of the Ethiopian state can then be determined independently of the denial of democratic rights to the nationalities, just as before it was determined independently of the denial of democratic rights to the working class and the peasantry.

The theoretical underpinning of the separation of the characterisation of the state from the relation of class forces in Ethiopia rests on Halliday and Molyneux's interpretation of 'the relative autonomy of the state', through which they weld their analysis to the problematic of non-capitalist development.

The state, argue Halliday and Molyneux, has a degree of relative autonomy 'even in the most settled and developed capitalist societies' but it is 'all the greater in other situations':

This is so in revolutionary contexts, where the normal controls of social class over the state may be attenuated, and where the very conflicts of the revolutionary period are concentrated on the state—either on gaining control of existing apparatuses or on establishing new institutions capable of replacing those through which the social relations of the old order are reproduced. The autonomy of the state may also be greater in situations of transition from one mode of production to another, where social forces associated with both modes may compete for power not just over the state, but within it, in such a way that the institutions are again released from class controls imposed in situations where one mode and one system of social relations are dominant. Finally, the autonomy of the state may be greater where class relations are themselves less developed, due to the disruption of the social system by external influences or by the predominance of social relations determined by factors other than class, such as ethnic and lineage bonds. . . It will be evident that all three forms of 'autonomy' have pertained in the Ethiopian case: Ethiopia is a society undergoing a revolution, its social relations are transitional and heterogeneous and its class forces are still partially developed.<sup>44</sup>

On the empirical level, the explanation here is circular, making cause and effect reversible. It was the relative autonomy of the state that for **Halliday**

and Molyneux made the revolution from above possible and has continued to be the driving force behind 'the revolutionary period', behind 'the transition from one mode of production to another', and it is presumably this process that has prevented a crystallisation of class forces. Thus it is precisely the conditions which the state, by virtue of its alleged autonomy, brought about, that are then held to account for the autonomy. The state has apparently taken off into self-sustained autonomy, providing the conditions for its own determination.

This is but an effect of Halliday and Molyneux's conceptualisation of the state's autonomy, which situates its functioning exterior to class struggle. Their position breaks with the Marxist point of view that the state is constituted and defined by the relation of domination that is established through class struggle and this is no less the case in situations where the organisation of the subordinate classes is weak and the dominant class is formed largely out of the functionaries of the state apparatus. The state for them is the object of class struggle, it reflects class struggle but it is not the organised form of class domination.

**The state is therefore both a reflection of the conflicts within society, the object of that conflict, and a means by which those concerned to transform society can hope to achieve their aims. If it is to a considerable extent limited by the objective structures of Ethiopian society—it cannot arbitrarily remould the social relations irrespective of the conditions prevailing—it is nevertheless an active agent in the process of consolidating a post-revolutionary order. It reflects to some degree the interests of class forces but it may also play an active role in class formation, in constructing new social relations of which its agents are a part.**

The state, for the authors, is a self-determining subject on the Weberian model, limited by the objective situation, subject to pressures from a plurality of forces but not itself internally related to class domination. The concept of relative autonomy refers to a realm of freedom from class determination which permits the state to become the source of its own power. The Marxist terminology is deceptive—this, in fact, is the state as conceived in liberal pluralist theory where classes compete for influence over the institutions of power. The state, and not the balance of forces in the class struggle, as the source of power is the corollary of conceptualising political forces without reference to the class struggle. The relative autonomy of the state, in Halliday and Molyneux's analysis, turns out to be an analytical void, a failure to elucidate how the state functions within the class struggle in Ethiopia, how it organises the relations of domination/subordination, outside of which there can be no understanding of it in a Marxist sense.

In the *Ethiopian Revolution*, instead of class struggle, it is the state theorised as the Subject, acting within a set of objective constraints,

that is presented as the motor of history. The action of the Ethiopian state is triggered by the subjectivity of the dominant faction within its personnel.

**Within the state itself, power is concentrated in the hands of a group of radical military officers who have proclaimed their intention to lead Ethiopian society to some form of radical change and their determination to implement what they proclaim is not, by now, in doubt.**<sup>46</sup>

In this way, the Ethiopian state's potential for advancing class relations towards the socialist transition is assessed, first of all, by relation to the intentions of its personnel. This sociological reductionist notion of the state is the one to be found in the theory of non-capitalist development, which notwithstanding the claims of Soviet writers, has close affinity not with **Marx** but with Weber.

As in Weberian sociology where the social actor is the origin of social action and the latter is defined by the meaning the actor attaches to it, the state-Subject's action is defined by the policy through which it interprets its own actions. The divergence of this Weberian type **conceptualisation** of the state from the Marxist one is not only theoretical. These two conceptions give theoretical effect to contradictory class positions with respect to the state. The Marxist analysis of the state by proceeding from its function within the class struggle, defines its principal aspect by its relation to the oppressed, by how it organises the subordination of those classes and **groups**.<sup>47</sup> By contrast, the Weberian explanation takes its point of departure from the state's own criterion of operation, the policies which it seeks to implement. This is the point of view of the functionaries of the state, who 'live' the ideology of its practice. That Halliday and Molyneux give expression to the Ethiopian state's own ideology is evident in their assessment of the Derg's policies.

It is on the basis of the military's internal and external policies that the authors talk of the post-1974 regime having 'moved so rapidly and far to the **left**'.<sup>48</sup> In their view, these policies have attempted to turn the objective constraints on the state—internal to the society and external—in a direction favourable to commencing the socialist transition.

**While there are those in the state who favour a socialist option, the possibility of Ethiopia's attempting a transition to socialism rests upon the fulfilment of all of three conditions: the triumph within the state of those favouring this path; the securing sufficient support from classes within Ethiopia itself; and supportive transnational conditions.**<sup>49</sup>

The external conditions to which the policies of the Derg had to orientate are set, according to Halliday and Molyneux, by the Soviet bloc, on the

one side, and the West, on the other.

the conditions for attempting a socialist transition were not given within the confines of Ethiopian society alone: they involve transnational factors, of support (from the USSR and its allies) and of opposition (from the West). Any programme of economic development, a prerequisite for beginning a transition to socialism, involved substantial aid from abroad. Neither the intentions of the major capitalist states, nor the reservations of some of the PMAC leadership about the USSR, were conducive to such an orientation.<sup>50</sup>

While the implication here is that what prevents Soviet aid from assisting towards a socialist transition are 'reservations' on the part of the Derg, subsequently, Halliday and Molyneux point to a number of limitations in the aid itself. Indeed, it is on this point that the authors distance themselves from the theory of non-capitalist development. They cast doubt on its claim that assistance from the Soviet Union plays a decisive part in a country's progression towards the socialist transition. Their overall assessment is that Soviet aid is determined 'primarily by a given country's foreign policy'. In some cases it contributes to the transition to socialism, in others it can aid 'the consolidation of overtly capitalist regimes'.<sup>51</sup>

After these general remarks one might expect an examination, however cursory, of the impact of Soviet aid on Ethiopia's prospects for socialist development but, instead, discussion of Soviet aid is restricted to the supply of arms to the Derg in the Eritrean war, which the authors describe as 'reprehensible'. This moral stricture is an inadequate substitute for a materialist analysis of the Soviet Union's role in Ethiopia. But such an examination is not accessible within the analytical framework of Halliday and Molyneux, which having failed to render account of the class character of the Ethiopian state and of the class relations within the state sector, cannot provide the basis for evaluating the significance of Soviet military support to the suppression of the Eritreans and other nationalities or the impact of Soviet economic support, most of which is channelled to the state sector.

Halliday and Molyneux's discussion of Western strategy towards Ethiopia, since 1977—the year in which the Soviet Union shifted its allegiance from Somalia to the Derg—is even more vitiated by silences. The 'opposition from the West' to the Derg's policies appears to consist, in their account, of the US's reduction of aid to Ethiopia:

Under Congressional amendments on this issue, on the compensation claims of US firms for nationalisations, the USA was not only prevented from supplying aid, but was also enjoined to vote against aid to Ethiopia in international agencies such as the World Bank. In the fiscal year 1979, the USA provided only \$10 million in development assistance, plus \$30 million in commodity assistance.<sup>52</sup>

And contrasting Western hostility to the regime with Soviet support,

they write:

Internationally, the **PMAC** [the Derg] can rely on the support, military, ideological and in some degree economic, of the **USSR** and its allies. By improving relations with the Arab states, it may at least prevent them and also the West from giving substantial support to groups overtly opposed to the new Ethiopian regime.<sup>53</sup>

This picture of Western hostility to the Derg can only be sustained by ignoring the growing involvement of European interests in Ethiopia. Western, principally European, loans to Ethiopia have increased more than five-fold since 1974. Under the **Lomé** Treaty, Ethiopia is the largest single recipient of EEC aid.<sup>54</sup> For the fiscal year that ended in July 1981, the EEC allocated \$213 million in 'soft' loans and grants, mainly for agriculture and **agro-industry**.<sup>55</sup> The combined value of EEC economic assistance and emergency relief pledged to Ethiopia is estimated to be \$650 million.<sup>56</sup> Of all this Halliday and Molyneux say not a word.

The portrayal of the Ethiopian state as largely cut off from Western 'aid' and capital as a result of its political orientation, conforms to the image of a state struggling for socialism that the Derg itself likes to foster. But it is in relation to the military regime's internal policies that the extent to which Halliday and Molyneux remain prisoners of the state's ideology is most evident. They assess the Derg's internal policies on the basis of a model of socialism that, while it can doubtlessly lay claim to a long history within the international communist movement, nevertheless constitutes a distortion of Marxism. It leads Halliday and Molyneux to determine the socialist content of the Derg's policies—hence of the state's 'socialist orientation'—not by relation to the class struggle in Ethiopia, to the developments that are likely to **favour** the political forces of the oppressed—the workers, peasants, urban petty bourgeoisie, women, the oppressed nationalities—but by their correspondence to the juridical relations through which the state controls the reproduction of social relations.

The Derg's domestic policies are evaluated by Halliday and Molyneux on the basis of its intervention in the socio-economic structure, in which the principal contradiction is conceptualised as the opposition between two juridical forms, the state owned sector and the private sector. The authors write:

. . . there is a basis for development towards socialism, given the fact that the 1974 revolution has also created a state sector—in industry, finance and agriculture—and has, through the mass mobilisations and the planning system increased its overall ability to direct the economy. Any further progress on the path to a transition to socialism would involve expanding the state's control over the economy and in particular, substantial **transformation** of agrarian relations. Here, the most important internal obstacle to a socialist transition remains: the

**predominance of pre-capitalist, petty commodity and capitalist social relations and the inevitability of clashes with the classes benefiting from these relations.**<sup>57</sup>

This formulation would put, indiscriminately, in the same category of 'obstacles to a socialist transition', capitalists and poor peasants, merchants and petty traders—it is incapable of identifying the specific class alliances that are necessary to realise a favourable balance of class forces for a socialist revolution and transition. Instead of proceeding from a concrete analysis of the social relations of production, the socio-economic structure is dichotomised on the basis of juridical relations and the nationalised sector is equated with the economic basis of socialism. The sociological reductionist and voluntarist conception of the state here reveals its accomplice: a juridical conception of class relations.

This is not a chance alliance in theory but an organic unity established within an ideology that is linked to a specific form of state practice. It is the ideology of state capitalism which, in the guise of socialism, asserts the state to be the motor of social transformation and perceives in all that escapes its administrative control as 'non-socialist', as 'obstacles' or even as 'bandits' (as the Derg describes the Eritrean **resistance**).<sup>58</sup> We should not be surprised to find that an analysis—whether of **Stalin** or of the Derg—that remains within the confines of this ideology is able to **provide** a critique only of its method of treating these 'obstacles'—its 'violations of legality'—but not of the class nature of the state itself, which define the 'obstacles'. Halliday and Molyneux's book gives a theoretical expression to the ideology of the Ethiopian state, it does not provide an instrument for its understanding.

'Revolution from above', write Halliday and Molyneux, 'is not so much an alternative to revolution from below as an extension or fulfilment of a mass movement from below, where the latter is for a variety of reasons, unable to go beyond the **stage** of creating an atmosphere of national dissidence and to overthrow the established **regime**.'<sup>59</sup> Through its silences and misinterpretations, catalogued above, *The Ethiopian Revolution* suggests a contrary lesson: the lesson that the Eritrean and **Tigrayan** struggles continue to demonstrate in practice—the masses cannot be substituted for in history.

#### NOTES

1. Fred Halliday and Maxine Molyneux, *The Ethiopian Revolution*, Verso Editions, 1981, London.
2. For an account of Haile Selassie's overthrow and the coming to power of the military cf. J. Markakis and N. Ayele, *Class and Revolution in Ethiopia*, Spokesman, 1978, Nottingham.

On the military's consolidation in power cf. J. Valdelin, 'Ethiopia 1974-7; from anti-feudal revolution to consolidation of the bourgeois state'. *Race and*

- Class* No. 4 Spring 1978 and J. Markakis, 'Garrison Socialism in Ethiopia' *MERIP Reports* No. 79. While these texts provide much useful information on the military regime, they give little attention to the national struggles which have come to dominate the politics of the Ethiopian state.
3. An overall picture of the different national struggles and of the involvement of foreign powers in the **Horn** of Africa is provided by Bereket Habte **Selassie**, *Conflict and Intervention in the Horn of Africa*, Monthly Review Press, 1980, New York and London. On the Eritrean movement, specifically, cf. L. Cliffe, B. Davidson, B. Habte **Selassie** (eds), *Behind the War in Eritrea*, Spokesman, 1980, London and D. Pool, 'Revolutionary Vanguard in Eritrea' *Review of African Political Economy* No. 19 September–December 1980. On the **Tigrayan** movement cf. Solomon **Inquai**, 'The Hidden Revolution Triumphs in **Tigray**', *Horn of Africa* vol. **IV** No. 3, 1981.
  4. I. Andreyev, *The Non-Capitalist Way*, Progress Publishers, 1977, Moscow, p. 30.
  5. Ch. Bettelheim, *The Class Struggle in the USSR*, Vol. 1, Harvester Press, 1977, Sussex, p. 472.
  6. R. Linhart, *Lenine, les paysans*, Taylor, Seuil, 1976, Paris, p. 94.
  7. R. Ulyanovsky, *Present-Day Problems in Asia and Africa*, Progress Publishers, 1978, p. 33.
  8. *Ibid.*, p. 159.
  9. *Ibid.*
  10. *Ibid.*, p. 69.
  11. *Ibid.*, p. 47.
  12. *Ibid.*, p. 87.
  13. K. Marx and F. Engels, *Selected Works* vol. 2, Progress Publishers, 1969, p. 19.
  14. V.I. Lenin, 'A Caricature of **Marxism** and Imperialist **Economism**', *Collected Works*, Vol. 23, Progress Publishers, 1964, p. 74.
  15. Halliday and Molyneux, *op. cit.*, p. 271.
  16. *Ibid.*, p. 27.
  17. *Ibid.*, p. 29.
  18. *Ibid.*, p. 59.
  19. *Ibid.*, p. 73.
  20. *Ibid.*, p. 83.
  21. *Ibid.*, p. 69.
  22. *Ibid.*, p. 85.
  23. *Ibid.*, p. 90.
  24. *Ibid.*, p. 95.
  25. *Ibid.*, p. 99.
  26. *Ibid.*, p. 108.
  27. *Ibid.*, p. 109.
  28. *Ibid.*, p. 111.
  29. *Ibid.*, p. 127.
  30. *Ibid.*, p. 37.
  31. *Ibid.*, p. 121.
  32. *Ibid.*, p. 112.
  33. R. Lefort, *Ethiopie: la révolution hérétique*, Maspero, 1981, Paris, p. 232.
  34. *Africa Confidential*, Vol. 16, No. 20, 10.10.1975.
  35. Halliday and Molyneux, *op. cit.*, p. 158.
  36. *Ibid.*, p. 152.
  37. *Ibid.*
  38. *Ibid.*, p. 172.
  39. *Ibid.*, p. 189.
  40. *Ibid.*, p. 184.
  41. *Africa Confidential*, Vol. 21, No. 10, 7.5.1980.

42. *The Middle East*, No. 90, April 1982.
43. Halliday and Molyneux, *op. cit.*, p. 158.
44. *Ibid.*, p. 146.
45. *Ibid.*, p. 147.
46. *Ibid.*, p. 270.
47. E. Balibar, *On the Dictatorship of the Proletariat*, NLB, 1977, London, p. 231.
48. Halliday and Molyneux, *op. cit.*, p. 154.
49. *Ibid.*, p. 155.
50. *Ibid.*
51. *Ibid.*, p. 282.
52. *Ibid.*, p. 231.
53. *Ibid.*, p. 270.
54. P. Wiles (ed), *The New Communist Third World: An Essay in Political Economy* Croom Helm, 1982, London and Canberra, p. 111.
55. *African Research Bulletin* (Economical, Financial and Technical Series), 15.4.1981.
56. *The Horn of Africa*, Vol. 4, No. 1, 1981.
57. Halliday and Molyneux, *op. cit.*, p. 271.
58. cf. Ch. Bettelheim and B. Chavance, 'Stalinism and the Ideology of State Capitalism', *The Review of Radical Political Economy*, Vol. 13, No. 13, Spring 1981, New York.
59. Halliday and Molyneux, *op. cit.*, p. 31.