

May 10, 1977

**Letter from Roger Barltrop of British Embassy in
Addis Ababa, 'The Derg'**

Citation:

"Letter from Roger Barltrop of British Embassy in Addis Ababa, 'The Derg'", May 10, 1977, Wilson Center Digital Archive, The National Archives [Kew, London], FCO 31/2094, fo. 94. Obtained by Radoslav Yordanov.
<https://digitalarchive.umd.edu/document/134775>

Summary:

Information obtained by the British from an Ethiopian officer who defected to West Germany. His report shows the strong influence of the Soviet Union in the Derg at the time.

Original Language:

English

Contents:

Original Scan
Transcript - English

CONFIDENTIAL



BRITISH EMBASSY
ADDIS ABABA

10 May 1977

P E Rosling Esc MVO
EAD
FCO

LAST
PAPER

RECEIVED IN
REGISTRY No. 28
18 APR 1977

See 04/1

Mrs Tordjua
Pl arrange
a translation for
ourselves + Addis. Note
timing agrees. R 12/5

Dear Sir,

THE DERG

1. At the time of the killing of General Teferi Bente and several Derg members on 3 February, Captain Meles Maru, a member of the Derg, was visiting West Africa with an official delegation. He had, at an earlier stage, been ADC to Teferi Bente; and, on hearing of the latter's death, decided not to return to Ethiopia.

2. Captain Meles subsequently made his way to West Germany. He was there extensively questioned by the German authorities about the Derg; and the Ambassador here has passed to us in confidence a copy of the resultant de-briefing report. From what he has told us of it, it is a most interesting document. As you will see from the enclosed copy, it is in German; and I should be grateful if you could arrange for a translation to be prepared and sent to us - if possible by the next confidential bag (leaving London on 21 May).

X

Yours ever,

Rogv.

R A R Barltrop

LAST
PAPER

I have sent it to Translation Section.

RS: 20/5

Translation now received.

Pc 15/5

RS 13/5

CONFIDENTIAL

Translation

- 1) Through the elimination of the moderate wing of the Provisional Military Council of ETHIOPIA on 4 February 1977, of which Brig.-Gen. TAFERI BANTE, the acting Chairman up till then, and 6 other influential members had been victims, Lieutenant-Colonel MENGISTU succeeded in asserting himself as the strong man of the Military Government and finally getting himself elected as the new Chairman.
- 2) Thereby, however, the USSR also succeeded in an important step towards its aim of exerting direct influence as far as possible on the policy of the Ethiopian Government.

This success for the USSR should be attributed primarily to the Soviet Ambassador at ADDIS ABABA, Anatoli RATANOV. Ever since the formation of the Military Council in the summer of 1974 RATANOV has systematically, intensively and repeatedly endeavoured to gain direct influence over individual members of this body.

It is in MENGISTU that RATANOV has finally found a man whom he has been able to corrupt on account of his uncontrolled striving for power precisely with the prospect of one day being able to seize power himself.

In recent months RATANOV has been calling on the PMAC almost daily and making his "recommendations" to them.

Thus, in particular, the policy of Marxism-Leninism announced by the PMAC in December 1976 and pursued by it recently must be attributable to RATANOV's burrowing activities, just as RATANOV is also the man who is said to have persuaded MENGISTU ruthlessly to rid himself of all his personal enemies. These include the former Head of the Political Committee, Maj. SISSAY, as well as latterly the group around General TAFERI BANTE.

The second man at the Soviet Embassy at ADDIS ABABA, SINITSIN,

CONFIDENTIAL

has been described as being just as active as Ambassador RATANOV in the efforts to gain influence. SINITSIN has had on the one hand to conduct and/or interpret at difficult negotiations for his ambassador whose English is described as not very good. On the other hand he has also played an active and independent part in shaping the whole development.

Relations between the PMAC and the POO (Provisional Office for Mass-Organization) have **varied** from the start,

The original aim and task of the POO was merely to examine all possibilities for handing back the power of government to the civilians.

Under the name of (?)MEEGSON (phonetic), the English translation of which is "All-Ethiopian Socialist Movement" and under the direction of HAILE (?)~~FIDA~~^{FIDA}, the POO had in the course of time developed into a political instrument, and that is why it lost its independence in November 1975 and was put under the Political Committee of the PMAC.

Despite control by the PMAC the power of the POO should not have been or be underestimated.

Thus the death of Major SISSAY, the former Head of the Political Committee, is said to have been partly due to the fact that he did not have the support of the POO.

It was the same in the case of SISSAY's two successors (?)BERHANU and (?)^{MOGWEC}NOGME. The differences with the POO which were ascribed to them finally led to their elimination.

By pragmatically assessing the influence of the POO, MENGISTU has in the course of time known how to establish a good

CONFIDENTIAL

relationship with the POO and to range its members behind him, so that now the POO must be regarded as a willing instrument of MENGISTU's.

Contrary to the original intention and to what the West has assumed hitherto, namely that the composition of the Military Council has varied by representatives being sent to it from the various units and the police in turn, it has now been possible to learn on good authority that the personnel comprising the PMAC has never changed from the very beginning.

The number of members of the PMAC has in most cases dropped from 120 originally to 85 at present.

This figure of 85 members is made up as follows:

11 members belonging to the "Standing Committee" (i.e., the Chairman, MENGISTU, the 1st Deputy, ATNAFU and also the 9 chairmen of committees);

22 other members (together with the 11 mentioned above) belong to the "Central Committee"; and another

52 members together with all the others form the "Congress", which thus has more than

85 members.

CONFIDENTIAL

It has been possible to obtain particulars of members of the Provisional Military Administrative Council (PMAC) since 4 Feb. 1977 which when briefly set out under

Name,
Service rank,
Position,
Official post, and
Political orientation

give the following information about most of the members of this body:

1. Lt.-Col. MENGISTU HAILE MARIAM

Chairman of the PMAC since 4.1.77.

Clearly favoured, influenced and supported by the Soviets. In particular corrupted by the Soviet Ambassador at ADDIS ABABA, Anatoli RATANOV, by means of the prospect of power. For that reason markedly pro-Soviet, yet without any precise party-political ideas. Harsh and (?)trigger-happy¹, a fanatic for power.

On RATANOV's advice postponed a visit to the USSR planned for 1976; the visit now planned to take place in 1977.

2. Lt.-Col. ATNAFU ABATE

Although in the meantime promoted to be 1st Deputy Chairman of the PMAC, politically neutral and without any following worth mentioning. Personal antagonist of MENGISTU, yet a man without fortune[sic]². No marked personality, no special qualities of leadership. In the course of time "demoted" by MENGISTU to stooge and dogsbody.

Has stayed in the USA under the alias of "CHARLIE BRONCE" or "BRONX (phonetic)".

Is worried about his position - opportunist. Is not supported by the Soviets. The Soviet Ambassador has spoken against ATNAFU several times. May be one of MENGISTU's next victims.

CONFIDENTIAL

3. Cpt. FIKRE SELASSIE
is the new Secretary-General of the PMAC (successor to Cpt. ALEMAYEHU HAILE who was shot). Very pro-Soviet. Has been in the USSR on a 9-month political training course.
4. Maj. BERHANU BAYE (BAIJE)
Chairman of the Political Committee, pro-Sov., has not visited the USSR so far.
5. Col. TAKA TULU
Chairman of the Security Committee, pro-Sov., at present (beginning/middle of March 1977) in the USSR.
6. Col. TESHAY GEBRE KIDHANE
Chairman of the Defence Committee, pro-Sov., has not been to the USSR.
7. Lt. GEBEYANE
Chairman of the Information Committee, pro-Sov.
8. Maj. ENDALE
Chairman of the Social and Economic Committee, pro-Sov., has been to the USSR.
9. Maj. FISSAH
Chairman of the Committee for Administration and Law, politically moderate, not a supporter of the USSR.

Other members of the PMAC and firm partisans of MENGISTU's are:

10. Maj. DEMISSIE
pro-Sov., has not been to the USSR.
11. P.O. TAMRAT
strongly pro-Sov., has been to the USSR.
12. Cadet NEGUSSE
strongly pro-Sov., has been to the USSR.

CONFIDENTIAL

13. Private ESHETU
strongly pro-Sov., has been to the USSR.
14. Private GEZHA GENE
strongly pro-Sov., has been to Bulgaria.
15. Maj. GETACHEW
Supporter of MENGISTU
politically neutral, has not been to the USSR.
16. Cpt. ALI
supports MENGISTU
politically neutral.
17. Sgt. LEGESSE
pro-Sov., has been to the USSR
18. Maj. GEBRE YESUS
pro-Sov.
at present (March 77) in the USSR
19. Cadet MENGISTU
pro-Sov.
3-months stay in Jugoslavia.
20. RSM (Regimental Sergeant Major) DEMEKE
supports MENGISTU
politically neutral.

Among the moderate pro-USA members of the PMAC may be numbered:

21. Maj. HADDIS
22. Maj. HOLASHET
23. Cpt. KASSAYE
24. Lt. MELAKU
25. Lt. SELESHI

CONFIDENTIAL

26. Lt. GIRMA
27. Sgt. KEBEDE
28. Corp. MULUGETA
29. Q.M. (Quarter Master) AKLILU
30. Cpt. HAILE

The undermentioned members of the PMAC, whose political influence has been described as insignificant, are in the provinces:

31. Maj. DABALLA
32. Cpt. WJBESHIT
33. Jr. Technician DEMISSAU
34. Cadet BAGASHAW
35. Maj. KASSAHUN
36. Corp. GIRMA
37. Technician GASASSA
38. Corp. AMBACHEW
39. Corp. GIRMA ADMASSU
40. Lt. GIRMA BURKA
41. Corp. DEDJENE
42. Cpt. KASSAI ARAGAU
43. Sgt. NEGUSSE FANTA
44. RSM GETACHEW
45. RSM DEMISSU
46. Q.M. GETAHUN
47. Maj. KASSAHUN
48. Sgt. ABERA
49. Lt.-Col. ABATE MERSHA
50. RSM TEFERRA

CONFIDENTIAL

51. Cpt. BELAY
52. Maj. NEDEW
53. Lt.-Col. ABEBE BELAIN
54. Sgt. GEBRE HIWOT
55. Lt. ASHEBRE
56. Lt.-Col. FANTAI
57. Maj. MEKURIA
58. Sgt. GETACHEW
59. Sgt. ALEMAYEHU
60. Corp. DAMET
61. RSM HAILE
62. Lt.-Col. ELEKE
63. Corp. FISSAI
64. Sgt. PETROS
65. Maj. GIRMA
66. Lt. TESSEMA
67. Cpt. TIRUNEH
68. Lt. TADESSE
69. Private DEMISSIE
70. RSM GISAW
71. Q.M. KEBEDE
72. Corp. ARAGAU
73. Q.M. GOSHU

-
- Footnotes: Page 4:
1. The original reads "schiesswütig" which has not been identified but means literally "shooting mad".
 2. The English noun appears thus in the original. The meaning is not clear. Or is it the French noun for "luck". The German "Fortuna" would mean "Lady Luck".

Confidential

British Embassy
Addis Ababa

10 May 1977

P E Rosling Esq MVO
EAD
FCO

THE DERG

1 - At the time of the killing of General Teferi Bente and several Derg members on 3 February Captai Meles Maru, a member of the Derg, was visiting West Africa with an official delegation. He had, at an earlier stage, been ADS to Teferi Bente; and, on hearing of the latter's death, decided not to return to Ethiopia.

2. Captain Meles subsequently made his way to West Germany. He was there extensively questioned by the German authorities about the Derg; and the Ambassador here has passed to us in confidence a copy of the resultant de-briefing report. From what he has told us of it, it is a most interesting document. As you will see from the enclosed copy, it is in German; and I should be grateful if you could arrange for a translation to be prepared and send to us - if possible by the next confidential bag (leaving London on 21 May)

[Signature]
R A R Barltrop

[Attachment]

Translation [From the German]

□Through the elimination of the moderate wing of the Provisional Military Council of ETHIOPIA on 4 February 1977, of which Brig. Gen. TAFERI BANTE, the acting Chairman up till then, and 6 other influential members had been victims, Lieutenant-Colonel MENGISTU succeeded in asserting himself as the strong man of the Military Government and finally getting himself elected as the new Chairman.

□Thereby, however, the USSR also succeeded in an important step towards its aim of exerting direct influence as far as possible on the policy of the Ethiopian Government.

This success for the USSR should be attributed primarily to the Soviet Ambassador at ADDIS ABABA, Anatoli RATANOV. Ever since the formation of the Military Council in the summer of 1974 RATANOV has systematically, intensively and repeatedly endeavoured to gain direct influence over individual members of this body.

It is in MENGISTU that RATANOV has finally found a man whom he has been able to corrupt on account of his uncontrolled striving for power precisely with the prospect of one day being able to seize power himself.

In recent months RATANOV has been calling on the PMAC almost daily and making his "recommendations" to them.

Thus, in particular, the policy of Marxism-Leninism announced by the PMAC in December 1976 and pursued by it recently must be attributable to RATANOV's burrowing activities, just as RATANOV is also the man who is said to have persuaded MENGISTU ruthlessly to rid himself of all his personal enemies. These include the former Head of the Political Committee, Maj, SISSAY, as well as latterly the group around General TAPERI BANTE.

The second man at the Soviet Embassy at ADDIS ABABA, SINITSIN,

Has been described as being just as active as Ambassador RATANOV in the efforts to gain influence. SINITSIN has had on the one hand to conduct and/or interpret at difficult negotiations for his ambassador whose English is described as not very good. On the other hand he has also played an active and independent part in shaping the whole development.

Relations between the PMAC and the POO (Provisional Office for Mass-Organization) have varied from the start,

The original aim and task of the POO was merely to examine all possibilities for handing back the power of government to the civilians.

Under the name of (?)MEEGSON (phonetic), the English translation of which is "All-Ethiopian Socialist Movement" and under the direction of HAILE (?)FIDA, the POO had in the course of time developed into a political instrument, and that is why it lost its independence in November 1975 and was put under the Political Committee of the PMAC.

Despite control by the PMAC the power of the POO should not have been or be underestimated.

Thus the death of Major SISSAY, the former Head of the Political Committee, is said to have been partly due to the fact that he did not have the support of the POO.

It was the same in the case of SISSAY's two successors (?)BERHANU and (?)MOGWE. The differences with the POO which were ascribed to them finally led to their elimination.

By pragmatically assessing the influence of the POO, MENGISTU has in the course of time known how to establish a good relationship with the POO and to range its members behind him, so that now the POO must be regarded as a willing instrument of MENGISTU's.

Contrary to the original intention and to what the West has assumed hitherto, namely that the composition of the Military Council has varied by representatives being sent to it from the various units and the police in turn, it has now been possible to learn on good authority that the personnel comprising the PMAC has never changed from the very beginning.

The number of members of the PMAC has in most cases dropped from 120 originally to 85 at present.

This figure of 85 members is made up as follows:

11 members belonging to the "Standing Committee" (i.e., the Chairman, MENGISTU, the 1st Deputy, ATNAFU and also the 9 chairmen of committees);

22 other members (together with the 11 mentioned above) belong to the "Central Committee"; and another

52 members together with all the others form the "Congress", which thus has more than 85 members

85 members

It has been possible to obtain particulars of members of the Provisional Military Administrative Council (pmac) since 4 Feb. 1977 which when briefly set out under
Name,
Service rank,
Position,
Official post, and Political orientation

give the following information about most of the members of this body:

1. Lt.-Col. MENGISTU HAILE MARIAM Chairman of the PMAC since 1.1.77.

Clearly favoured, influenced and supported by the Soviets.

In particular corrupted by the Soviet Ambassador at ADDIS ABABA, Anatoli RATANOV, by means of the prospect of power. For that reason markedly pro-Soviet, yet without any precise party-political ideas. Harsh and (?) trigger-happy¹, a fanatic for power.

On RATANOV's advice postponed a visit to the USSR planned for 1976; the visit now planned to take place in 1977.

2. Lt.-Col. ATNAPU ABATE

Although in the meantime promoted to be 1st Deputy Chairman of the PMAC, politically neutral and without any following worth mentioning. Personal antagonist of MENGISTU, yet a man without fortune [sic]². No marked personality, no special qualities of leadership. In the course of time "demoted" by MENGISTU to stooge and dogsbody.

Has stayed in the USA under the alias of "CHARLIE BRONCE" or "BRONX (phonetic)".

Is worried about his position - opportunist. Is not supported by the Soviets. The Soviet Ambassador has spoken against ATNAFU several times. May be one of MENGISTU's next victims.

3. Cpt. FIKRE SELASSIE

is the new Secretary-General of the PMAC (successor to Cpt. ALEMAYEHU HAILE who was shot). Very pro-Soviet. Has been in the USSR on a 9-month political training course.

4. Maj. BERHANU BAYE (BAIJE)

Chairman of the Political Committee, pro-Sov., has not visited the USSR so far.

5. Col. TAKA TULU

Chairman of the Security Committee, pro-Sov., at present (beginning/middle of March 1977) in the USSR.

6. Col. TEFAY GEBRE KIDHANE

Chairman of the Defence Committee, pro-Sov., has not been to the USSR.

7. Lt. GEBEYANE

Chairman of the Information Committee, pro-Sov.

8. Maj. ENDALE

Chairman of the Social and Economic Committee, pro-Sov., has been to the USSR.

9. Mad. FISSAH

Chairman of the Committee for Administration and Law, politically moderate, not a supporter of the USSR.

Other members of the PMAC and firm partisans of MENGISTU's are:

10. Maj. DEMISSIE

pro-Sov., has not been to the USSR.

11. P.O. TAMRAT

strongly pro-Sov., has been to the USSR.

12. Cadet NEGUSSE

strongly pro-Sov., has been to the USSR.

13. Private ESHETU

strongly pro-Sov., has been to the USSR.

14. Private GEZHA GENE

strongly pro-Sov., has been to Bulgaria.

15. Maj. GETAGHEW Supporter of MENGISTU

politically neutral, has not been to the USSR.

16. Cpt. ALI

supports MENGISTU politically neutral.

17. Sgt. LEGESSE

pro-Sov., has been to the USSR

18. Maj. GEBRE YESUS

pro-Sov.

at present (March 77) in the USSR

19. Cadet MENGISTU
pro-Sov.
3-months stay in Jugoslavia,

20. RSM (Regimental Sergeant Major) DEMEKE
supports MENGISTU
politically neutral.

Among the moderate pro-USA members of the PMAC may be numbered

21. Maj. HADDIS

22. Maj. HOLASHET

23. Cpt. KASSAYE

24. Lt. MELAKU

25. Lt. SELESHI

26. Lt. GIRMA

27. Sgt. KEBEDE

28. Corp. MULUGETA

29. Q.M (Quarter Master) AKLILU

30. Cpt. HAILE

The undermentioned members of the PMAC, whose political influence has been described as insignificant, are in the province:

31 . Maj. DABALLA

32. Cpt. WJBESHIT

33. Jr. Technician DEMISSAU

34. Cadet BAGASHAW

35. Maj. KASSAHUN

36. Corp. GIRMA

37. Technician GASASSA

38. Corp. AMBACHEW

39. Corp. GIRMA ADMASSU

40. Lt. GIRMA BURKA

41. Corp. DEDJENE

42. Cpt. KASSAI ARAGAU

43. Sgt. NEGUSSE FANTA

44. RSM GETACHEW

45. RSM DEMISSU

46. Q. M. GETAHUN

47. Maj. KASSAHUN

48. Sgt. ABERA

49. Lt.-Col. ABATE MERSHA

50. RSM TEFERRA

51. Cpt. BELAY

52. Maj. NEDEW

53. Lt.-Col. ABEBE BELAIN

54. Sgt. GEBRE HIWOT

55. Lt. ASHEBRE

56. Lt.-Col. FANTAI

57. Maj. MEKURIA

58. Sgt. GETACHEW

59. Sgt. ALEMAYEHU

60. Corp. DAMET

61. RSM HAILE

62. Lt.-Col. ELEKE

63. Corp. FISSAI

64. Sgt. PETROS

65. Maj. GIRMA

66. Lt. TESSEMA

67. Cpt. TIRUNEH

68. Lt. TADESSE

69. Private DEMISSIE

70. RSM GISAW

71. Q.M. KEBEDE

72. Corp. ARAGAU

73. Q.M. GOSHU

Footnotes: Page 4: 1. The original reads "schiesswütig" which has not been identified but means literally "shooting mad".

2. The English noun appears thus in the original. The meaning is not clear. Or is the French noun for "luck". The German "Fortune" would mean "Lady Luck".