

THE INSIDE STORY

JOHN JUDIS



EPLF representative Bereket Habte-Selassie

Musical chairs: Sour notes in the Horn of Africa

The era of world wars was sparked by the assassination of a Serbian archduke. It was not to be the last time that a relatively obscure national conflict or civil war quickly assumed global proportions. In the last 30 years, civil wars in Korea and Vietnam and national conflicts in the Mideast have embroiled the larger capitalist and socialist powers in deadly rivalry.

Of recent conflicts of this kind, the most bewildering is that taking place in the Horn of Africa, where having driven back the Somali army with Cuban and Soviet aid, the Ethiopians are now turning their attention to the war against the Eritrean independence movement.

The Eritrean conflict is bewildering because of its musical-chair pattern of changing allegiances. The Soviets and Cubans were formerly Eritrea's staunch allies: now the Soviets hint that the Eritrean movement is an arm of Arab imperialism. The U.S. used to count Ethiopia as its chief ally in black Africa; now it may join the Sudan and Saudi Arabia in backing the Eritreans.

But from the Eritrean's standpoint, the global dimensions of the conflict pale before the simple affront to their desires for independence.

UN denies independence.

Along with Ethiopia, Somalia, and Libya, Eritrea was a former colony of Italy. Unlike them it was not granted independence after World War II.

The British seized Eritrea from the Italians in 1941 and held it until 1952, when the UN ruled in favor of a federation between Ethiopia and Eritrea. The Soviet Union contested the UN decision, but American pressure on behalf of Ethiopian emperor Haile Selassie carried the day.

Selassie was then the main American ally in black Africa; he wanted Eritrea's mineral wealth and highly educated population, and because it gave Ethiopia ac-

cess to the sea. The U.S., for its part, had a key naval and communications base in Massawa on the Eritrean coast.

The UN did, however, grant Eritrea limited autonomy, with its own parliament, chief executive, and taxes, but Selassie chipped away at that until he finally annexed Eritrea in 1961.

The Eritrean independence movement began in 1957. In 1961 the ELF (Eritrean Liberation Front) was organized. In 1970, a leftwing group split from the ELF and formed the EPLF (Eritrean People's Liberation Front). Four years of civil war between the two organizations followed. It is often said that the Eritreans might have won their independence in the early '70s had it not been for the hostility between the two groups.

In 1974, Haile Selassie was overthrown by a group of army officers, organized in a military council of 120 called the Dergue. These officers undertook a land reform. Under the instigation of Gen. Aman Andom, one of their chief strategists, they also briefly entertained the notion of a negotiated settlement with the Eritreans. But the majority turned against Aman, who was arrested and killed. In January 1975, the Dergue launched a major offensive against the Eritreans.

Faced with growing unity between the ELF and EPLF, internal opposition, and a Somali-backed secessionist movement among the Somalis of the Ogaden, the Ethiopians steadily lost ground. In 1974, they controlled 50 percent of Eritrea. Today, they control only 5 percent.

With Cuban and Soviet aid, the Ethiopians finally drove the Somali army out of the Ogaden this March, and there is now widespread speculation that they are preparing a major Soviet-Cuban-backed counteroffensive against the Eritreans.

A lawman turned outlaw.

Last week, Bereket Habte-Selassie, an Eritrean associated with the EPLF, visited Chicago to warn of a Cuban-Soviet backed counteroffensive against the Eritreans. Bereket believes that through political pressure the Cubans might be dissuaded from throwing their full forces into the conflict.

Bereket is presently a visiting professor of African law and politics at Howard University in Washington, D.C. Born in Eritrea in 1935, he had held Italian, British, and Ethiopian citizenship. He was educated in England and returned to Africa in 1957 to become a junior civil servant in the Ethiopian government. In 1961, he became the attorney general of Ethiopia.

Asked why he had agreed to become attorney general, Bereket said he didn't think he had any choice. Furthermore, he thought he could advance the Eritrean cause from within.

But in 1964, Bereket resigned because his role had become "intolerable." He left for UCLA to finish his doctorate. When he returned to teach, he was "banished" to the small town of Harar. He had become a "lawman turned outlaw."

In 1974, Bereket helped negotiate a truce between the ELF and the EPLF. He also advised his friend Gen. Aman Andom, who at his urging visited Eritrea in 1974. When Aman was killed, Bereket "started a trend." He became one of thousands of Eritreans living in Ethiopia to join the guerillas.

Bereket joined the EPLF rather than the ELF because he was impressed with its discipline and commitment to popular power. His own model for a future Eritrea resembles that of Mozambique, and he sees the EPLF as similar in philosophy and practice to FRELIMO, the Mozambican liberation organization. Instead of postponing the social revolution until the war's end, as ELF leaders urged, the EPLF has transformed the social structure as they went on: bringing land reform, education, health care, and popular rule in the wake of their victories.

As a member of the EPLF, Bereket organized an international relief fund for the 500,000 persons displaced by the war.

In 1976, to seek special care for his handicapped child, Bereket and his wife returned to the U.S. He describes himself, however, as always "subject to recall."

Useful slogans.

I asked Bereket how he responded to the argument that Eritrea would, in the long run, be better off united with Ethiopia. Bereket acknowledged that in 1974 unity might have been possible had the Dergue been willing to negotiate. He also foresees a future time when a socialist Ethiopia and a socialist Eritrea might federate. But under the present circumstances, with Eritreans given no choice in the matter, nothing but independence is acceptable.

"Who decides it would be better in the long run?" he asked. "We don't deny the value of a greater kind of unity, but when they come to you with arms and say it is better for you to join, you must ask the question: 'For whose benefit?'"

Bereket is skeptical about the Dergue's claims to be "socialist" and "Marxist-Leninist." He knew the Ethiopian leader Lt. Col. Mengistu Haile Mariam when Mengistu was a Captain stationed in Harar. "I very much doubt if Mengistu heard the name of Karl Marx before November of 1974," Bereket said. "He was an ultranationalist, an intense man. That is all."

Bereket believes that the Dergue adopted socialist slogans because they were "egged on" by younger officers and student radicals. "The slogans have also become very useful in securing Soviet aid," he added.

"The government might even believe in such slogans," Bereket said, "but we must judge them by their actions." He cited their "red terror" against the EPRP (Eritrean People's Revolutionary party), whose principal demands have been negotiations with the Eritreans and a return of civilian rule. He also believes they cut short their land reform.

A hegemonic exercise?

Bereket is also skeptical about Soviet intentions in the Horn of Africa. While they view their actions as "anti-imperialist," he views them as engaged in a "hegemonic exercise."

But he is most disturbed about a possible Cuban role. He recalled how many Eritrean guerillas were trained by Cubans, and how the Cuban revolution was an early model and inspiration. One of the Eritrean bases, he told me, is called *Sierra Maestra*.

In citing EPLF reports of recent Cuban involvement in battles around Asmara, Bereket noted that only 1,000 Cuban troops were reported to have been involved. That shows they are "troubled" about their involvement, and still have not made up their minds whether to intervene fully, Bereket said.

Without Cuban and Soviet intervention, Bereket believes the Eritreans would win their independence in short order. A meeting last month in Khartoum has cemented ties between the EPLF and ELF, and they have already proven their military superiority over the Ethiopian armies.

But if the Cubans and Russians intervene, things will not be easy. "If they do the same thing they did in the Ogaden," he said, "they will probably gain back some cities, but it will be at tremendous cost for them and for us."

"It will be a long war."

The Cuban Information Office in Washington would make no comment on alleged Cuban involvement in Eritrea or the future Cuban role. But they said they would try to get IN THESE TIMES an interview with a Cuban official who could clarify the Cuban position. If and when such an interview occurs, we will present it.

IN THESE TIMES

THE INDEPENDENT SOCIALIST NEWSPAPER

Published 50 times a year: weekly except for the fourth week of July and the fourth week of December by New Majority Publishing Co., Inc. 1509 North Milwaukee Avenue, Chicago, Illinois 60622, (312) 489-4444, TWX: 910-221-5401, Cable: THESE TIMES, Chicago, Illinois.

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BUREAUS

LOS ANGELES: Bob Gottlieb, David Talbot and David Lindorff, 437 28th Ave., Venice, CA 90291, (213) 931-9351.
SAN FRANCISCO: Chris Dorr, 140 Sanchez St., San Francisco, CA 94114, (415) 626-7897.
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This edition (Vol. 2, No. 23) published April 26, 1978 for newsstand sales April 26-May 2.

By John Norton

COLUMBIA, S.C.

A FORMER CAMPAIGN MANAGER for George Wallace is well on his way towards forging a progressive political coalition in this state that might propel him into the State House. Tom Turnipseed managed Wallace's 1968 presidential campaign and served as an aide to the Alabama governor. Now, he has rejected the racist stances that characterized the Wallace movement and has reached out to labor, blacks, environmentalists and a latent populist sentiment in hopes of winning the South Carolina Democratic gubernatorial nomination. In the process he has upset the traditional Democratic political structure of this state.

In the weeks following his Halloween campaign announcement, staged before power company offices in the state's six largest cities, a traditionally restrained press has freely quoted unidentified politicians who describe Turnipseed as "an inspired madman," "dangerous," and "demagogic."

"Turnipseed is a latter-day Huey Long," one Republican declared in a widely reprinted remark. "He's crazy as a damn bedbug, but crazy in a smart way."

Amidst doubts as to the sincerity of his political transformation, fears of his populist rhetoric and questions about his emotional stability, Turnipseed is well on his way to a chance for the governor's office.

Black leaders are divided about the former segregated academy organizer. "It would be a national disgrace and embarrassment for a former Wallace segregationist to come from Alabama and be elected governor of South Carolina by blacks," the senior member of the black legislative caucus told a reporter.

But Isaac Williams, state field representative for the NAACP, demurs: "No one is capable of examining a man's heart, so you have to look at his actions. We have been able to get Tom's support on many issues of interest to blacks... I think people aren't discrediting Tom's new convictions."

Political polls indicate Turnipseed is presently better known and more respected among voters than any of the other candidates now being mentioned as contenders in the June 1978 Democratic primary.

Supporters believe, and detractors fear, he may be able to organize the most broadly-based political coalition in state history, a coalition of blacks, labor, and middle-class suburbanites often dreamed of by Southern politicians.

"Forget, hell" school.

Born in Mobile in 1936, Turnipseed says he was educated in the "forget, hell" school of Southern sociology. "I remember during World War II down in Mobile, we had some Northern people move in behind us. I don't know where we got it from, but it was like we were supposed to fight them. We were taught in the public schools some real strong biased-type things. We were taught that black people were not really 'people' people. It was the worst kind of insulation and isolation."

Turnipseed was also exposed to Alabama's populist tradition, and he says he developed a general resentment toward arbitrary power and privilege at an early age. His father was an entomologist; when Turnipseed was ten, the family moved to Virginia where his father took a job developing oil-based insecticides for Shell Oil Company.

"We lived there about two years and then all of a sudden Shell created the Shell Chemical Company, some big corporate move, you know, and all of my daddy's colleagues were told, 'You don't have a job anymore.' And here he is with three young kids, up in Virginia, an Alabama boy without a job. My father wasn't a very articulate man, just very good at his research. I never will forget how disillusioned he was with the corporation and the idea that the bottom line is everything."

Turnipseed's father found a job with North Carolina State University helping

ONCE RACIST, NOW POPULIST, TOM TURNIPSEED TAKES ON S. CAROLINA



Tom Turnipseed ran George Wallace's '68 campaign. Now he admits he was racist and is out to build a populist political coalition in South Carolina.

Wilkes County, N.C., farmers develop a commercial apple crop. At age 16, Turnipseed experienced the first of three emotional breakdowns and was hospitalized for three weeks for treatment of mental depression. (Details of his psychiatric treatment were released recently after opponents "leaked" the information to the press.)

"I just got depressed," he says. "I was president of my class in high school and playing football and doing everything, and then all of a sudden I started withdrawing. It was a situation of not being able to cope with society as it was."

Turnipseed played football on scholarship at a North Carolina junior college, then joined the military. Two years later he enrolled as an undergraduate in history at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. In 1958 and again in 1959

he was hospitalized for depression.

"Always in late winter," he recalls. "It was a terrible experience, but I think I'm stronger today because of it. I found out what I have to do to be happy is to become totally involved in society and absolutely totally involved in helping people."

In the early '60s Turnipseed set out to help white Southerners. He finished law school at Chapel Hill and moved to Barnwell, S.C., where he accepted a post as director of the struggling South Carolina Independent Schools Association, a loose-knit coalition of segregated private schools organized in anticipation of court-ordered desegregation.

"I just felt like it was another example of the South being set upon," he explained recently. "I was a racist, no doubt about that. And I'm sorry for it. I felt instinctively that the South was being done

wrong, but I didn't really understand the reason. Now I understand and totally believe that the biggest problem we had was being an economic colony. And the thing that has helped perpetuate it has been the racial thing—keeping people divided on race, teaching white people to be poor and proud and hate black people."

Turnipseed left South Carolina in 1967 and joined the Wallace presidential campaign. "I was attracted to his populism. He was a great deal more of a populist than a lot of people realize, but it was exclusionary to black people to a large extent and that was totally wrong."

Turnipseed served as Wallace's national campaign director in 1968 and was instrumental in organizing the petition drives that helped place Wallace on the presidential ballot in 50 states. After the defeat, Turnipseed stayed on to organize Wallace's successful bid for governor and to lay groundwork for the 1972 presidential race.

He left Wallace in 1971 for reasons that remain cloudy. Turnipseed says he was turned off by the political intriguers who surrounded the governor. Some accounts say Turnipseed was fired after he told *Parade* magazine he would "make Cornelia the Jackie Kennedy of the rednecks," but Wallace has always insisted they parted on good terms.

Taxpayers Association.

Shortly after his return to South Carolina, Turnipseed organized the South Carolina Taxpayers Association and became its first and only executive director. In press releases he described the group as the foundation of a grassroots movement to return control of government to taxpayers.

In the beginning a strong conservative influence was apparent within the group, and Turnipseed continued to be attracted to Wallace. After the Maryland assassination attempt and Wallace's decision to withdraw from the presidential race, Turnipseed tried to organize a draft-Wallace movement in South Carolina.

The Taxpayers Association served as Turnipseed's first forum for attacks on the political and economic establishment, and his first assault was on the South Carolina Public Service Commission (PSC). The commissioners, Turnipseed said, were dominated by a small group of senior state senators who controlled appointments to the PSC and who were themselves influenced by large retainer fees from utilities. The payment of retainers to legislators by regulated utilities has been an integral part of Turnipseed's rhetoric in three campaigns for public office.

Turnipseed says the formation of the Taxpayers Association marked the turning point in his attitude toward blacks. "I'd never really known any black people. When I got to know them through my work with the Taxpayers, I just said, my God, what have we done? I started thinking how it would be to be black. To endure what they've endured. I began to realize that blacks and whites were going to have to get together to change things."

Turnipseed began to articulate what has become the underlying theme in all of his battles with the power structure. The South, he said, has been under the control of outside economic forces, epitomized by the New York financial structure headed by David Rockefeller. These forces control the flow of money and use this power to exploit the South, to keep wages low, to keep unions out and to encourage the divisiveness among poor blacks and whites that serves to maintain a cheap labor market.

At rate hike hearings, Turnipseed closely questioned power company executives and was able to document a series of financial ties between Northern banks and state power companies. He charged that rate hike requests were a direct result of the banks' conspiracy to reap excessive profits from the Southern colony.

In the spring of 1972 Turnipseed made a well-received speech before the state NAACP in which he pled for black-white unity. The remarks by a former Wallace operative attracted national media attention; Turnipseed was interviewed on the CBS

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