

RADIO-WAR IN SOUTHEAST ETHIOPIA

Hans Erik

The powerful transmitting station in Addis Ababa, formerly maintained by the Protestant Churches and known as RVOG (Radio Voice of the Gospel), was taken over by the revolutionary government after its seizure of power and is employed today to help 're-educate' the peoples of Ethiopia and to disseminate propaganda to the neighboring countries.

Programs are transmitted in Arabic to the Sudan and in Somali to the Somali people. The main speaker is Mustafa Ali Nur who, until recently, worked for the BBC in London broadcasting in its Somali Service. As a result his voice is well-known throughout Somalia and is a very valuable weapon for the Ethiopians, some of the BBC's reputation for reliability having rubbed off on him. He left London in October 1978 and within two weeks was agitating from a Soviet-supplied mobile transmitter in the Ogaden. This operation was hastily conceived and badly planned — its tenor was that Ethiopia was not at odds with the Somali people, but only opposed to President Siad Barre. The broadcasts were to prepare the ground for a commando-type raid into Northern Somalia from Jigjiga to occupy Hargeisa: from there the aim was to declare a Northern Somali Republic which would immediately call for federation with Ethiopia.

Mustafa Ali Nur is himself a member of a Northern Somali clan. The operation failed mainly, it is thought, because the planners had not sufficiently taken into account the limitations of the Ethiopian army itself, nor of the extreme difficulties presented by the desert terrain. For that matter the Soviet

transmitter was not powerful enough to meet the demands upon it. Thereafter Mustafa Ali Nur was transferred to the revolutionary broadcasting station in Addis Ababa, where he heads a team which includes some of the dissident Somali army officers who deserted Siad Barre.

All this appears to have gone unnoticed by Western observers. How many Western journalists speak Somali? It is, however, only one sector of the struggle for the air-waves in the Horn. Four Radio stations broadcast in the Oromo tongue. The Oromo (better known as the Galla — a name they themselves reject) form the largest ethnic group in East Africa, numbering between 12 and 15 millions. At one time they formed a number of individual States and Kingdoms but were severely conquered and colonized by the Amhara of Ethiopia around the turn of the 19th Century. The colonial attitude persists today even under a communist government.

The broadcasting stations are Radio Mogadishu, Radio Kenya, Radio Harrar and Radio Addis Ababa. Mogadishu has lost most of its audience because of its persistence in naming its programs 'the Gallo Program' or 'Somali-Abbo Program', implying that its hearers, even though they may call themselves Oromo, are in reality members of the Somali grouping. This is totally denied by the population of Southeast Ethiopia.

Radio Harrar broadcasts on the medium waveband and gives detailed information on the fighting in the Ogaden and in the Bale, Arusi and Sidamo provinces. The names of persons taken prisoner, or

are given, interviews with deserters are reported and the localities where the action has taken place are not withheld. The Oromo-speaking announcer of Radio Harrar was a well-known Oromo named Abdi Muhammed Koppe. In January 1978 when the Government's Red Terror raged throughout the country he deserted to the Resistance. He stayed "in the field" until December 1978 and then gave himself up to the PMAC (Provisional Military Administrative Council — the Junta). At first he was given good treatment and interrogated about his knowledge of the Resistance. He was even well-treated. Then in February of this year he and ten leading Oromo nationals were summarily shot and their bodies were exposed for a full day in the sweltering streets of Harrar to discourage any one else who had similar ideas on Oromo nationalism.

Nowadays, Radio Harrar is transmitting in Oromo language to the Resistance on the themes of "Ethiopia is free", "Oromo is free" and thus no one needs to fight for his freedom any longer. The Military Government has brought peace and democracy to all the peoples of the former Empire, Radio Harrar says.

It is significant that Radio Addis Ababa never mentions the fighting in its Oromo Program, broad-

cast on the *Short Wave*. Its program is typical of any totalitarian State, and care is taken not to let the rest of Ethiopia hear anything to suggest dissatisfaction in the Southeast, or Oromoland.

Radio Kenya broadcasts its Oromo language program as the Borana Program. The Borana are an Oromo people, largely nomadic still, whose traditional territories straddle the border between Kenya and Ethiopia. The Kenyan broadcasts are popular with the Borana.

Radio Moscow has long been prepared to broadcast an Oromo program in its Africa Service, but at the last moment the Derg appealed to it not to do so on the grounds that Soviet 'recognition' of the Oromos in this manner would undermine the authority of the Amharic speaking elite in Addis Ababa.

The intellectuals among the Oromo are waiting impatiently for the BBC or the 'Deutsche Welle' (Cologne) to broadcast in their language. They are, after all, the largest homogeneous language-group in Africa.

Hans Erik is a freelance writer based in Bonn, West Germany.