



The Day of Fulfillment

A 21-gun salute ushered in the sunrise across the eucalyptus-covered hills around Ethiopia's capital of Addis Ababa. In George Cathedral more than 100 stocking footed priests of the Coptic Christian Church began their matins to the booming rhythms of a throbbing bass drum and the jangle of silver rattles. In the street thousands of adoring subjects set up a howling cry of greeting for Emperor Haile Selassie, the Conquering Lion of Juda, Elect of God and 225th in a long line Ethiopian emperors who traced their ancestry back to the Queen of Sheba herself. A moment later, the tiny, dignified bearded monarch, resplendent in blue uniform and green sash all enveloped in a red-lined cloak, stepped out of a sleek green and black Rolls-Royce and entered the church to begin the ceremonies.

The Person of the Emperor. "This the day," the little Emperor told his subjects soon afterward, "of fulfillment of the gracious pledge so often reiterated by us, that our beloved people are to share in the responsibility of the public affairs of our government." Facing him in the parliamentary chamber were 210 representatives of the people, victors in the first election ever held in Ethiopia's 3,000-year history of autocratic rule.

The legislators stood respectfully before their seats as the Emperor spoke, for Haile Selassie's newly promulgated constitution made one point inescapably clear: "By virtue of His Imperial Blood as well as by the anointing which He has received, the person of the Emperor sacred, His dignity is inviolable and His Powers indisputable."

Who Then? Haile Selassie himself has been solely responsible for bringing his backward people closer to the trend of times. In his speech from the throne, the Emperor summed up some of the accomplishments of his 27-year reign: the adoption of his nation's first constitution, first popular elections, the inauguration public welfare, health and education programs. "If we had not provided our people with the opportunity for developing their knowledge," he asked, "who then could have commended or criticized our activities?"

Still as uncertain as new schoolboys of the exact nature of their function, newly elected legislators of Ethiopia were unlikely to criticize the Emperor's activities very strongly for some time to come. The constitution makes the Cabinet responsible not to them but to the Emperor, gives him the power to appoint every member of the Senate. But thanks Haile Selassie, they were there in the Parliament, empowered and even encouraged to voice the will of their constituents. For the people of Ethiopia, it was a major improvement on the past, when the only way to make a complaint or get a petition past the Emperor's guardian bureaucracy was to toss the document into his car as it rolled along the streets.

RAS TAFARI LIVES AND REIGNS!