



The End of the Lion of Judah

Less than a year ago, he was one of the last absolute monarchs on earth. He appointed governments, made laws, and held life-and-death power over his 26 million subjects. Since February, the once unchallengeable powers of the Conquering Lion of the Tribe of Judah, King of Kings, Elect of God, Emperor of Ethiopia have gradually been taken away by the reformist young military officers who now dominate his country. Last week even the titles were gone; Haile Selassie, 82, was deposed from the imperial throne he had occupied for almost a half-century.

Glittering Splendor. Last Thursday morning, the aging Emperor was abruptly summoned to the library of Jubilee (recently renamed National) Palace in Addis Ababa. There he confronted representatives of the Armed Forces Coordinating Committee, the collective leadership of the young officers. He stood erect, his eyes glistening, as a proclamation was read denouncing him for having abused the power and dignity of his office and having subverted it for his own gain. The proclamation ended by declaring that Haile Selassie was "deposed from office."

An awkward silence followed. It was broken only when the ex-Emperor protested, "We have served our people in war and peace." Minutes later, he was led out of his marble palace to a tiny blue two-door Volkswagen. The monarch who for years had been chauffeur-driven in a huge maroon Mercedes-Benz limousine could still not believe what was happening to him. "What? In there?" he asked incredulously. "Yes, in there," replied an officer courteously, as he pulled forward the front seat to enable his passenger to squeeze into the rear. As the auto pulled away, Haile Selassie turned for one last look at his imperial palace where he had lived so long in glittering splendor and outside of which lions had once roamed. His view was blocked by hundreds of students who jeered at him and screamed, "Hang the Emperor!"

Within an hour, Radio Ethiopia announced that the nation was no longer under Haile Selassie's "oppressive rule." Throughout the day, spokesmen for the coordinating committee explained that the military had been forced to depose the monarch because he was too old and weak, both physically and mentally. Further, Haile Selassie was charged with committing crimes against the Ethiopian people and with refusing to take measures that might have alleviated the harsh famine in northern Ethiopia, which has so far taken an estimated 100,000 lives.

The proclamation deposing Haile Selassie also suspended the Ethiopian constitution, banned strikes and antimilitary demonstrations and dissolved Parliament. The coordinating committee declared that a provisional military administration would rule until there are free democratic elections (no date was set) and a new constitution is drawn up to provide for-among other things-freedom of speech, land reform and the separation of church and state. Ethiopia's new leaders said that they planned to summon home from Geneva Crown Prince Asfa Wossen, 57, Haile Selassie's son, and

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anoint him as Ethiopia's King (significantly, not Emperor). Wossen, who is partially paralyzed from a stroke that he suffered two years ago, would be nothing more than a figurehead, and the likelihood is that the country will eventually be proclaimed a republic. Meanwhile, Lieut. General Aman Michael Andom, 50, a popular officer who has been chief of staff of the armed forces, has been named temporary head of the government.

No Protest. Immediately after Haile Selassie's arrest, tanks and troops were rushed to key intersections and public buildings in Addis Ababa. Instead of protesting the ouster of their monarch, people adorned the tanks with garlands of flowers and personally thanked the soldiers who had affixed green-and-white 'Ethiopia Tikdem' (Ethiopia First) stickers to their helmets. Business in the capital continued as usual.

The calm was undoubtedly the result of a carefully orchestrated campaign by the military to discredit Haile Selassie. It reached a crescendo last Wednesday, the Ethiopian New Year and the day before the Emperor's ouster. For the first time, Patriarch Abuna Teweoflos of the Ethiopian Orthodox (Christian) Church did not mention the Emperor-head of the church to which half the Ethiopians belong-in his sermon. Instead, the patriarch asked God's blessing for the officers' movement. Later in the day the coordinating committee broadcast a scathing attack on Haile Selassie, denouncing him for erecting statues to dead dogs and feeding live ones while thousands died of famine in Wollo province. That evening Ethiopian television for the first time showed pictures of famine victims; the grim reportage was interspersed with shots of the Emperor drinking champagne and admiring huge cakes he had had flown from Europe for state banquets.

At week's end Haile Selassie remained under house arrest in a military headquarters about 30 miles from Addis Ababa. Unless the deposed Emperor refuses to return the moneys that the military claims he has stashed away in coded Swiss bank accounts, the chances are that he will be spared a humiliating show trial for crimes against the state. He may be allowed to remain in Ethiopia; more probably, he will be packed off to exile perhaps to Britain, where he lived almost penuriously from 1936 to 1940 during Italy's occupation of his country. In any case, last week's events clearly marked the end of the public career of the tiny (5 ft. 4 in.) monarch who won the world's heart 38 years ago when he stood on the podium of the League of Nations in Geneva, begging the world's powers to help him oust Mussolini's troops from Ethiopia. "God and history will remember your judgment!" he warned the delegates.

Love Affair. Ethiopia's Tases (feudal lords) in 1916 chose Haile Selassie to be regent and heir to Empress Zauditu. Fourteen years later, when the Empress died suddenly, he was crowned the 255th Emperor of the Menelik line which, legend claims, sprang more than 2,500 years ago from the celebrated love affair between King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. For the next 44 years he ruled unchallenged, except for the Italian occupation and for a brief and abortive palace coup at the end of 1960. During his reign, the Emperor demanded all the obsequiousness due absolute power; no one was allowed to approach him without bowing thrice and job seekers were obliged to prostrate themselves before him.

The Emperor was a founding father of the Organization of African Unity in 1963 and established its headquarters in his capital. At home, though, he seemed concerned mostly with the trappings of progress-inspecting new roads and interviewing youths proposed for scholarships abroad. He did little to initiate changes that might have

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raised Ethiopia from its position as one of Africa's poorest, least literate and most corrupt nations. His failure to act on economic and social problems triggered the military protests last February and led inexorably to his ouster.

Haile Selassie, for all his failings, acted as a glue binding together Ethiopia's disparate parts. Without him, the country may be increasingly difficult to govern, especially if-as some experts fear-there is a struggle between military men who want to wield total power and those officers (backed by a large number of students and academics) who want a leftist government dominated by civilians. Such a clash would clearly delay the reforms needed to bring Ethiopia belatedly into the 20th century.

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