MEKI CATHOLIC SCHOOL

Grade 12 History

"Success doesn't come from what you do occasionally, but from what you do consistently. Study hard today, so your future self will thank you tomorrow." 🚀📚

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Unit Six: Ethiopia: Internal Developments and External Influences from 1941 to 1991

Introduction

Unit Six of the Grade 12 Ethiopian Student Textbook examines Ethiopia's history from 1941 to 1991, a period marked by the restoration of Emperor Haile Selassie's rule, socio-economic challenges, political upheavals, and the rise and fall of the Derg military regime. Covering pages 157 to 196, this unit traces Ethiopia's internal developments amid significant external influences, particularly from Cold War superpowers. The six lessons highlight key phases: the post-liberation monarchy, societal conditions, autocratic consolidation and resistance, the 1974 revolution, the Derg's reforms, and its eventual collapse. This note delves deeply into each section, providing historical detail, Ethiopian perspectives, and analytical insights to illuminate this complex era.

1. The Restoration of the Imperial Rule and External Influences (Page 158)

Overview

The restoration of imperial rule in 1941 followed Ethiopia's liberation from Italian occupation, marking Haile Selassie's return and efforts to reassert centralized authority amid external pressures.

Historical Context

- **Italian Occupation (1936–1941)**: Italy's fascist regime occupied Ethiopia, forcing Haile Selassie into exile in 1936. The occupation ended with the East African Campaign, where British forces and Ethiopian Patriots (Arbegnoch) liberated Addis Ababa on April 6, 1941.
- **Haile Selassie's Return**: On May 5, 1941, the emperor reentered the capital, symbolizing Ethiopia's regained sovereignty.

Restoration Efforts

- **Centralization**: Haile Selassie sought to rebuild a unified state, appointing loyal governors and abolishing regional autonomy granted during the occupation.
- **Modernization**: Introduced reforms like the 1955 Constitution, establishing a parliament, though power remained concentrated in the monarchy.
- **Military Support**: Relied on British advisors initially to reorganize the army, transitioning to U.S. assistance post-1945.

External Influences

- **British Role**: Post-liberation, Britain maintained influence via the Anglo-Ethiopian Agreement (1942), controlling key areas like the Ogaden until 1948.
- **U.S. Alignment**: By the 1950s, Ethiopia aligned with the U.S., hosting a military base in Asmara (Kagnew Station) and sending troops to the Korean War (1950–1953).
- **Cold War Dynamics**: The U.S. provided economic and military aid to counter Soviet influence in the Horn of Africa.

Challenges

- **Economic Recovery**: War damage and Italian exploitation left infrastructure and agriculture in disarray.
- **Regional Resistance**: Former collaborators and local leaders resisted central control, complicating unification.

Analysis

- Haile Selassie's restoration balanced tradition with modernization, but reliance on foreign powers foreshadowed vulnerabilities exploited later by revolutionary forces.

2. Socio-economic Conditions and Social Organizations (Page 163)

Overview

Post-1941 Ethiopia faced socio-economic stagnation and evolving social structures, shaping the context for political unrest.

Socio-economic Conditions

- **Agriculture**: The backbone of the economy, dominated by subsistence farming and cash crops like coffee. Land tenure systems favored nobles and the church, leaving peasants (gult holders) impoverished.
- **Economic Disparity**: Urban elites and rural landlords prospered, while rural masses faced famine (e.g., Tigray, 1958) and limited access to services.
- **Infrastructure**: Modest advances included roads and the Addis Ababa-Djibouti railway, but development lagged in rural areas.

Social Organizations

- **Traditional Structures**: The Ethiopian Orthodox Church and nobility wielded significant influence, reinforcing feudal hierarchies.
- **Emerging Groups**: Urbanization fostered a small educated class, including students and civil servants, exposed to global ideas via radio and travel.
- **Labor Movements**: Trade unions, like the Confederation of Ethiopian Labor Unions (CELU, 1962), emerged, advocating for workers' rights.

Ethiopian Context

- **Education**: Expansion of schools (e.g., Haile Selassie I University, 1950) produced a generation critical of autocracy.

- **Ethnic Diversity**: Tensions grew between the Amhara-dominated center and peripheral groups like Oromos and Eritreans.

Analysis

- Socio-economic inequalities and the rise of an educated elite created fertile ground for dissent, challenging the monarchy's legitimacy.

3. Consolidation of Autocracy and Oppositions to the Monarchy (Page 169)

Overview

Haile Selassie consolidated autocratic rule, but growing opposition from various groups signaled mounting unrest.

Consolidation of Autocracy

- **1955 Constitution**: Granted limited legislative power but preserved the emperor's absolute authority, with no political parties allowed.
- **Security Apparatus**: Expanded the Imperial Bodyguard and police to suppress dissent.
- **Eritrea Federation (1952)**: Eritrea, formerly Italian, was federated with Ethiopia, fully annexed in 1962, centralizing control but sparking resistance.

Opposition Movements

- **1960 Coup Attempt**: Led by the Imperial Bodyguard's Germame Neway, it aimed to overthrow Haile Selassie but failed, exposing elite discontent.
- **Student Protests**: University students, inspired by Marxism and pan-Africanism, demanded land reform and democracy (e.g., 1969 "Land to the Tiller" campaign).
- **Eritrean Rebellion**: The Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF, 1961) launched an armed struggle against annexation.
- **Peasant Uprisings**: Rural discontent, notably in Gojjam (1968), protested taxation and land policies.

External Influences

- **Cold War Support**: U.S. military aid bolstered the regime, while Soviet interest in regional socialism influenced opposition ideologies.

Analysis

- Autocratic consolidation alienated key societal segments, setting the stage for the 1974 revolution by uniting diverse grievances against the monarchy.

4. The 1974 Revolution: The Downfall of the Emperor and the Rise of the Derg (Page 184)

Overview

The 1974 revolution ended Haile Selassie's reign, ushering in the Derg, a military junta that transformed Ethiopia's political landscape.

Causes

- **Economic Crisis**: The 1972–1974 Wollo famine killed thousands, exposing government neglect and fueling public outrage.
- **Social Unrest**: Strikes by teachers, taxi drivers, and CELU, alongside student protests, paralyzed the country.
- **Military Discontent**: Low-ranking officers, frustrated by poor conditions and elite corruption, organized against the regime.

Events

- **Early 1974**: Protests escalated; Prime Minister Aklilu Habte-Wold resigned in February, replaced by Endalkachew Makonnen, but unrest persisted.
- **Derg Emergence**: The Coordinating Committee of the Armed Forces, Police, and Territorial Army (Derg) formed in June 1974, initially demanding reforms.
- **Deposition**: On September 12, 1974, the Derg deposed Haile Selassie, ending the Solomonic dynasty; he died in captivity in 1975.

- **Power Seizure**: Led by Mengistu Haile Mariam, the Derg abolished the monarchy, establishing a provisional military government.

Rise of the Derg

- **Ideology**: Adopted Marxist-Leninist principles, aligning with the Soviet Union.
- **Initial Actions**: Suspended the constitution, dissolved parliament, and arrested nobles and officials.

Analysis

- The revolution reflected a convergence of socio-economic despair and ideological fervor, shifting Ethiopia from monarchy to military socialism.

5. Socio-economic and Political Reforms of the Military Regime (Page 190)

Overview

The Derg implemented sweeping reforms to dismantle feudalism and establish a socialist state, with mixed outcomes.

Socio-economic Reforms

- **Land Reform (1975)**: Proclamation nationalized all land without compensation, redistributing it to peasants, dismantling the feudal system.
- **Nationalization**: Banks, industries, and urban properties were seized, centralizing economic control.
- **Collectivization**: Established peasant associations and state farms, though productivity often declined due to mismanagement.

Political Reforms

- **Socialist State**: Declared Ethiopia a People's Democratic Republic in 1987, with a one-party system under the Workers' Party of Ethiopia (WPE).

- **Red Terror (1977–1978)**: Brutal campaign eliminated opposition (e.g., Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party, EPRP), killing tens of thousands.
- **Military Expansion**: Bolstered by Soviet and Cuban aid, the army grew to counter internal and external threats.

Ethiopian Context

- **Eritrean War**: Intensified as the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) gained ground.
- **Ogaden War (1977–1978)**: Somalia invaded, but Soviet-backed Ethiopian forces repelled it with Cuban support.

Analysis

- Reforms aimed at equity but led to repression, economic stagnation, and prolonged conflict, undermining the Derg's legitimacy.

6. The Decline and Downfall of the Derg Regime: Internal and External Threats (Page 196)

Overview

The Derg collapsed in 1991, felled by internal rebellions, economic collapse, and waning Soviet support.

Internal Threats

- **Rebel Movements**: The EPLF and Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), part of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), gained territory by the late 1980s.
- **Economic Failure**: Droughts (1984–1985), failed collectivization, and war drained resources, causing widespread famine.
- **Popular Discontent**: Red Terror and forced resettlement alienated the populace.

External Threats

- **Cold War Shift**: Soviet support declined after Gorbachev's reforms (1980s), cutting aid by 1989.
- **Somali Conflict**: Lingering tensions weakened Ethiopia's southern flank.

Downfall

- **Military Defeats**: EPLF captured Asmara (1991); EPRDF advanced on Addis Ababa.
- **Mengistu's Flight**: On May 21, 1991, Mengistu fled to Zimbabwe; the EPRDF entered the capital on May 28, ending Derg rule.
- **Aftermath**: Eritrea seceded in 1993, and the EPRDF established a federal government.

Analysis

- The Derg's downfall reflected the unsustainability of its repressive socialism, exacerbated by global shifts and resilient opposition, reshaping Ethiopia's future.

Conclusion

Unit Six encapsulates Ethiopia's journey from imperial restoration to revolutionary upheaval and military dictatorship, ending with the Derg's collapse. Internal socio-economic disparities and external Cold War influences drove these changes, with the 1974 revolution and subsequent conflicts marking turning points. This period's legacy—land reform, ethnic federalism, and Eritrea's independence—continues to shape modern Ethiopia, as explored in Unit Eight.

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