

August 18, 1981

Telegram from Czechoslovak Embassy in Addis Ababa

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Summary:

Prague's representation to Addis Ababa offers an insight into the Soviet Union's economic assistance toward Ethiopia in the early 1980s, while voicing, at the same time, the Soviet economic delegation's nuanced and candid impression of Mengistu's abilities to control the course of the revolutionary transformations.

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Secret

On August 17, 1981, the Soviet ambassador informed the ambassadors of the Socialist states (except the Romanian and the Yugoslavian ones) about the talks of the Soviet economic delegation, led by Skachkov, in Ethiopia, consisting of four extensive discussions with Mengistu in the course of a week. The Soviet delegation was comprised of seven deputy ministers, from the Ethiopian side Mengistu conducted the negotiations indirectly through Hailu Yimenu, joined by 11 ministers and permanent secretaries. The main task was to evaluate the performance of existing economic and to discuss further development of economic cooperation. So far, the Soviet Union had provided loans amounting to RUB 210 million for the economic development of Ethiopia. Of those, used are RUB 30 million. Previously, RUB 10 million was provided in commercial area and RUB 18 million was free assistance. The second phase of the cooperation, according to Skachkov, would focus on the construction of basic industries.

Geological Survey - (gold - reserves of 5.5 tons, oil, gas, construction of four mining centers Assab - Bahr-Dar - Shashamene - Ogaden).

Energy Development - (Water Resources) hydroelectric power plant Malka Wakana of 150 megawatts in cooperation with Czechoslovakia (trilateral talks on the project to take place in Moscow on August 20, 1981).

Laying the foundation of engineering (plant for assembly of tractors with the prospect of moving to a separate production of tractors and agricultural machinery).

Nationalization of land in Gambella regions - (10,000 hectares, cement plant with a capacity of 600,000 tons per year. Construction of grain silos for 175,000 tons of corn and agricultural training centers).

The second phase of the projects has been previously discussed in general, but their implementation is accessed now.

The specific clarification of issues related to the individual projects was the subject of the meetings of the working groups. During the talks, Mengistu stressed the importance of political and economic cooperation with the USSR and the socialist states. In this context, he saw the solution to the urgent tasks of the revolution. He characterized this stage as needing an increased international on part of the Soviet Union and the socialist states. He spoke about the national development campaign for the elimination of illiteracy. Openly talked about the positives, the shortcomings and the difficulties. He stressed the necessity of building a Marxist-Leninist party and the strengthening of the military and state apparatus. At the present stage, he reaffirmed that the priority is given to the agriculture, the development of the

industrial base, mainly energy, as well as to the preparation of qualified cadres. He is aware that plans will be hampered in the future by bureaucracy and technocrats, who studied in the West.

The findings of the delegation:

In discussions, Mengistu appeared as one-sided, sometimes being tendentiously informed and to a certain extent isolated. He is fully committed to the implementation of the outlined revolutionary plan - but he lacks the broad support at the highest-level functionaries. Medium level cadres meet him with reluctance, sometimes bordering on sabotage. The positive is that he is fully aware of the situation, but so far is lacking the ability to solve the problems.

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