

# ETHIOPIA

## culturally different but essentially the same

by Dale Hinchey

The author of this article has just returned from Ethiopia, where he observed the local culture while constructing a community hall. Dale Hinchey is a 3 year Arts Student from Fredericton, enrolled in Sociology. "The trip gave me an insight into how people can be different culturally, but essentially the same."

The government consists of an elected assembly which acts as a rubber stamp for his Imperial Majesty Haile Selassie; the supposedly benevolent monarch. His benevolence is over-rated.

There are only approximately 1000 freshmen students admitted to Haile Selassie University (the only university in the country) each year, because of the sheer limitation of space, yet his Imperial Majesty can maintain at least a half dozen palaces (and they are palaces) with gates, guards, gardens, stables, lions and all the paraphernalia necessary to the conquering Lion of Judah himself. Over seven million dollars per year is spent by the Ethiopian government on internal security men.

### STUDENT ACTIVISTS

Students seem to be the only people who try to instigate political change.

When we were in the ancient walled city of Harrar; I was told by an Australian missionary who had been in the country seven years, that we were involved in any subversive political activity.

There were several students who described last year's student riots which had occurred in January of 1969. All the schools in the country had to be closed for many weeks.

Even high schools received damage from student stonings. Apparently University students had staged a demonstration against his majesty who dispatched armed police. The result was 20 students were shot. The leader of the university student movement was assassinated in the streets of Addis A Baba while walking his girlfriend. Students generally blame government agents for the assassination.

I also talked at great length with several students from Harrar who had been offered a scholarship to Canada. After his participation in the student unrest his scholarship was denied. Government agents had shot his best friend (who was a student leader) as they both were walking from a bar.

Several days later he himself was caught by the police, whipped until his back was permanently scarred and deprived of water for three days at the end of which time he was given salt water.

He was made to divulge all the names of people he knew who were organizing the student movement.

Ethiopian students seem to be the people who are really politically active. The majority of the population is pastoral in nature and their greater concern is in obtaining enough food

for their families. The days of the monarchy I am told, are numbered. When his Imperial majesty dies (he is now 72) the country will be gripped in a violent struggle for the throne—either by the military trying to execute a coupe or by familial successors of Selassie trying to obtain the throne. The students, if they can ever reorganize will themselves be pressing for benevolent dictatorship. (Che Guavera is a hero.)

### DEFINITIONS OF HAPPINESS

The Ethiopian citizen has few human rights yet the government, as a member of the United Nations, issued stamps, celebrating International Human Rights year.

The whole tone of the government would seem to be aimed at maintaining the people at a low level of political and social awareness. All books are politically censored.

There is no law regulating the sale of alcoholic beverages. Cities may have several breweries and distilleries but no dairy. The drug laws are incredibly lax. With the amount of money being spent on internal security law enforcement would be no problem.

Thus a full grain bin, a few dollars in one hand and a bottle in the other is the definition of happiness for many. the educational system is becoming polarized along technical lines except for high school students and the limited number of university students with whom the future of the country may ultimately rest.

### CANADIAN CROSSROADS INTERNATIONAL

Canadian Crossroads International is an incorporate service organization designed to send university students to African countries each summer.

The organization as a whole was instigated in 1958 by the Rev. Dr. J.H. Robinson, a seeply human black pastor from New York. The intent of Crossroads Africa is to establish lines of communication between the west and newly emerging states of Africa, a cultural cross-fertilization program as it were.

This summer The University of New was fortunate in having two representatives chosen by Crossroads Val Carson (Sierra Leon) and Dale Hinchey (Ethiopia).

Approximately 250 students from U.S. and Canada of all races and religions went to countries of both east and west Africa. Forty per cent of the Crossroads were black Americans.

Each group was given a project under a development program of the particular country to which they had been assigned. Projects included building a school of youth hostel, digging a well—just about anything from building roads to hauling rocks from a quarry. However, the project is only secondary in nature; the primary concern is cultural interchange with the host society in which one is located.

For the first time in Crossroads history, a group consisting of French Canadians were sent to the Galion Republic.

The Ethiopian project was under the Ministry of Community Development and consisted of the building of a community centre for the town of Bedeas, Harrar Province. The project was situated on the side of a hill.

The work site had to be levelled, foundation dug, rocks put in for a foundation and a timber frame erected. After this mud was to be mixed with straw and the walls plastered. The roof was to be made from corrugated material. The buildings 300 ft. by 100 ft. dimensions made it suitable for a community meeting hall where literacy classes could be held, women's clubs could meet as well as teach-ins on medical hygiene.

### PRIMARY OBJECTIVE

Our primary objective -- to mix with the people and learn about the Ethiopian way of life was hindered by the fact that the main language of Ethiopia is ambaric and since the country has never been colonized, ambaric is also the language of business and government. Students learn English in school and we never lacked for interpreters when we needed them. The people themselves were open and friendly in our town where the population was partially Moslem, and part Orthodox Christian. The traditional religious rivalry expected between two different religious philosophies was also present.

Our group was invited to dinner several times and we ate ambaric style.

The every day living situation and the kinship bond which rose through work, bar hopping, being invited to dinner and sports were found to have developed several close friendships. Parting at the end of the visit was indeed a difficult task.

The question may be asked - what is the relevance of what we did? Did our trip to Africa become a travel tour type of thing? The relevance of our accomplishment was that we proved that ordinary people, not diplomats nor politicians, but people can become steadfast friends even though racial and cultural dicotomy is tremendous. We found the people basically friendly.

### THE FOURTH WORLD

The majority of Canadians and Americans regard Africa as a jumbled backward continent, retaining the colonial concept of tigers, tribes and troopers. Africa is on the move. They are the fourth world. Africa consists of emerging nations -- the same as China is an emerging nation with whom the West must ultimately deal.

It is not well that some of the ignorance and misunderstanding about Africa be dispelled -- that is why each crossroader must give a minimum of 50 lectures about his/her experiences. Look for notices on these lectures which will be supplemented by beautiful color slides.