

## **Is Ethiopia the next Ukraine – part 2?**

**By Worku Gebeyehu Lakew, author of Empire and Revolution in Ethiopia, March 2018 AA**

According to Ethiopian published sources, there will be a free and fair election in Ethiopia within the next 15 months, around July 2020. This is supposed to be the first free and fair election since 2005 and we all know what happened to that election. The winners were locked up by Meles as terrorists including all 29 MPS in Addis Abeba in which the government candidates were totally defeated, without one exception. So in essence this will be theoretically the very first free and fair election in the 2000 years of the country's political history.

Considering it is that significant, we should give it the maximum attention that it deserves including looking at the claim that it could be a free and fair election.

I want to start by looking at what kind of political choices the country could have and the future direction that it could follow. As the country seems to be emerging from autocracy to a democratic future clearly the first option is to embrace western liberal democracy which is a choice that could easily transpire through a free and fair election of the type that is being planned without the necessity of a revolutionary upheaval that will cause enormous bloodshed and dislocation.

### **Is western liberal democracy right for Ethiopia?**

This raises the question of whether western liberal democracy is right for the country and its people and whether the people are ready for such a move. If we look at the history of the emergence of Western liberal democracy, one of the first things to notice is that its rise was preceded by the development of the industrial revolution that was sweeping across Western Europe and the associated emergence of the enlightenment movement as well as the massive explosion in science and the arts. The modern middle class born out of these revolutions was no longer ready to accept the autocratic rule of the aristocracy and the monarchy that run the state in which the landed gentry had all the rights and privileges and the rising merchant and industrial class played second fiddle and was mostly oppressed. Republican ideas about the sovereignty and the rights of man had begun to spread but were mostly taken to mean as the rights of the rising middle classes and the intelligentsia with a grudging acknowledgement of the lower classes. Instead of divine right of kings and monarchs to rule, the new republican movement saw power coming from the public and the people to the elected representatives and consequently wanted to change the existing order. The middle classes couldn't do this by themselves and therefore were willing to use the power and organisation of the working class and the landless peasantry as well as the urban poor.

Consequently, when the uprising came, the middle classes were easily able to capture the movement and set up a republic that was more or less controlled by the new middle class. However they had to offer something to the working class that was the main force in the barricades and the struggles to overcome the state power of the old state and that was where the social democratic movement was born as part of the modern liberal order. The social democratic movement offered the workers and the lower middle classes the right to organise in trade unions and professional associations, for collective bargaining, for minimum wages, for better workplace conditions, for annual leave and sick pay for maternity pay and for unemployment benefits. It accepted that the liberal state has a duty to set up free medical care for the population as well as free education for

the young and welfare payments for those out of work and that all these benefits could be funded from general taxation of the upper and middle classes. It set up banks to provide affordable mortgages for working people to overcome the housing problem and homelessness and ensured that the mortgage banks didn't exploit people with high and unaffordable interest rates and that the repossession rates for poor loans was kept to a minimum to combat homelessness and family instability.

For this movement to succeed the main requirements were the widespread development of the industrial revolution, the rise of a large and opinionated middle class that was organised and the widespread belief among the middle class population that human society had entered the period of the enlightenment in which all human beings were born equal and were endowed fundamental individual and group rights such as the right to have and hold an opinion on all matters including political issues, the right to express these opinions, and the right to organise with others, to bring social change. It successfully argued that sovereignty resides with all individuals and these are universal human rights that cannot be taken away by the state or any other institution and should be guaranteed by the constitution.

In Ethiopia, the industrial revolution is just beginning and we do not have a strong and organised middle class that is ready to step in to assert its rights and the enlightenment movement hasn't yet really established deep roots. Most of the country is organised along ethnic lines which are pre-capitalist and pre-industrial forms of identity and organisation. The task of any movement and the modern state includes the development of modern industry and the creation of jobs to pull the people out of poverty. It is not without reason that of all the countries of the world, the Ethiopian people have the lowest minimum wage of \$20 us dollars a month. It is a reflection of the underdevelopment of our society and the industrial sector. It is not without reason, that modern Ethiopia is the source of millions of domestic workers for middle class and lower middle class Arab and Middle Eastern families in which sometimes appalling wage and employment conditions are in evidence. Due to the lack of an industrial job market, several million of our rural youth and workers are forced to be guest workers of a lower type in the domestic sector of foreign countries instead of their own country. The removal of poverty and underdevelopment is a national priority and emergency to which all other tasks should be subordinated. Hence the capacity of our society to set up western style liberal democracy is limited.

## **A democratically elected national democratic state and Revolution**

Instead, the main function of our new democracy is the development of the country through the setup of an elected national democratic state that will get rid of this backwardness. This task has to be carried out mainly by ourselves and foreigners cannot do it for us. But foreign investment can play a crucial role if a national democratic state manages the process so that the people, the young Ethiopian business class and the country benefit from it as well as the foreign investors. This requires regulating foreign investment and the economy from the stand point of the workers, the lower middle classes, the peasant farmers, the urban and rural precariat, and the emerging national middle class, or business class and taking into consideration the needs of foreign investors. This kind of regulation from the centre left is not well understood and is very different from regulation from the centre right, which ends up benefitting mainly foreign investors and some local partners of these investors.

## Regulation of markets from the centre left or from the centre right?

Quite often governments from emerging countries confuse regulation from the centre right and label it as regulation from the centre left. If you want to see working examples of regulation from the centre left that benefits both sides ( foreign investors, local businesses public or private, and local workers ) you have to look at what happened in china over the last thirty years and what is happening in Vietnam now. Do not be misled by the fact that such regulation was done by the communist party of china. Because the party is communist only in name and has more billionaires and millionaires among its 90 million members than the republican and democratic parties in the United States. Beijing for example is the home of more Billionaires than New York or any other world city in 2019. The communist party, like any other capitalist party, but even more so, was responsible for the massive exploitation of hundreds of millions of poor Chinese peasants and workers that it labelled as guest workers, for very low wages so that it could gradually tackle the elimination of poverty, the rise of a new middle class and a working class and the completion of the Chinese industrial Revolution. Traditional communist parties do not engage in the enriching of foreign capitalists or local capitalists at the expense of poorly paid workers, it just means that such labels are not useful at all in understanding what is happening in the modern world.

The use of a communist party to achieve these objectives of “regulating from the centre left” is not always necessary. It can also be done under conditions of a free and fair election as in western liberal democracy and under the aegis of national democratic revolution promoting parties . Examples of the electoral approach towards a national democratic revolution are what happened in South Korea, Taiwan, Malaysia, Singapore and more recently and to a limited extent , Vietnam. All these societies are making the transition into middle Income countries and they used a form of Industrial strategy that regulated the markets to achieve the national democratic revolution that their society and people desperately needed. However, they were not as successful as the Chinese in regulating from the centre left and sometimes they kept swinging from that pole to regulating from the centre right ( Korea under President Park or Malaysia under Mahathir) or even at times purely from the right, which is why they show more mixed and less successful results than the Chinese.

In Ethiopia we do not have to follow the example of the Chinese, and we could use a free and fair election to put in power a national democratic group that is committed to achieve the objectives of the national democratic revolution. The two challenges to such an approach is that the multinational companies that bring in foreign investment would prefer regulation from the centre right or no regulation at all and are very skill full and experienced in getting it. The second problem is that regulation from the centre left is not automatically guaranteed unless the political parties that are contesting for power are fully aware of it, want it to happen and include politicians, campaigners and professionals that have some of the orientation, the commitment and the skills necessary to make it happen.

One of the complicating factors is what actually happens in a transition period like Ethiopia is facing currently. Domestic Ethnic empowerment forces, vested interests of internal or external origin such as hedge funds, venture capitalists, foreign governments, groups funded by foreign interests, and people already in power will confuse the debate out of self-interest and it will be difficult to **cast it in terms of the major historical tasks of the country and the people as I tried to outline above.** Hubris

or deliberate and sophisticated confusion can be used to cloud the situation so that the real debate is murky and labels such as communist, socialist, and extreme left start to emerge in order to avoid the focus on the core problems facing our country today.

### **Importance of a single market for a national democratic revolution**

In order to be able to get out of its backwardness, Ethiopia, more than anything else needs to start with a single market. That should include a single labour market, where people move freely everywhere in the country, a single commodity market so that goods could flow freely in all regions and achieve the same prices everywhere without restriction, a single service market for the same reason as a single goods market, a single capital market so that investment is not restricted, a single land-lease market not restricted by ethnic bottle necks and no go areas for businessmen and a single customs, tariffs, taxes and macro-economic policy market. . Ethnic federalism with all its internal boundaries stops this from happening and consequently blocks the country from completing the industrial revolution that it has started. A single national market also gives a more empowered federal state structure that is better able to cope with restraining corruption which will otherwise get out of control and demoralise the public and the chances of a stronger democracy.

### **Political and economic space for the development of domestic capital**

Ethiopia needs foreign as well as domestic capital. But domestic capital in Ethiopia is very underdeveloped. Domestic capital formation requires having a system of savings that is in excess of consumption, and that requires people to be in employment that will enable them to save and it also requires the emergence of an extensive middle class. These savings will also need to be mobilised and consolidated through a banking system that is fit for purpose and encourages people to save. Another source of domestic capital is the creation and availability of credit from the banking system to businesses and to the middle class. In Ethiopia housing credit is barred and inaccessible for the middle classes and can only be available to real estate businesses. This will stunt the development of the middle class and the housing sector and restrict social mobility. It will also drive up housing prices beyond the affordability of the rising middle class and the working class and create housing crashes that will drive people to poverty. The general level of credit availability and money creation is very poor in Ethiopia showing the need for extensive reforms to be able to push the industrial revolution. The capital markets, which could be the source of credit for investment, are also very poorly developed in Ethiopia. In fact there is no uniform capital market under a system of Ethnic federation. In order to develop the capital markets, a system of leases on state and publicly owned land need to be legally developed so that these could be monetised by the leaseholders including poor people and used to expand the stock of national capital available for businesses. There is also a huge need to create a capital market in stocks and shares, which is one of the normal routes in which businesses can raise capital for further investment. The financial services industry in the country is highly underdeveloped and major reforms are required so that it could also be a source of capital mobilisation. All these steps are necessary so that domestic capital has an equal chance to compete with foreign capital and to form partnerships. Such partnerships are one of the sure ways in which industrial modernisation and upgrading can take place and technology transfers can happen. Without such reforms, domestic businesses are sitting ducks that would be overwhelmed by foreign capital and will not be able to play their part in the development of the country.

Domestic capital formation and mobilisation requires a national democratic revolution and a national democratic state. It is one of the key tasks that can be successfully achieved by a policy of regulating the economy, the markets, the society from the centre left under conditions of Ethiopian democracy. The alternative approach, which is free markets, light touch regulation,, to do the same type of regulation. and unrestricted foreign investment and full scale privatisation, argues that the above steps are not necessary and its side effects are not true at all. This is the policy of neo liberalism and in the following sections; I will look at this approach in detail. Japan used the powerful MITI (Ministry of International Trade and Industry) to achieve this regulation from the centre left and the Chinese used MNDP (ministry of national development and planning) which was even more powerful than MITI.

## **Can social democracy apply to Ethiopia?**

Some people argue that modern social democracy, like it is practised in some of the Scandinavian societies, cannot apply in Ethiopia as we are still a poor country. This is quite true as average social welfare payments in places like Sweden can reach as high as 80% of average wages, and these average wages can be as high as 40,000 US dollars a year. However this is a misunderstanding of the concept of social democracy. In practise it means that you only have to provide benefits what the level of development and the available resources in your society will allow you to do. Take the Chinese for example. Over the last 20 years they have focussed on three or four things. Every year they take out a certain proportion of people out of absolute poverty as defined by the United Nations. Now they have reached a stage where they are only looking at ten million or so still in absolute poverty from a population of 1.4 billion people. Another thing that they do is try and cover as many people as possible every year in a national insurance scheme that helps pay the price of drugs that people have to use. These have now reached some 90% of the population for basic treatment and drugs. The same applies to basic pensions. And basic housing is another thing they are working on. Housing ownership among the population has reached between 90 and 95% compared to the UK where it is less than 50%. They have also developed a national insurance scheme that pays income at the basic level if you are not working.

Even the Ethiopians have seen the benefit of such systems and have already stated a basic scheme to cover pensions and health care for the poorest section of the population. So it is horses for courses rather than copying a system that cannot apply to emerging countries. In Ethiopia, the historical task of social democracy is to create jobs for unemployed people as a priority. Ethiopian social democracy will have no relationship to the Scandinavian variety and is more like Chinese social democracy but in any case, it will have to forge its own direction.

## **Liberal Democracy (and NDR in emerging countries) or Neoliberalism**

The answer to this question has differing outcomes and consequences that are as wide as the republican revolution and the monarchical feudal system that preceded it during the French revolution.

The two systems on the surface are as similar as identical twins of the same sex can be. And this fact alone makes people think that there are no real differences between them and those that say they are not are splitting hairs. To give three examples, they are both based on the capitalist system.

Secondly they are based on capitalist markets as the main force in the economy whose central principle is free enterprise (private companies for the most part) in which all citizens could take part equally and benefit in a fair manner and where all transactions are protected by law. Thirdly they are both based on elected representative systems of government in the political sphere where governments can change hands on a periodic basis on the basis of universal suffrage. To complicate things further they also share the principle of separation of powers with three poles of government including an elected legislature, an independent Judiciary and an executive that is accountable to the legislature. It gets worse, as they both seem to believe in an independent media, the so called fourth estate, and a constitutional commitment to human rights and therefore to a free society.

How can most people, going about their daily business of keeping a job or a business running, bringing up families, putting food on the table, paying the mortgage or the rent, and looking after children and dependents be able to tell apart something as identical as these two systems during the initial electoral p[ro]cess. There lies the paradox of our times.

And yet these two systems are as different as black and white in their outcomes. For example Western Liberal democracy benefits all of society including the 1% and the 99% even if some are really doing very well (the 1%) while some people in the middle (say 10%) are doing ok and there are always some sections that are barely able to survive (say 30%) and the remaining 60% or so just keep their head above water and a roof over their head if they can. The hope that things will get better under the principle of a responsible and regulated society and state keeps the whole system ticking over.

In the neo liberal system things are absolutely different. The 1% at the top is extremely rich beyond the stage where they do not know what to do with their money except to use it to make more money. The bottom 30% are worse off than the WLD model and lead a very precarious existence , and the middle 69% although able to survive are also in a precarious state and live an insecure existence. The situation of the 99% gets worse every year while those of the 1% gets even more decadent and wealthy with time. Of course all these percentages are guides which are nearly accurate and not exact figures.

### **Some key features of the neo liberal system**

It has no theory or philosophy of economic or wealth equality or wealth and income distribution and therefore the whole system functions as a sweeper system where almost all newly created wealth by the whole society is hovered and swept into the hands of the 1% from all sources such as markets, financial institutions, from stocks and shares, from dividends, from capital gains, from agricultural and industrial productions, from asset monetisation's, from incomes, bonuses, fees, dividends from all sorts of trades including bets , currency appreciations , insurance schemes etc. It is probably wrong to say that it has no theory or philosophy of income distribution because it has, in the sense that it believes that it is right to set up a system that rewards the 1% beyond their wildest dreams with no care on how it affects the 99%. In other words Greed is good and the devil may care about the consequences for others.

It allocates all rights only to the 1% by converting wealth into fundamental rights in politics, society, and the media and in legal and constitutional matters. For example in the US the first amendment , the right to free speech has been completely changed so that it could mean that corporations are

people and money is free speech and the 1% can use unlimited amounts of money to influence the election process and the media to get their own candidate elected every time. They do not even need to declare its source and so it is called dark money. This in turn takes away the fundamental rights of the other 99% and curtails their first amendment rights. Not only do they have less money available to defend their free speech but they are also limited by electoral law on how much they can spend on such matters and how and where they can spend it.

The system requires the 99% to be insecure, without a safety net, vulnerable to disease, ill health, poverty, homelessness and many other deprivations. It does this by privatising all institutions such as housing, medical and health care, federal, state and local provisions on transport, utilities, and restricting unemployment benefits. It promotes austerity, cuts to all services, removal of trade union rights, promoting workplaces where trade union membership is marginalised and becomes weak and unattractive, Collective bargaining for wages and benefits are banished in favour of bonuses, shares, stock options, etc.

It continuously and recklessly changes everything into commodities including basic necessities such as housing, education, health care and transport as well as food supplies and energy sources. Once commoditised it then engineer's asset price inflation to extract maximum benefits from these commodities and this is then used to drive out large sections of the population out of these assets by causing asset bubbles and massive indebtedness adding to more insecurity.

It destroys social cohesion by creating differences within the public based on identity politics such as race, ethnicity, and religious beliefs including sexuality, gender and other differences which are stoked up to create more divisions.

In the context of emerging countries it rigs the system so that almost all benefits go to foreign investors and multinational companies, weakens local regulatory capacity and achieves media control to create an ideological and political hegemony for foreign investors and their local 1% supporters and to create a political and ideological environment where neo liberalism is the norm and acceptable and where other options appear as extremist tendencies and are banished from the public sphere and the media.

It creates enormous diversions to the real problems of society by engaging on external wars through manufactured causes such as possession of WMD, promotion of terrorist movements etc. thereby dividing the society on such issues, giving it a handle on local oppositions as well as selling weapons abroad, and creating state of emergencies that could be used to deny the home population less rights.

The recklessness and greed of accumulating wealth for the 1% creates ecological consequences for the society leading to environmental disasters without mitigating measures that a liberal democratic system would adopt.

In short the two systems are as different as chalk and cheese while looking very similar on the surface. Of course it will not be able to achieve all of this at once but will accept whatever it can get away with. But it uses its political and media influence to journey along these lines and will not rest until it achieves its goal.

## **The evolution of the opposites to liberal democracy- modern neoliberalism**

In the modern economy of global financial capitalism, the stakes are too high for the modern global elites of being out of political power for even a short period. The global elites have never had it so good in all the history of modern capitalism. Standards of living are extremely high for the limited numbers who have made it to be members of the elite. In case of a rainy day they have a global slash fund of some 25 Trillion US dollars just sitting around in off shore accounts. The entire United States GDP is only 18 Trillion dollars just to put things in perspective. And this is only the known amounts and with so many offshore systems and tax havens it is not possible even to fully identify the amounts that are outside the global regulatory framework.

This is the hot money that could bankrupt any economy if it is moved around in the banking system, like the time when the George Soros fund used its power to chase the British pound out of the European Exchange rate mechanism by betting against it, in just a couple of days, that we now remember as Black Monday. In the process he made at least one billion pounds. With all this 25 trillion dollars lurking in off shore accounts, you can see that some of our elites are so rich that they will not even notice a billion or two missing from their accounts. On the other hand US zero hour workers are struggling with hourly pay of less than ten dollars and poverty is expanding in the United States.

Between 1943 and 1978 when liberal democracy was in place in the United States, wage levels for sections of the working class were very attractive. For example, aerospace assembly workers could earn as much as half a million dollars a year, and even car assembly workers in Detroit could earn up to 100,000 dollars a year. But of course these achievements can disappear in no time as companies continuously restructure in order to find higher and higher returns to share holder capital and in the process whole sectors of industry can relocate overseas and all the jobs disappear. That is what happened to Detroit until the city was forced into bankruptcy and the local housing markets were forced to collapse. There are one million young people under zero hour contracts in the UK. In the world today, the top 26 billionaires own as much as the next four billion people according to an Oxfam report. Before the US moved to neo liberalism, in the 1950's its rich people used to pay more tax than all the middle classes, the poor and the working class combined. Now, over 50% of US stocks and shares are owned by the 1%.

We also live in a period of extreme income inequality. I was rudely reminded of our new level of tolerance for extreme inequality when I listened to a BBC news item in 2008 reporting that a Chicago commodity broker was awarded an annual bonus of one Billion Us dollars. It makes you wonder what his salary was if his bonus is that much. The shocking part was that none of the global media commented on the implications for income inequality of such a level of annual bonuses and it was just reported as an item of news. Unlike Neoliberalism, which only really took hold after 1979, western liberalism that preceded it had a notion of equality in which the income of the elites were kept in check through taxation, income distribution and market and industry regulation so that the rest of the society was not priced out of the system. General taxation was used to fund crucial public services which were important for the survival of working people and the poor.

Talking of society, that is another thing that neo liberalism also ditched. We are all individuals surviving and competing in a free market economy, and that very notion of society has been



expunged as a concept, just like any notion of a public sphere, like the NHS (barely hanging in there still) or public sector education and transport. Under this paradigm only the fittest need to survive and even that is not really true if you take a really hard look. Only the private sphere is legitimate and any notion of the public sphere is ideological dogma and had to be vanquished through privatisation.

## **Neoliberalism and the enlightenment under the age of mass surveillance**

Neo liberalism doesn't even recognise any notion of social democracy which is another hangover from the enlightenment. The latter is now under full retreat under the Assault of the former as only a free market can confer rights on individuals. Without any national discussion and consensus, neo liberalism, after 1979, has turned western liberalism into a new scheme whose function is to regularly shovel any social wealth into the hands of the elites, of one per cent of society on a regular basis at the expense of the 99%. In other words it has become a pyramid scheme that can only survive by recruiting more new members to keep the show on the road. As soon as new members stop joining the pyramid scheme, it has to pay out more than it can collect and becomes insolvent.

That is why the new Ethiopian workers, worth some 4 Trillion US dollars of labour cost arbitrage income are important to neo liberalism. Contrary to what the neo liberal media claims, the choice facing us immediately is not between capitalism and socialism, but between re-establishing western liberalism in place of neo liberalism which is against any form of regulation of the free market that it doesn't approve. We need a capitalist economy that is regulated by society for the benefit of the many, not the few and that where necessary and rational includes a public sphere and a state sphere as well as a private sphere and that addresses poverty, inequality, ecological suicide and under development as well as making our elites very rich. It is not about jealousy. It is about fairness and having moral ethics about greed not being good for anyone. Neo liberalism is characterised by any notion of ethics and morality except in the sense that lip service is paid to the concept and it is summoned when necessary and useful. Instead, it preaches an imaginary notion of a free society while in reality the freedom is only for the one per cent.

At the moment those on top of the food chain have it so good compared to those at the bottom, such as the precariat, living under zero hour contracts, unable to or barely able to pay their rent, mostly shut out of house ownership and the housing market, burdened by student and other debt, living in the gig economy that demands being available at all anti-social hours for minimum wages. So you can understand why the neoliberals are not considering the end of this nonstop party, even by normal elections, unless you can guarantee not to challenge the neo liberal system.

## **Recent developments in the progress of neoliberalism**

As mentioned earlier the stakes are too high and the 1% stands to lose everything even if they relinquish power for one election cycle so they have perfected the system of how to stay in power indefinitely

One of the ways that it does this is through total control of the media. For example in the UK all newspapers and digital media groups that are main stream operate a loose alliance that enables them to maintain the same editorial line on key issues to do with neoliberalism. One way of doing that is to attack the only anti neoliberal movement (the Corbin led labour party and the momentum

network that supports it ) by continuously attacking the leader as not fit to lead, as anti-Semitic and racist, as a national traitor to the British people that voted for Brexit or anything else that comes in handy. The entire media network also supports war and foreign intervention in Syria, bombing the country etc. as if it is a matter of national survival and attacks the Corbin movement for being opposed to the war. The media also encourages the splitting of the labour party by promoting the activities of the neo liberal supporting factions of the parliamentary labour party that used to be called new labour (they call themselves Progress now) and giving them unlimited media coverage and support while undermining the Corbin side. Most important, they portray the social democratic platform of the Corbin led party as socialist and communist throwbacks even if its policies are limited to keeping the NHS public, abolition of tuition fees and taking back utilities and railways into public hands on the grounds that they are natural monopolies and continuous price hikes hurt working people and the middle class as well as the poorest section of society.

The same applies in America where the Sanders movement is also under permanent siege from the entire media establishment. You could ask the question of how did all the media in the western world was captured by one neo liberal movement, which is acting as a global elite mouth piece and this would require lengthy study, but the situation is clear. The global elite is acting as a unified force across countries, and nations, straddling all continents and monopolising all the airwaves, repeating the mantra that there is no alternative to neoliberalism, and that there is no difference between western liberal democracy and the new neo liberalism of the one per cent. If you want the history of how this came to pass you have to look at the narrative of what happened when the Berlin Wall came down. This event was sold not just as the end of soviet totalitarianism, but also all forms of socialism including, wait for it, the western enlightenment and social democracy that was born of that movement. Any attempt at defending the enlightenment and its enduring values about press freedom, individual and collective human rights such as trade unions, and the right to strike are considered as revisionism of history in which the neo conservatives and their ideology of neo liberalism, and American exceptionalism which is the right to rule over the world as its sole superpower cannot be challenged. This uniform and totalitarian view is enforced through secret media and intelligence networks where elected western governments have no choice and have to toe the line. This new establishment has decided that anything opposed to this view is fake news and has to be purged from the mainstream as well as social media.

If a democratically elected pro-western liberalism government that wants to undertake economic development strategy to empower the country and its people is established that could run counter to the interests of the global multi nationals whose interest is to enrich the elite and to exploit the rest and can be subjected to several counter measures. These include a media barrage both internally and externally against the leaders of such parties including by such organisations as human rights watch, which will find their victims from the many confrontations that the global NGO's will organise against the new government including provoking law and order agencies to act or over react against such mobilisations, to broadcast such events live and use them to hound the leaders including sanctioning them individually and vanishing them from the banking system.

One of the saddest things to happen under neoliberal Britain is the complete absence of a press supporting liberal democracy and the values of the enlightenment. Of course they would deny this sleight of hand if you ask any editor but their editorial line and publishing activities give them away. The occasional homage to liberal democratic causes and environmental movement support such as

the Extinction movement and the ecological movement can only help in the confusion and hubris that exists in the media landscape and is usually sufficient to confuse the doubters. All the media groups have closed down their investigative journalism departments on the grounds that they cost too much money while at the same time setting up new departments that promote neo liberal values and activities or undermine groups opposed to neo liberalism.

Just as in the Arab spring, the Resolution Foundation of George Soros, the German Marshall Fund and the Heritage Foundation as well as other national Endowment for Democracy funded groups can now mobilise young women, the precariat, So called Pro Life feminist groups, some Black lives supporters and many other inscrutable groups into the streets of New York and Washington to promote or oppose various neo liberal activities or their opposite numbers.

Besides the control of the media there are other ways in which the neo liberal movement wants to prevent a different election outcome during the election process and the danger to Ethiopian progressive political parties is that they will not take full account of these different ways of undermining democracy.

### **The Ethiopian equivalent of “corporations are people and money is free speech”, the new dark money**

Look at the following situation. For the last 48 years or so NGO's in Ethiopia were restricted from receiving more than 10 per cent of their funds from abroad, and were not allowed to undertake any type of political lobbying. There were restrictions on how they could use foreign funding as it excluded such items as paying salaries etc. a few weeks ago a new legislation was enacted by the rubber stamp parliament that DR Abiy is still using .

This new Ethiopian legislation was equivalent to corporations are people in the united states , and the gate that was made wide open to start the political action committees that are entitled to fund any cause or individual without any restriction to the amount of money they receive from corporations and how they can use them.

For the first time internal or external NGO's were allowed to undertake political lobbying and campaigning, to use unlimited funds from abroad for such purposes, to be able to pay salaries and all related lobbying and campaigning expenses from such foreign funds and to organise the Ethiopian population freely for such purposes. No wonder The Soros foundation is rushing to set up several NGO's in Ethiopia under the Resolution foundation umbrella and that George Soros himself had a special meeting with DR Abiy at Davos a few weeks ago to expedite that purpose.

Just like the 15 US funded NGO's in Egypt that could put a million people on the street, by whipping the unemployed members of the precariat as well as any indignant member of youth and intellectual's fighting for human rights, for women's equality, for employment rights and for some captured movements of climate change, all these external neoliberal promoting organisations from abroad can now freely undertake all these activities in Ethiopia from which they were previously barred. It is a sad day for Ethiopian independence and it is even sad that thus happened under the watch of the highly popular and patriotic Dr Abiy.

In Ukraine the US funded NED was able to allocate 5 billion US dollars to achieve the objectives of pro neoliberal and pro oligarch regime change. In Ethiopia with five times the population, it is feasible to imagine that NED could allocate 25 Billion US Dollars to achieve a similar objective. What democratic and patriotic movement in the country can compete with that kind of money, media power and organisational ability? It is almost like the country is colonised again but with a completely different means.

With weapons pouring into the country across the Sudanese border ( according to the Ethiopian foreign minister DR Workneh Gebeyehu ) , it is quite feasible to create a situation where peaceful demos can suddenly mutate to violent confrontations , as in Syria, by properly timed attacks on the security forces that are trying to police such peaceful protests. Hardly a day passes without the security forces announcing the seizure of illegal weapons including Kalashnikovs, bullets, machine guns and grenades being trafficked across the border.

Human rights watch can put pressure on any leader and any political initiative and country to offer the feet of any country to western global media fire and to call for economic and other sanctions, to black list any individuals from the global banking system etc. or to stop anyone from travelling abroad

Any nation could be made a pariah state, demonised and completely blockaded and stopped from exporting anything that it has like oil or other resources. Look at Iran and Syria. The leading and successful company of any country that competes with US owned companies or that cannot be used for surveillance on behalf of the Americans can be demonised and black listed. Look at what is happening to Huawei and ZTE.

There is only one conclusion to emerge from Ethiopia's new NGO legislation so loudly praised by the New York Times: NGO's are people and money is free speech and Ethiopia may never have a first amendment in its constitution but it has now.

The new US model for Ethiopia seems to be control of the political, military and security arrangements by the neo- liberals in the west led by the US, including the macroeconomic policy and environment, Chinese investment in infrastructure and heavy industry as well as other commercial sectors where US cost structures don't allow for profitable involvement, and western MNCs in high value sectors such as consumer industries and telecoms including consumer data oversight. It means that the security of Chinese investment is totally under US oversight and can be proscribed where politically necessary and expedient. Will the Chinese be able to live under such economic and political architecture? I think the answer to this question is no as it will subjugate Chinese national interests to US national interests.

Neo liberalism is evolving into a modern form of dictatorship that cannot be threatened by the ballot box and has devised new unorthodox policies to achieve that objective, and modern technology is part of it. It does make mistakes from time to time and the occasionally maverick does get through such as Donald Trump, who is not the best useful advocate for the neo liberal system.

## **The fourth Industrial Revolution (FIR) and the end of the Enlightenment**

We are in the middle of the fourth industrial revolution, which within it has many sub revolutions at least 15 major ones and lots of minor ones, one of the main strands of the FIR is the revolution in high technology and this in itself constitutes a combination of some ten or eleven sub revolutions. To mention just a few , there is the revolution in electronics and microchips including semiconductors, the digital revolution, the software revolution, the revolution in computing and cloud computing, the AI revolution, the smart phone revolution, the communication revolution including the 5G computing and IOT, the robotics revolution, the bio technology revolution and most important of all the Cyber revolution.

The reason that the cyber revolution is more important than all the others is because it deals with the control , the management and the communication of all digital objects and beings and how they communicate with each other. For the first time in our history we have been able to centralise the control and management of the digital universe and this has given governments and specially intelligence organisations like the CIA and the NSA, complete and direct control of everything we do in the digital world, the capacity to bypass intermediate stages such as governments and institutions, and to be able to influence and control the lives of all individuals anywhere in the planet.

This unimaginable power is too scary to talk about and in the wrong hands is capable, by itself, to enable the abolition of all liberties and rights enjoyed by human beings and that comes from the revolution in enlightened expectations. It can make any constitution, legal systems and checks and balances a relic of the past and as Edward Snowden showed (and he had to pay with his freedom in order to do that) it is already being abused by the powers that do. Any government with access to this technology has the power for live surveillance and control of the life of any individual for 24 hours of the day and can use any weaknesses or lapses in the life of ordinary citizens in order to force a change in their behaviour through blackmail. It only needs a few hundred cyber workers for a country like Ethiopia to embed themselves in the social networks of individuals and groups and to monitor their smart phones, their social media and their bank accounts to be able to achieve such control. According to published sources the US has a million cyber workers doing this type of job under the pretence of defending the country from cyber-attacks.

In the political sphere, such powers can now be used to put any particular group of politicians in power, and to keep them there permanently or to replace them with other beings with similar attributes. We have entered a new totalitarian age which even the communist mandarins of Romania's Ceausescu or Stalin's NKVD couldn't have dreamed of. This control now applies not only to individuals but also to groups, to communities, to organisations and to other countries. Enter the planetary Gulag managed by the NSA. It can be used to deny a voice to dissenters or to keep out alternative views from the public sphere where it matters such as the airwaves and let it languish in some obscure print media of negligible impact.

But, for the first time too, we also know where all the dead bodies are as well as the murderers, where the stashed millions and billions are and who has control over them and we could bring them to justice or in the wrong hands we could turn them around to do our will. It is a strange world. At the moment every digital activity of all human beings that are of interest whether voice, visual, text,

image , video, financial transaction , research , communication and private life is being systematically collected and stored where AI bots would retrieve anything of interest at any time. Massive servers in the cloud and wholly newly built cities with storage warehouses have sprung up across the planet to carry out these archiving tasks.

However unlikely it seems that the enlightenment will rear its head again; such a possibility couldn't be ruled out as the development of human society proceeds in an uneven manner and tomorrow is just another day.

## **Conclusion**

There are some clear signs that neo liberalism is what is being prepared for Ethiopia's future.

Among these is the choice of Ethiopia as the first country in Africa, perhaps outside Switzerland, to host the 2020 Davos annual gathering. It is after all the network of choice for the neo liberal world

The removal of the legislation on NGO's that had protected the country from dominant foreign influence for 48 years and its replacement by a new foreign NGO and neo liberal friendly version of it passed by the rubber stamp parliament and hailed by the New York Times as the best example of how NGO's should be regulated

The meeting between George Soros and Dr Abiy at Davos and the decision by the Resolution foundation to set up an Ethiopian group

The decision by Human Rights group to set up an office in Ethiopia after the Davos Meeting and the change of the NGO legislation

The passing of a new policy on Refugees in Ethiopia that was friendly to foreign investors, as it gives over one million refugees employment and residential status and can put pressure on levels of minimum wages in the country to fall even lower while making a large segment of the population for groups like the Soros foundation to mobilise as appropriate

The uniform voice of the global neo liberal media on the question of the Ethiopian changes is a sign that they know things that we do not yet know. All liberal media editors and lead writers and columnists do receive a briefing from pro neo liberal intelligence organisations as part of their opinion forming process.

The rapid setting up of a privatisation group for key sectors of the economy such as telecoms, aviation, banking without the need to adopt a national development strategy or clarifying the status of the old growth and transformation plan of the EPRDF

The going ahead with preparations for a 2020 election in spite of the clear dangers that this could represent to national unity and stability

The linking of the Ethiopian banking system to the world banking system through the policy of the IFC being the lender of last resort for Ethiopian Private banks activities instead of the Ethiopian Central Bank.

However these by themselves are not definitive and sufficient examples and we need to hear from DR Abiy where he stands on the question of liberal democracy as opposed to neo liberalism. His recent interview with the financial times wasn't conclusive on this question.

The fact that the US government has adopted Ethiopian national interests as its own national interests and is promoting them in the region and the wider world doesn't present a problem in itself and is in fact a bonus. Unlike the Chinese the Ethiopian government can never compete with the US for global or regional hegemony and can never be a threat to the US.

However, if the US starts demanding that the US national interest be adopted as the Ethiopian national interest and at the expense of the latter, this will act as a hindrance to the future development of the country and the achievement of the millennium development goals of achieving a middle income country by 2025 or later. So we need to proceed with our eyes wide open

By the same token if the US is in favour of Chinese investment, infrastructure development and technology transfer activities in Ethiopia and doesn't try and obstruct them the question of Ethiopia being the next Ukraine will not arise.