Coup d’État 1916

Laq Iyasu, son of ras Mika’el Ali of Wëllo and grandson of ase Menilik II, became a de-facto ruler of Ethiopia after the death of ras Täsäm-ma Nadaw in 1910. With the growth of his pow-
er, the Šawàn party, led by fitawrari Habtä Giyorgis, ras Wäldä Giyorgis and probably däggäzmäät Tafari Mäk-annéen (later ase Haylä Sollase I), among others, grew afraid of losing its central position in the country. The international context of World War I and the ruler’s support for the Central Powers was also of some mean-
ing for the Šawàn party, mostly connected with the Allies. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church felt at the same time threatened by the pro-Islamic sympathies of laq Iyasu.

As a result, in 1916 the nobles and clergy used Iyasu’s visit to Harär for a coup. At a meeting on 27 September in Addis Abàbà, they accused laq Iyasu of betraying both Menilik’s will and the Christian religion. They proclaimed Menilik’s daughter Zàwëditu the new Empress and Tafari Mäk-annéen the Heir to the Throne, with the title of ras. Fitawrari Habtä Giyorgis became the third member of the triumvirate. On 11 February 1917, Zàwëditu was crowned Empress (nagosìä nagoätät). The Wëllo army led by ras Mika’el was defeated by Šawans under fitawrari Habtä Giyorgis at Sàgäle on 27 October 1916. Laq Iyasu would spend the next years hiding un-
til he was arrested and imprisoned in 1921.


Coup d’État 1960

On 13 December 1960 A.D., Brigadier General Mängstå Naway, commander of the Imperial Bodyguard, and his younger brother Garmame Naway, governor of Gëggiga province, occupied the imperial palace in Addis Abàbà. Their supporters included General Mulugeta Buli, former Imperial Guard commander and personal Chief of Staff to the Emperor, ase Haylä Sollase; Brigadier General Šagge Dibu, Chief of Police; Lieutenant Colonel Wàrqanàh Gàbày-yàhu, chief of security; and Getačëw Bàqqàlë, Acting Minister in the Marine Department; and parts of the Imperial Bodyguard’s rank and file.

On 14 December 1960, the rebels detained alga wàraś Asfà Wàssàn Haylä Sollase, announced the overthrow of ase Haylä Sollase who was in Brazil on a state visit and appointed alga wàraś Asfà Wàssàn Haylá Sollase as the new Emperor. The rebels also appointed ras Ëmimru Haylä Sollase, ase Haylä Sollase I’s cousin, as premier for a government that advocated an 11-point socialist and nationalist program under a con-
titutional monarchy. Major-General Màrád Mängätà, chief of staff of the armed forces, and Major-General Kàbbàdà Gàbre, chief of ground forces, opposed the rebels. The rebels sought to avoid a battle by opening negotiations with these two loyalist officers through the US military attaché. However, Màrád Mängätà and Kàbbàdà Gàbre used the interlude to gather reinforce-
ments.

On 15 December 1960 Màrád Mängätà announced that troops had deployed throughout Addis Abàbà and called on all Ethiopians to remain loyal to the Emperor. The following day, he declared that the C. had failed. On 17 Decem-
ber 1960 countless thousands of Ethiopians lined the streets to welcome the Emperor’s return. However, fighting continued on the outskirts of Addis Abàbà for some days. On 21 December 1960 the authorities captured Getačëw Bàqqàlë while Mulugeta Buli, Šagge Dibu, Wàrqanàh Gàbày-yàhu committed suicide. On 24 December 1960 soldiers killed Garmame Naway and captured Mängstå Naway.

On 12 January 1961 the Emperor pardoned all Imperial Guard privates and non-commissioned officers who had participated in the C. but indicated that officers would be placed on trial. Two officers eventually received prison sentences of 15 and 10 years respectively. On 30 March 1961 Mängstå Naway was hanged in a public square in Addis Abàbà. The failed C. attempt resulted in numerous casualties in the armed force (29 killed; 43 wounded), Imperial Guard (174 killed; 800 wounded) and among the civilian popula-

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tion (121 killed; 442 wounded). At least seven foreigners also died in the fighting.

The events that led to the C. attempt centred on dissatisfaction with the growing corruption, inefficiency and incompetence of the Imperial government. The C. plotters also expressed sympathy for the plight of the landless peasants and believed they could be freed from exploitation by a more socially conscious government.

The most important consequence of the C. concerned its impact on Ethiopia’s intelligentsia, students and armed forces, all of which became more convinced that a more modern, responsive government would ensure social and economic progress for all Ethiopians.


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