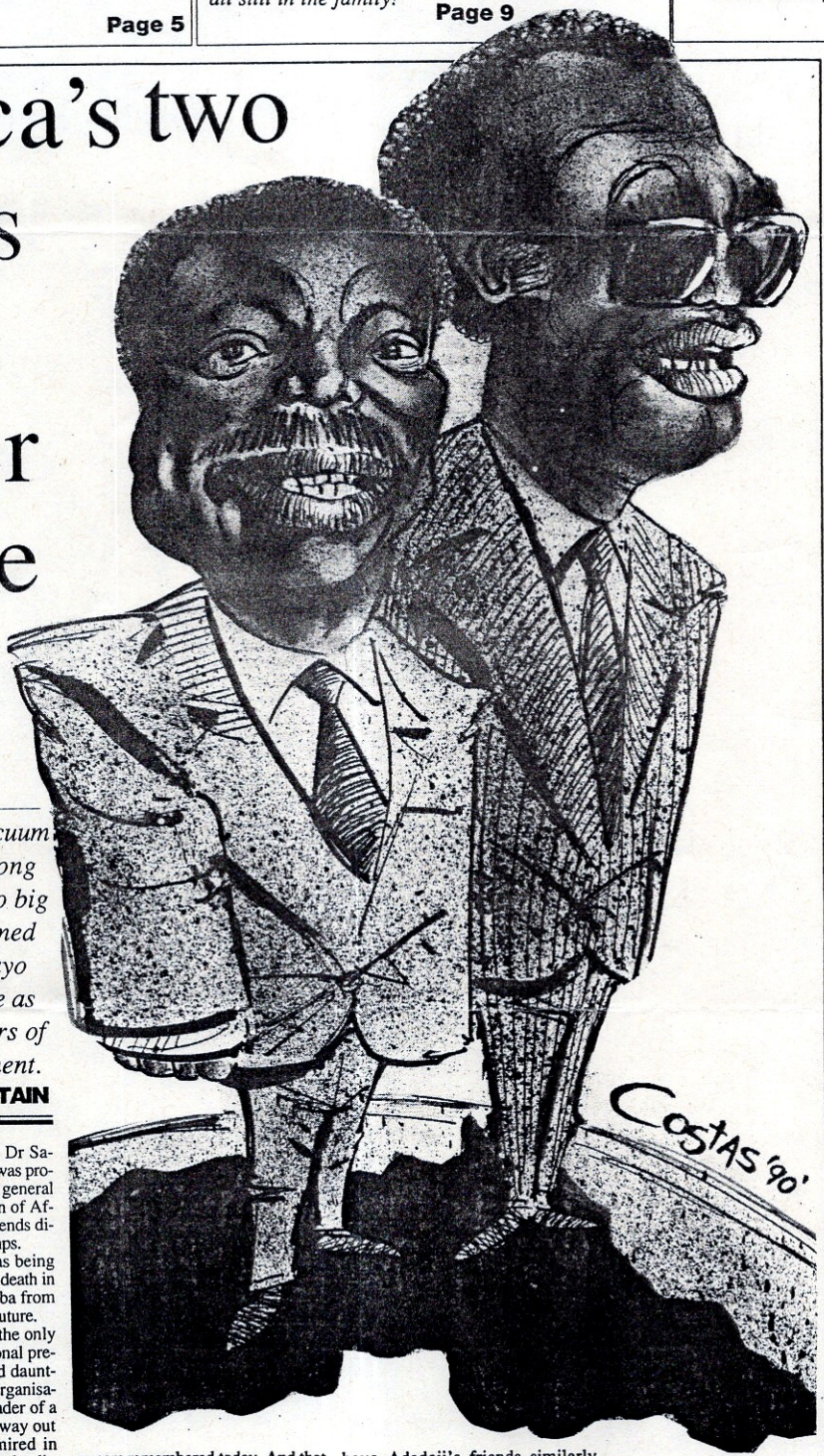
SUPPLEMENT TO THE WEEKLY MAIL JULY 13 1990

Weekend Mail

Africa's two giants who tower above the rest



In the growing vacuum of credibility among Africa's rulers, two big men — Salim Ahmed Salim and Adebayo Adedeji — emerge as outstanding leaders of a bankrupt continent.

By VICTORIA BRITTAIN

A YEAR ago, when Dr Salim Ahmed Salim was proposed as secretary general of the Organisation of African Unity, his friends divided into two camps.

Some said he was being enticed to political death in a bureaucracy in Addis Ababa from which none emerged with a future.

Others argued that he was the only man in Africa with the personal prestige, intellectual calibre and dauntless optimism to return the organisation to its 1960s status as leader of a continent then wrestling its way out of colonialism, and now mired in such deep economic, social and political crisis that talk of recolonolisation as inevitable has become commonplace.

History probably had Salim leaning towards the pessimists. The first secretary general of the OAU, Guinean High Court judge Mr Justice Diallo Telli, is the only one of his six predecessors remembered today. And that is less for his distinguished record in Addis Ababa than for the invitation to dinner from President Sekou Toure which followed his return to Guinea and led to his death in Camp Boiro prison.

Fifteen years ago — before the African crisis struck — Professor Adebayo Adedeji's friends similarly warned him that he was stepping into an oubliette by accepting Kurt Waldheim's request to head the United Nation's Addis Ababa-based Economic Commission for Africa (ECA). So little importance did Nigeria's heavyweight politicos attach to the job that

●To PAGE 3

Adebayo Adedeji and Salim Ahmed Salim: The exceptions to the helpless with which African rulers confront the continent's economic crisis

Fawu: A union racked with dissension. Or slowly shifting towards unity?

The bitter feud within the branch of the Food and Allied Workers Union — a key Cosatu affiliate with a history of internal conflict — has given rise to a 'campaign for democracy'.

By **DREW FORREST**

"WE have a problem of people who do not toe the line in Fawu. These people are opportunists and white intellectuals. They must be identified, isolated and dealt with."

For critics, this warning — allegedly issued by Food and Allied Workers president Chris Dlamini at union caucus before last year's Cosatu congress — epitomises a "Stalinist" leadership style which has sparked repeated splits and conflict within Fawu ranks.

Purges of "unreliable" elements within the union have been alleged, as well as a high staff turnover at national and local level and the defection of factories to rival unions.

This year the Cape Town branch has been racked with dissension, and Fawu recently lost much of its Eastern Cape region to a splinter union formed by a dismissed regional secretary Elliot Nduzulwana. Conflict during the Spekenam strike of 1987/8 rapidly assumed a political character and threatened to split the union.

But in the labour field, one soon discovers, there is no absolute reality — only versions of it. Dlamini denies making the statement. And national organiser Alan Roberts believes the union is now stronger and more united than at any stage in its history.

Criticism of Fawu's political style — its allegedly gung-ho support for the ANC, its exiled labour arm Sactu and the South African Communist Party; alleged adherence to the "two-stage" theory of revolution and purported determination to force a centrally formulated line down the throats of its members — is quite widely voiced within the federation.

But public attacks are now emanating from sources closer to the union: sacked officials of its Cape Town branch and worker supporters who have launched a "campaign for democracy" within Fawu.

The campaign, which seeks a code of conduct for worker democracy within Fawu, including "respect for all comrades", the right of minorities to hold and put forward political views, respect for the constitution and an end to "threats, violence and slanders", is rooted in a tangled skein of events beginning last year in Cape Town.

What is not in dispute is that the branch was suspended by the region, relaunched at an AGM on February 4 this year which fired branch secretary Miles Hartford, and that officials sympathetic to Hartford were later suspended and then fired. But the significance of the upheavals is hotly contested.

For Hartford, who is widely seen as standing to the left of the official Fawu "line", the trigger

●To PAGE 2

From PAGE 1

The two giants of the African continent tower above the rest

General Murtala Mohammed, in his short-lived takeover as Nigerian head of state, summoned Adedeji home and, without consultation , named him foreign minister. Adedeji's clear disdain for the casual morality of soldiers in politics probably dates from this incident.

Today these two are potentially the most influential men on the African continent. Adedeji, and later Salim, stepped out of the top ranks of national politics in Nigeria and Tanzania before the worst of the crisis hit at home, tainting all politicians with the whiff of failure. In the growing vacuum of authority and credibility of the presidents, generals and prime ministers across the bankrupt continent, these two forceful men are emerging towering above the seedy fray.

This week, as the foreign ministers and heads of state gather in Addis Ababa for the annual summit of the OAU, never have so many leaders had such a precarious hold on power, been under so much pressure from the international community or been so discredited at home. But, this year, serious rumblings of discontent are epidemic, from Kenya across to Liberia, Ivory Coast and Gabon, and from Zambia north to the focus of the week's attention: Ethiopia itself.

Like politicians everywhere, Africa's leaders mostly do not like intellectuals — particularly supremely self-confident ones with an encyclopedic knowledge of skeletons in many cupboards — any more than Sekou Toure did. Salim, who has been Tanzania's prime minister, as well as defence minister and foreign minister, and Adedeji, who has degrees from Harvard and London capped by honours from universities all over the world, are the exceptions who have beaten the system which elavates mediocricy.

It was not surprising, certainly not to Salim, that there was enough opposition to him at last year's OAU summit to take to voting between him and the ineffectual incumbent, Ide Oumarou of Niger, to three ballots. The fight was, however, far from the straightforward Anglophone/Francophone tussle popularly presented. It was a bitter struggle, led by President Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe, for an African spokesman who would fight to get the continent's dignity back in the international community after a period of stunning reverses for all the hopes of independence.

With Namibian independence achieved, and South Africa moving towards political freedom, the focus of the OAU is shifting to economic questions. And it is Adedeji's pioneering economic studies which give Salim the basis for pointing the OAU at "economic liberation", as he puts it. Outside Africa it sounds like a cliche but he is deadly earnest, and is a man used to getting his way.

The latest five or six years have seen Africa's economic crisis, and the political and social collapse that has sprung from it, deepen to the extent that two-thirds of the continent has been forced to cede key policy-making to the Washington-based thinkers of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund in exchange for any access to international capital. Washington's policies are daily bringing more poverty, more desperation and the rise of repression and corruption.

Salim and Adedeji are the exceptions to the helplessness or cynicism with which African leaders confront the current disaster and the very real prospect that things are going to get even worse. Outside the discredited power structures of national politics these two have a vast grassroots constituency across the continent. Adedeji, with great courage, began several years ago stepping on eggshells and advocating democratic reforms as one preliminary to reviving economic development possibilities. His implicit challenge to African elites found no support in the West which was still supporting the best known tyrannies such as Zaire and Kenya. But, by a mixture of tact and toughness, Adedeji persuaded the African presidents to accept his reform programmes. Salim, for all his apparent outgoing warmth and frankness, is also a subtle tactician and behind the scenes has put his political weight behind Adedeji's academic work. As the ambassadors of those presidents to the international community, the West is finding the two increasingly difficult to ignore as they point out that the emperors (in the shape of the IMF, World Bank and the Western donors who tie their aid to them) have no clothes on.

Salim was an obvious choice for anyone, like Mugabe, recognising that Africa needs some tough leadership. Although he is only 48, he has already missed by a whisker two even bigger jobs than chief executive for the 51 countries of Africa — president of Tanzania, and the first African secretary general of the UN. The Machiavellian deals struck against him in both races appeared to take Salim by surprise — the first checks in his seemingly effortless rise. In both cases those who opposed him were those who like the status quo, (particularly the permanent members of the Security Council), while those who backed him were for change and a tough and articulate espousal of the tiermondist attitudes now so unfashionable in the West and the former state socialist countries of Eastern Europe, but essential in the south.

Four years later, the chaotic and doomed Zanzibar revolution against the medieval world of the sultans erupted when Salim was in China with another youth delegation. He got back to find himself, at the age of 21, posted as the ambassador of revolutionary Zanzibar, to the heady atmosphere of Abdul Nasser's Egypt — founder of the OAU and spokesman par excellence for Africa's decolonisation. After Zanzibar merged with mainland Tanganyika, Salim stayed on as ambassador until, at the age of 28, he became Tanzania's representative to the UN and nine years later, president of the General Assembly. In his spare time he managed a master's degree at Columbia University.

Two triumphs marked that period and have set the shape of his life ever since: the administration of China to the UN against the wishes of the Nixon administration (later this probably brought the Soviet Union to vote with the United States to block his bid for the top UN job), and the chairmanship of the decolonisation committee, which would later bring him an insider's view of the agony and impotence of his friends in independent Angola and Mozambique as South Africa's proxies ripped their countries apart in the 1980s.

If Salim is the product of Africa's radical nationalist years on the world stage, and in particular of the Tanzania created by Julius Nyerere, Adedeji is from a very different background and a generation formed in the more measured days before independence.

Within two years of arriving in Addis Ababa, Adedeji's studies for the EAC began to show that an economic crisis was emerging. By 1980 his first report on how to avert it, the Lagos Plan of Action, was adopted by the OAU. But the war with the World Bank for the domination of the continent's economic policy was already on. The bank published the Berg report — the first in a series over the last decade which have blamed Africa's economic crisis on internal factors and signposted the way out with increased export commodities. Adedeji begged Berg not to publish but instead to back the ECA strategy and get African countries working together for self-sufficiency.

In 1985, having put Africa's economic crisis on the international agenda with a UN Special Session committed to it, Adedeji went for the job of director general of the UN's Industrial Development Organisation. When he emerged as the front runner among the three candidates, the US changed the voting rules and he lost. He took it as a hard lesson in Western retribution for failing to be "a good African".

Perhaps in response to the defeat, he went to work on Africa with more energy than ever. He works an 18-hour day which leaves aides 30 years younger unable to keep up.

Powerful Western policy makers, used to patronising African leaders who survive on their aid budgets, have a habit of slipping nervously away from public debate with Adedeji and Salim. Douglas Hurd did it in a House of Commons conference with them last month when he left before either of them spoke. Messrs Conable and Camdessus of the World Bank and the IMF did it when they ignored Adedeji at a meeting in Washington earlier this year when he said they were now more powerful in Africa than the colonial powers had been. More powerful perhaps, but no more popular, and with the same chance of being seen off by history.
— The Guardian, London