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agreement among opposition forces on the nature of the democratic state they wish to bring into existence in Ethiopia and a clear strategy for bringing it about.

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THE EPLF AND ITS RELATIONS WITH DEMOCRATIC MOVEMENTS IN ETHIOPIA

(*ADULIS*, vol 1. no. 11, May 1985*)

Ethiopia's rulers regard Eritrea as a territory that must remain under their occupation at any cost. As long as this outlook prevails in Addis Ababa, Eritrean independence, peace and stability may not be guaranteed, even after the military defeat of the Ethiopian army in the hands of the Eritrean revolution. Unreconciled to the 'loss' of Eritrea, the regime in Addis Ababa will rearm itself to continue the war of aggression, thereby depriving the Eritrean people of the peace and security that are essential for successful national reconstruction. Therefore, the overthrow of the expansionist Addis Ababa regime and its replacement by a popular and democratic state are essential for a lasting solution of the Eritrean case and the establishment of peace and good neighbourliness in the Horn of Africa.

Conscious of this interrelationship and convinced that the Eritrean Revolution is an integral part of the peoples' struggles throughout the world, the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) has, while leading the Eritrean national struggle, forged links and fully cooperated with Ethiopian organizations capable of setting up a democratic alternative to the Dergue's military regime. For the EPLF, this cooperation is not based on the belief that 'the enemy of my enemy is my friend', but rather on the firm conviction that total independence for Eritrea and the emergence of a progressive government with popular support in Ethiopia are inseparable goals. Hence, the front encourages and assists those organizations and movements that push towards this goal while, at the same time, criticizes and opposes those forces and tendencies that harm the cause and push its attainment further away.

But which are the programmes and political lines that advance the peoples' struggles in Eritrea and Ethiopia and bring the day of liberation and peace closer? And which are those that hamper the cause? How can the past ten years' experience of the democratic movements in Ethiopia and their relationship with the EPLF be assessed? To provide satisfactory answers to these questions, Ethiopia's problems and their solutions must be analysed properly.

Ethiopia is a multi-national state. Apart from the exploiting classes, the masses of all nationalities have been deprived of basic rights and the fruits of their labour. This picture is complicated, however by national oppression which affects all nationalities, except the Amharas. These nationalities — Oromo, Tigray, Somali, Afar, Sidama, etc. — have been deprived of their lands and denied the right to determine their destiny, to participate as equals in the political life of the country and to develop their languages and cultures.

National oppression — this powerful weapon of the ruling classes — is, however, a double edged sword, which harms not only the subject nationalities but the masses

* *Adulis* is a monthly magazine published by the Central Bureau of Foreign Relations of the EPLF, available from them at 42 rue Lebour, 93100 Montreuil, France.

of the oppressor nationality as well. Among Amhara toilers — regardless of how poor they may be — it fosters contempt for the oppressed nationalities, while among the Oromo, Tigray, Somali and Afar masses, it arouses deep hatred not only for the Amhara rulers but also for Amhara workers and peasants. Moreover, it induces the oppressed nationalities to regard each other with contempt and hatred. The ruling classes fan these feelings of mutual suspicion and scorn as they pit the masses of all nationalities, who have the same interests, against one another and enable the rulers to consolidate their power and perpetuate their exploitation.

The task of combating this evil and dangerous policy and forging solidarity and unity among the different nationalities falls on Ethiopian progressives. Many of them, however, have pushed the interest of the people aside and, instead of striving to eliminate the feelings of resentment and enmity induced by national oppression, have utilized them to advance their sectarian interests.

Soon after Haile Selassie's autocratic regime fell in 1974 under the joint pressures of the Ethiopian people's spontaneous uprising and the Eritrean Revolution, multinational organizations capable of gaining wide support and influence among the people had emerged in Ethiopia. Among other mistakes, however, these organizations could not get rid of their Amhara, great national chauvinism. Slighting the question of nationalities, they characterized all movements fighting for the rights of oppressed nationalities as 'petty-bourgeois, reactionary and anti-proletarian'. Moreover, they did not only refuse to cooperate with these national movements, but considering them principal enemies, waged propaganda and agitational campaigns against them; besides rendering direct or indirect assistance to the Dergue's liquidationist wars against the oppressed nationalities, they directed their arms to fight the national movements.

On the other hand, the nationality movements which gained more popularity in the post 1974 period, and whose fight was and remains just, could not free themselves from a narrow outlook. Instead of striving to overcome the suspicion and hatred that their peoples harboured for oppressed Amharas and Amhara progressives, they worked to deepen these feelings. The thinking that all Amharas, no matter how progressive they claimed to be, were 'Neftegnas' — i.e. people imbued with a settler — colonial mentality — and that joint work with them was impossible became dominant in these organizations. To them the national struggle became paramount and secession the ultimate goal. And from these followed the policy of not allowing multinational movements or other national movements to work in the 'national territory'.

As a result of the incorrect handling of the question by both the national and multinational movements, the interests of particular organizations and nationalities were deemed paramount in lieu of the interests of all nationalities and the whole people. In due course, this led to harmful rivalry and spiteful competition, culminating in internecine war. As a result, the unity of the oppressed peoples, whom the ruling classes had pitted against each other, and the establishment of a united front of organizations, which, if they had pooled their resources could have become a formidable force and succeeded in overthrowing what was then a shaky regime, could not materialize. Thus the revolutions in Eritrea and Ethiopia were setback.

Today, in Ethiopia, there is no multi-national organization with a broad base among the masses. And overall, the national movement is weak. On the other hand, after 10

years of dictatorial military rule and the starvation of one million people to death, the anti-popular character of the Dergue's regime has become obvious. The objective conditions are favourable for the escalation of armed struggle. If the Ethiopian peoples are not going to miss the opportunity to establish a democratic state for the second time however, the mistakes of the first period must be corrected. All Ethiopian progressives must develop a clear common understanding of the question of nationalities and its correct solution as well as the necessity of a united front and the basis of its formations.

Unity Based on Equality or Secession?

Leaving aside the especial case of Western Somalia which was ceded to Ethiopia by Britain in the forties of this century, the borders of modern Ethiopia took shape towards the end of the century when Menelik, having emerged victorious over his feudal rivals, rapidly and greatly expanded the Southern and Western frontiers of his kingdom. Prior to this, in the territories of the oppressed nationalities, there were feudal principalities which fought against each other and with those of the Amharas, but there were no economically cohesive and clearly demarcated independent states of the Oromos, Tigreans, Afars or others. Hence among Ethiopia's oppressed nationalities there can be no hankering for a return to a formerly nonexistent independent status, no nostalgia for an independent state. The demand for secession, therefore, has no historical basis.

Ethiopia's oppressed nationalities are not economically cohesive entities, either. And although the chauvinist policies of Ethiopia's ruling classes have hurt them economically and perpetuated their underdevelopment, secession from multinational Ethiopia, especially once a democratic state that guarantees the political, economic and social equality of nationalities is set up, will damage rather than help the economic development of the oppressed nationalities. There is, thus, no economic basis for the demand for a separate state.

Another factor that could include the separation of an oppressed nationality from a central state is the sharpening of the national antagonism to the extent that it makes it impossible for two nationalities to live together.

While it is true that national oppression has, in the particular conditions of Ethiopia, aroused bitterness and resentment, it has not rendered impossible the establishment of an equal and harmonious relationship among nationalities once oppression has been eliminated. Furthermore, the feelings of resentment and mutual distrust among nationalities will fade in the process of the joint political and armed struggle that is necessary for the establishment of a democratic state that upholds the right of self-determination.

To sum up, once a progressive state is set up in Ethiopia and the system of national domination and oppression gives way to one based on the equal rights of all nationalities, there would be no historical, economic or other factors that would make the demand for secession correct and justifiable from the standpoint of the interests of the masses. On the other hand, secession is impossible as long as a repressive regime holds sway in Addis Ababa because Ethiopia's ruling classes will fight the demand for separation to the very end.

To argue that secession is an incorrect and impractical solution in the particular conditions of Ethiopia, however, does not imply a rejection of the right to political independence, which is included in the right to self-determination. Some national

questions are solved on the basis of secession; others on the basis of unity with equality. In both cases, the right to self-determination is upheld. But a specific problem demands a specific solution.

(Likewise) on the question of Ethiopian nationalities, what is at stake is not the principle of the right to self-determination in general but the particular destinies of particular peoples. And in this specific case, historical, economic and other factors show that the only correct solution is unity based on equality. Agreement of views on this crucial question would play a major role in removing the hurdles that obstructed the advance of the Ethiopian revolution in the past stage. But there is another question which needs to be clarified and properly answered and that is the concept of nationalities and the national question itself.

The Question of Nationalities in Ethiopia

The question of nationalities is a question of the destiny, political destiny in the first place, of peoples who inhabit the same geographical area and have economic ties as well as a common language and culture. It is the struggle for the right of self-determination of a particular nationality. It is different from the question of 'nations' (in the wider use of the term) or colonies in the sense that here the people fight not for the rights of individual nationalities but for the right of the whole people who, in the majority of cases, are composed of various nationalities. The question of 'nations' (again in the wider use of the term) and colonies is defined by the boundaries of the country in question, while the question of nationalities is not fettered by the administrative boundaries within the concerned multi-national state.

Let's give some examples. In Ethiopia, the Oromo people live in several of the country's adjoining administrative regions. These boundaries, however, have no influence on their struggle. The Oromos of the administrative regions of Wollega and Sidamo do not fight as Wollegans or Sidamans but they and the rest of the Oromos fight as one people for the rights of their nationality. On the other hand, the fact that Oromos live in the administrative region of Sidamo does not allow them to declare the whole region their territory and prevent other oppressed nationalities living there — Sidamas in this particular example — from organizing their national movements and fighting for their liberation. Similarly, the Afar people who live in Wollo and Tigray have the right to struggle not as Wolloans and Tigraians but as Afars and for the rights of their nationality. And the people of Tigray who have stood up to regain their national rights should not begrudge the same right to another oppressed people.

This has nothing to do with the giving away of 'one's territory'. But it calls for respect for the rights of others in as much as one demands respect for one's rights. This would serve as a basis for forging the unity of the oppressed which scares the enemy and brings the day of liberation much closer. Moreover, the frontiers of the nationalities do not coincide with the administrative boundaries of regions and provinces drawn by the Addis Ababa regime for administrative and other reasons which do not take the interests of the nationalities into account.

Experience in different parts of Ethiopia has shown that to delineate a nationality's territory on the basis of this administrative boundaries or by extending them further is counter-productive. It is a harmful measure based on a narrow outlook and ends up frustrating the unity of the oppressed which is essential for victory. It leads to territorial disputes among national movements, to preventing other oppressed

nationality movements from setting up independent organizations and launching armed struggle in the areas that you consider your 'territory', to disallowing multi-national movements — which by their character must work actively throughout the country — to organize in the given nationality's territory.

If the common and final aim is unity based on equality, however, there is no need for this scramble as the territories which are objects of dispute belong to a single country, to a single people. Surely, there is no need to attempt now to extend the frontiers of one's nationality, if tomorrow all nationalities are going to live together as citizens of one country. Moreover, the boundaries of nationalities should not be drawn today and unilaterally, but with the participation and consent of all nationalities after the setting up of a democratic Ethiopia which respects the right to self-administration.

Here, the case of the nationalities which have been divided up by the international boundaries of Ethiopia and its neighbours can be raised. For if the Afars of Tigray and Wollo, unimpeded by the boundaries that separate them into two administrative regions, have the right to press their cause as a single people, what is there to prevent them from calling on the Afars living beyond Ethiopia's borders in Eritrea and Djibouti to join them? If the Oromos in Ethiopia's different administrative regions have the right to organize a single national movement, why can't the Oromos in Kenya join them?

It is true that the boundaries of Ethiopia and its neighbours — Eritrea, Djibouti, Kenya, Somalia and the Sudan, — like those of the rest of the African countries, were drawn up on the basis of the capital and power of the European colonizers and did not take national composition and destiny into account. As a result, many nationalities were divided up and now live in two or more countries.

On the other hand, the colonial powers broke down nationality and tribal barriers within the colonial boundaries and gave rise to the colonized peoples political and economic unity and a national consciousness. This, in turn, gave rise to movements that struggle, not for the rights of individual nationalities, but for the national independence and social progress of multi-national peoples. Therefore, Eritreans struggle not as Tigrynas, Tigres, Afars, Sahos, etc., but all Eritrean nine nationalities as a single people; and the same goes for the people of Kenya who fought as Kenyans and not as Kikuyus, Luos, Oromos or others. Here, the Afars of Djibouti and Eritrea join hands with the peoples of Djibouti and Eritrea; the Kenyan Oromos with the rest of the Kenyan people.

The Sudanese Nuers cast their lots with the Sudanese people and their brothers in Ethiopia with Ethiopians. Similarly, the Tigre people of Eritrea fight as Eritreans, while those across the border in the Sudan partake in Sudanese affairs. Once the separate national identity of a multi-national people is recognized, it is unacceptable to demand from without that certain of the nationalities join hands with you. Clearly, a country's internal administrative boundaries are qualitatively different from the international boundaries that were drawn up by the colonial powers and which, in the course of a long historical, political and economic process, became the basis for united national struggles.

The Question of a United Front

Such a clear understanding of the nature of the question of nationalities and its resolution is a precondition for the formation of a united front of all national and

multi-national organizations in Ethiopia. If the nature of the question is well understood and the goal of unity based on equality clearly stated, every national organization will be encouraged to mobilize its people for the common goal; multinational organizations will be free to work in the areas where they will be most effective, regardless of which nationality lives there; and national and multinational organizations will fight side by side and assist each other. This will create optimum conditions for the united front to draw up a nation-wide strategy and deploy its forces in the areas where it can deal the heaviest blow to the Addis Abeba regime.

A united force that would work in such a mature and effective manner would create a new and optimistic spirit of struggle throughout Ethiopia. Moreover, it would enable the front to speak with a single and weighty voice on behalf of the Ethiopian people, isolate the Dergue internationally and gain broad recognition and support. While it is true that external support and influence do not constitute the decisive factor in any popular struggle, the formation of a democratic alternative to the Dergue capable of gaining international recognition would play a major role in speeding up the Ethiopian people's victory, as the military junta in Addis Abeba would not be able to stand long without the massive external help that is propping it up.

On the other hand, as the unproductive attempts of the past stage have confirmed, a united front that is not based on unanimity of views on the nature of the question of nationalities and its solution is bound to be an ineffective and short-lived instrument, one in which each organisation jockeys for its sectarian interests. An agreement to join hands against the common foe cannot form a solid basis for genuine and active cooperation if there is disagreement on the basic and burning issues of the day. Joint work is unthinkable as long as territorial disputes are not settled, as long as one organization fights for secession while another opposes it.

As long as the united front is not linked by a common aspiration which makes the sacrificing of sectional and group interests worth-while, each organization will strive to grow and gain influence at the expense of another. Since the United Front attempts to mobilize the masses for diametrically opposed aims — secession and unity — each organization will work to isolate its rival from the people by political and propaganda campaigns and by raising the exclusivist issue of the 'lands and boundaries of nationalities'. In Ethiopia where the question of nationalities is very sensitive, such disagreements inevitably lead to violence and internecine war.

In short, a united front organization in Ethiopia must have as its main aim the establishment of a democratic state which would bring to fruition the unity of equal nationalities, if it is to succeed in correctly handling the complex class-nationality relations in the country and lead the people to victory. The rights of nationalities in the new democratic state and the relations between the central government and the administrative organs of the nationalities must be clearly spelled out and the organizations that constitute the United Front must accept them and fight for their implementation. Taking into account the concrete conditions of Ethiopia and the problems of gaining regional and international recognition, it is clear that any united front which falls short of these requirements and is divided on the decisive issues will remain inoperative and, in the long run, harm the struggle of the peoples of Ethiopia.

Another issue which is closely linked with the aims of the United Front is the

question of membership. An indisputable criterion for membership is opposition to the Dergue's regime and to Soviet intervention in the affairs of the Eritrean and Ethiopian peoples. However, will organizations which meet this requirement but are the orderlies of Western imperialism and dream of reviving the feudal relations which have been weakened over the past 10 years of struggle be allowed to join the United Front? Will the Front open its doors to groups which imperialism has organized, sustained and armed and is now getting ready to infiltrate into Ethiopia?

In the present conditions of Ethiopia, are there any groups, except those who have already declared their anti-imperialist stand, which oppose the Dergue and Soviet intervention but are not in the service of U.S. imperialism? And is it possible that such groups can exist? The answer to all these questions is a definite 'no'.

The groups that draw their swords at the Dergue and Soviet intervention but bow to western imperialism are precisely those whom imperialism has been sustaining, those who still carry the smell of the overthrown autocratic regime. It is obvious that these forces have no place in the United Front, and if that is the case, it must be clearly stated in the criteria for membership that those who can participate in the United Front must be opposed not only to the Addis Abeba military regime and the Soviet union's pro-Dergue stance but also to feudal exploitation, imperialism and all forms of foreign domination.

Apart from the above mentioned crucial issues which have a direct and immediate bearing on the progress of the Ethiopian revolution and, indirectly on the Eritrean revolution, the EPLF considers all other issues — the question of the 'Social imperialist' nature of the Soviet Union, for instance — as secondary. One thing is beyond dispute: there must be unwavering opposition to the Soviet Union's liquidationist stand and aggressive role in the region and a demonstrated readiness to confront its military intervention. It is also reasonable to propose that the internal and external policies of the Soviet Union be discussed by organizations and their cadres with the aim of bring differing views on the subject closer.

However, it is totally incorrect to suggest that Ethiopian organizations and the EPLF be divided into antagonistic groups on the basis of their answer to the question of whether capitalism has been restored in the Soviet Union, a controversy which has not been resolved by revolutionary forces who seek to derive lessons from the experience of the socialist camp for their struggles for progressive societies.

To argue that 'it is strategic to differentiate friend from enemy on a world scale', to declare that 'whoever considers the Soviet Union an imperialist power is with us' and 'whoever doesn't call the Soviet Union imperialist is against us' and, on that basis, to malign organizations that have courageously fought Soviet military intervention and condemned its anti-liberation movement stance in this region and other continents as defenders, apologists and puppets of the Soviet Union and group them in the ranks of the enemies is wrong. Once you dub an organisation an enemy, you are bound to conduct propaganda campaigns and mass mobilization efforts against it, strive to limit its influence and strength and conspire against it. These inevitably lead to the straining of relations between organizations and peoples and then to open conflict.

This is what experience has shown. In many Western and Third World countries, this type of outlook and thinking has resulted in the fragmentation of groups and the

fizzling out of revolutionary movements which, if they had remained united, could have achieved much. For all these reasons, the 'Social imperialist' nature of the Soviet Union should not be a touchstone that divides Ethiopian organizations and the EPLF into two antagonistic camps.

The Eritrean People's Liberation Front has come forward to give its forthright views on the basic questions and tasks of the Ethiopian revolution because it is convinced that the destiny of the Eritrean and Ethiopian peoples is closely linked. The Front believes that for the advance of the Eritrean revolution, cooperation with the struggle of the Ethiopian peoples comes second only to the capability of the Eritrean people and that, for the Ethiopian revolution, the most important external factor is the Eritrean people's struggle. It works carefully, patiently and seriously to broaden and deepen its relations with democratic Ethiopian organizations and reinforce the solidarity of the two peoples. The EPLF puts the importance of the formation of a solid alliance between the two revolutions above any of its diplomatic activities. At the same time, it expects from Ethiopia's democratic movements of similar stand and an equal sense of responsibility.

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STATEMENT BY THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE OF THE TIGRAY PEOPLE'S LIBERATION FRONT (TPLF) ON THE OCCASION OF THE 24TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE ARMED STRUGGLE IN ERITREA.

It is 24 years since the struggle of the Eritrean people began. On this day, the 1st September 1985, the 24th anniversary of the beginning of the armed struggle, great celebrations are being held in the liberated and semi-liberated areas of Eritrea and elsewhere. This great occasion is honoured not only by the heroic people of Eritrea but also by the TPLF and the Tigrayan masses.

The anniversary of the birth of the armed struggle in Eritrea which has a great and deep meaning for the Tigrayan people and its vanguard the TPLF, is regarded with special deep feeling and respect. This is not only because the Eritrean people are close neighbours and brothers of the Tigrayan masses, or only because the heroic Tigrayan fighters have repeatedly closed ranks with their Eritrean counterparts to make the ultimate sacrifice for the realization of the ideals of the struggle in Eritrea. The fundamental reason is far deeper than that.

That the Eritrean question is a historically proven, theoretically and scientifically supported case of colonialism and the struggle that the Eritrean masses are waging is a just and *necessary* struggle against colonialism are beyond any reasonable question. It goes without saying that all forces which stand for democracy and justice must necessarily support and uphold that struggle.

The TPLF, basing its stand on historical facts and sound scientific analysis has rightly supported, from the beginning, the Eritrean struggle against colonialism.

While many forces changed their position due to opportunistic considerations and opposed the just struggle of the Eritrean masses, the TPLF stood steady on its conviction in and support for the struggle. The TPLF's principled open support for the Eritrean people's struggle has not been without political and other repercussions within Ethiopia and elsewhere. However, the TPLF did not succumb