

APDUSA VIEWS

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THE LONG STRUGGLE OF ERITREA

A NOTE TO THE READER

This publication is based on a lecture delivered by Dr Dhaya Moodley on 25 April 1992 on the occasion that APDUSA paid tribute to the late Dr Z.S. Christopher who died in exile on 16 March 1992. The lecture was dedicated to her.

The choice of the subject matter of the lecture, namely, The Long Struggle of Eritrea,¹ could not have been better timed for us in South Africa. The Eritrean struggle holds many valuable lessons for us and for all people struggling for liberation.

We are presently witnessing the betrayal of the interests of the oppressed and exploited people of this country by the leadership of the ANC and the Communist Party. We see that leadership at its various levels falling over one another in a shameless race for position, money, motor cars and high living.

What can be more disgusting than to see persons who once paraded as revolutionaries making a dive for palatial mansions, fancy motor cars, expensive clothing and status-boosting parties with top capitalists. The public manifestation of this phenomenon of degeneracy began with the Mandela mansion followed by an expensive display of flattery by trade union bureaucrats who got the workers to manufacture a luxury car for Nelson Mandela. Then the scramble for luxury homes and cars until that reached a crescendo with Mrs. Winnie Mandela buying a luxury car for R980 000², that is, R20 000 less than one million rand! At a time when millions are suffering privation from unemployment and when millions are going hungry or plainly starving, Mrs. Mandela, once bestowed with the title of Mother of the Nation by the cowardly and dishonest press of the liberal bourgeoisie, has been singularly insensitive to the plight of her people by this wanton display of obscene luxury.

¹ Taken from the title of the book: The Long Struggle of Eritrea for Independence and Constructive Peace edited by Lionel Cliffe and Basil Davidson
2. Weekly Mail (5-12 February 1993) .

² Weekly Mail (5-12 February 1993)

Mrs. Mandela is not alone in suffering from a craving for luxury. James Molatsi, president of the Mineworkers' Union, is a modest man, relatively speaking, that is. He bought an Audi for R200 000³.

Yet, people like these got involved in the political struggle allegedly on behalf of the people. Today, the people mean nothing to them.

Where are the demands of the people? Where is their much vaunted Freedom Charter? The ANC and the Communist Party have muzzled the Freedom Charter far more effectively than the Nats had ever done in the past. Hence, there is a deathly silence on the fundamental rights of the oppressed and exploited people. **HEREIN LIES THE BETRAYAL!**

The Great Betrayal has assumed the form of negotiations which the hacks and pen-pushers have euphemistically called "another terrain of struggle." The proponents of this other "terrain of struggle" are at pains to explain the betrayal by way of emphasising the might of the ruling class, pressure from frontline states, cessation of help from the Soviet Union and so on.

In sharp contrast to the obvious betrayal of the people in whose interest they claim to be working, we can refer to the struggle of the Eritrean people for independence from Ethiopian colonialism and for the establishment of a new social order. It has been a struggle of epic proportions and quality. A tiny nation of 3 1/2 million people engaged Ethiopia with its largest army in Africa and backed to the hilt by US imperialism for about 17 years and then backed, again to the hilt, by the Stalinist USSR for the next 13 years. It was against seemingly insuperable odds that this nation of heroes and heroines fought a liberation war and won! For the Eritreans, there was no "another terrain of struggle." They fought the struggle as it ought to have been fought and emerged victorious.

Even more striking is the conduct and behaviour of the leadership of the principal organisation, the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF). Their involvement and total identification with the people was the key to their success. Journalists and reporters who recently visited the country returned with amazing and marvellous accounts of total dedication of the leadership to the cause of their people. Exiles who had acquired skills abroad returned to serve their people. The political leadership is on duty 24 hours a day. Soldiers are busy with roads. That in itself is nothing new. What, however, is refreshing and inspiring is that they are working **WITHOUT SALARY!** Boarding and lodging and a very modest sum for pocket money is all they

³ Weekly Mail (22-28 January 1993)

get. They live simply, they eat simply and they dress simply. Thus by their very conduct, they are an example to their people.

When a comparison between the Eritrean revolutionaries and the leadership of the ANC and the Communist Party is made, it will be seen how false and phoney the latter are.

We affix as an appendix the National Democratic Programme of the EPLF. By reading it, we will have some idea of the thinking of the EPLF and the direction it has taken. We are also able to get a glimpse of the vision the EPLF has of the future Eritrean social order.

For the first time in 30 years, there is peace in the region. Eritrean and Ethiopian revolutionaries discovered each other whilst engaging a common enemy, that is, the hated Mengistu regime. They worked together in their striving and were able to destroy the tyranny of the Mengistu regime. The Ethiopian government is quite prepared to accept Eritrean independence should that be the wish of the majority of the Eritreans expressed by a referendum. This was confirmed by the Foreign Minister of Ethiopia at the beginning of February 1993.

This lecture, by virtue of constraint of time, is no more than an outline of that long struggle. The principal purpose of the lecture was to inform people of Africa's longest liberation war which was grossly underreported. It was also designed to give some indication of the nature of the struggle and the issues involved. Above all, it was sought to raise people's morale by showing that it was possible to continue the struggle and that there was no need for us to soil our hands with that other "terrain of struggle".

Editorial Committee

THE LONG STRUGGLE OF ERITREA

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February 1993

THE LONG STRUGGLE OF ERITREA

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

As humanity makes progress in the field of science and technology, our means of communications improve. The world is no longer the vast and boundless stretch of land and sea it was in previous centuries. Whereas previously it would take months for news to travel from one end of the world to the other, today we learn of events within minutes of their taking place.

Technological advance has shrunk the world.

The poet John Donne wrote

" No man is an island,

entire of itself;

every man is a piece of the continent,

a part of the main. "

Donne's famous poem has been interpreted in various ways but its essential meaning is the oneness of people who have deep common bonds regardless of which part of the earth they may be occupying. When therefore unarmed people are killed by a brutal army e.g. the people of East Timor by the Indonesian Army or the Sikhs by the Indian army we are concerned because those killed are the poor and exploited of a third world country. Who amongst us will not be moved at the news of the slaughter of unarmed people? Who can remain indifferent to the sight of emaciated bodies - the victims of drought and famine?

These reactions reflect the awakening of an internationalist outlook i.e. we look beyond our borders to other people who suffer as we do. We identify with them. Therefore when the Vietnamese took position to do battle with the world's mightiest power, U.S. imperialism, our hearts went out to the people of Vietnam. We rejoiced each time the Vietnamese inflicted defeats on U.S. imperialism.

This situation has been enacted countless times before - the battle between the seemingly weak against the seemingly invincible.

The Bible narrates the situation quite graphically in the confrontation between the small David against the giant and battle-scarred warrior Goliath who had never tasted defeat before.

Armed with only a primitive sling and a few river-washed stones, he struck the fatal blow at the only unprotected part of Goliath's body.

People entering a liberatory movement in a state of weakness are encouraged to study and are told of the history of the struggles for liberation in different parts of the world at different points in time. At the commencement of a struggle and during a period of retreat the enemy appears to be invincible. Those opposing them need stout hearts. One very important method of raising morale is to study the history of other struggles. From these studies, we will learn that no liberatory struggle is born with a golden spoon in its mouth. It is uphill all the way. In the end victory and success awaits the organisation with dedication coupled with inflexible principles, correct strategy and creative tactics.

With this in mind we look at the struggle by the people of Eritrea for nationhood and liberation: first from the yoke of the feudal regime of Haile Selassie and later the brutal military dictatorship under Mengistu.

Africa is the second largest continent occupying a land area in excess of 30 million square kilometers. Within this vast expanse, Eritrea occupies only about 100 000 square kilometers, an almost negligible area. It is 5 000 kilometers away from us in South Africa. This geographical quirk, together with the deliberate policy by the media to snuff out all sound of struggle in that region of the world, may make the political happenings there seem inconsequential to us in South Africa.

In keeping with our internationalist perspective however, lack of public attention and scant media reportage, is no measure of the importance of the Eritrean struggle. We are all Africans, since we were born on this continent. We will remain here and in all probability die here. If therefore this is our continent then we must make it our business to know what is going on here.

Eritrea is the site of one of the longest wars in modern history; a war that started in 1961 and only ended in 1991 - a duration of thirty years! It was a war waged by a people who have the lowest per capita income in the world against the country with the largest army in Africa and supported by the superpowers Ethiopia.

That this people could endure thirty years of civil war, famine, death squads, ecological disasters all drawing on the meagre resources of the people themselves, and still triumph, is a lesson in resilience, organisation and revolutionary optimism.

CHAPTER 2

OVERVIEW OF THE HORN OF AFRICA

The Horn of Africa is composed of Eritrea, Djibouti, Somalia and Ethiopia with Sudan to the north and west and Kenya to the south . The Indian Ocean lies to the east and the Red Sea north east.

The area has long been of interest to external powers. First the early Arab traders who realised the importance of the Red Sea and Gulf area, and later to the rulers of the Ottoman Empire who swept down from Turkey. In more recent times, the last century saw the competing colonial powers display keen interest in the region. Britain, Italy and France ruled the area in colonial times.

The influence of the superpowers tended to dominate in the post World War II period. The area became a hotbed of rivalry between the two. Each sought to extend and preserve its position of dominance in the area.

CHAPTER 3

HISTORY OF THE REGION

The history of Eritrea and Ethiopia interlocked and this interlocking continues today.

The origins of the people in Eritrea can be traced as far back as 2 700 Be. In modern history, they emerge in the nineteenth century as a group of independent chiefdoms and clans. They conducted trade with their Red Sea neighbours and their Tigrayan and Amharic neighbours to the south and south west.

The definition of their country as Eritrea with its present boundaries, derived from the rivalry between Ethiopia and Italy in the nineteenth century. Italy's presence in the region dates to 1869 when a Genoese ship owner and Italian missionaries bought a strip of land near the Port of Assab. They formally started to colonise the area in 1885, when an Italian force occupied the port of Massawa. From here they sought to push inland with their conquest. They met with valiant resistance from the resident populations; in fact in one battle at a place called Dogali they were soundly defeated and repulsed by the Eritreans. However a combination of superior Italian arms and

lack of a cohesive defense from the Eritreans allowed the Italians to push inland albeit slowly.

This is where they made contact with the Ethiopians who were pushing in the other direction, hoping to consolidate the Ethiopian Empire they called Abyssinia. At the same time there was rivalry within the Ethiopian camp concerning the Emperorship. The ruler at the time, John or Yohannes was under threat from Menelik. The Italians who were aware of this rivalry decided to exploit it and provided Menelik with aid. They hoped that this would enable them to take over the whole region with the aid of Menelik. They hoped to even conquer Ethiopia.

Menelik for his part appeared to be aware of the underlying motives of the Italians for proffering aid but nonetheless took it and utilised it to get rid of John, which he did in 1889. Later the Italians and Menelik signed a treaty of friendship and alliance. Following this treaty the Italians continued to invade more of Eritrea under continued resistance from the Eritreans. Menelik was alarmed and quickly renounced the treaty. The Italians, grossly underestimating the military strength and genius of Menelik proceeded to challenge him for Ethiopian territory. The Italians were soundly beaten by Menelik at Adua in 1896.

This put paid to the Italian intentions to overrun Ethiopia. Instead they consolidated their stranglehold over Eritrea and on 1 January 1890 named this colony Eritrea. And so the present boundaries of Eritrea came to be defined.

In Ethiopia the feudal aristocracy continued to reign supreme, while in Eritrea the Italians developed a colony - they controlled the government, the towns, all fertile land was expropriated in the name of the Italian government.

Meanwhile in Ethiopia in 1912, a radical young prince called Ras Teferi staged coup de tat and took power. He was later to be known as Haile Selassie. His co-conspirators were a motley band of people including some who were followers of the Bolsheviks in Russia. Soon after taking power however Selassie faced a choice: follow the radical path of these latter groupings or a conservative grouping. He chose the conservative grouping, and ensured that the radical groupings were destroyed.

This status quo persisted until 1935 when Italy having decided to join Germany invaded Ethiopia. Haile Selassie fled the country.

Eritrea: A political football

In 1941 Britain launched an offensive to wrest Eritrea and Ethiopia from the Italians. In Eritrea, they were helped by the local population without whose help they would not have had such an easy overthrow of Italian rule. This help they enlisted on the pretext of giving the Eritreans their independence. They even bombarded Eritrea with pamphlets urging them to help the British get rid of the Italians after which they guaranteed Eritrean independence.

This soon proved to be a lie. After getting rid of the Italians the British became the occupying power. In the meantime they had reinstated Haile Selassie as head of Ethiopia. Eritrea remained under British rule while the four powers (Britain, France, the USA and the USSR) of the Alliance vacillated on how to dispense with Eritrea. At one time, the USSR even suggested that Eritrea be returned to Italy as it thought that the Italian Communist Party would win the elections in that country.

In 1948 (after World War II) the future of Eritrea was handed over to the UN General Assembly to decide its fate. They had three options: total independence for Eritrea, a federation with Ethiopia or total union with Ethiopia. Numerous Commissions of Enquiry were set up to resolve the matter. They finally decided in 1952 to amalgamate Eritrea with Ethiopia in the form of a federation. The Eritrean people were to have their own local government in the form of an Eritrean Assembly. To complete the farce, the British were in charge of appointing office bearers to this Assembly. No elections were held. They appointed pro-British and pro-Ethiopian people.

The betrayal:

Slowly Eritrean sovereignty was whittled away: laws promulgated in Ethiopia were also enforced in Eritrea, the Eritrean flag was lowered and replaced by the Ethiopian flag, the Eritrean penal code was replaced by the Ethiopian penal code, the Eritrean Assembly was renamed (wait for this) "Eritrean Administration under Haile Selassie I, Emperor of Ethiopia," and the atrocities committed against the Eritreans abound - more of this later. In addition Selassie manipulated the Assembly to such an extent that by the dawn of the sixties, most of the officers were pro-Ethiopian. In 1962 a motion was put forward calling for the dissolution of the federation and amalgamation with Ethiopia by those officers loyal to Selassie. Those dissenting were compelled by force of arms to vote yes - the Ethiopian army had a resident force in Ethiopia and the Eritreans were not allowed to organise their own citizen force.

While all this took place the world stood by and watched.

Haile Selassie ruled until 1974 when he was overthrown by the Dergue - a military council. Within Ethiopia the Dergue was initially a progressive force in that it rid Ethiopia of the feudal aristocracy, implemented land reforms etc. Their initial reforms however were limited to Ethiopia. As far as their relationship with Eritrea was concerned they merely perpetuated the legacy started by the Italians and continued by Haile Selassie.

CHAPTER 4

ORIGINS OF THE ERITREAN STRUGGLE

The people of this region have mounted struggles since 1941 to rid themselves of foreign domination. They first tried peaceful political means but their unorganised nature in the face of deceit, treachery and a hostile army and police force stood no chance.

They soon realised the futility of this. The creation of the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) in 1961 marked the beginning of the armed struggle. This coincided with the Ethiopian attempt to incorporate Eritrea as part of Ethiopia.

a) THE ELF

The ELF started with 13 fighters and 7 guns. Young people, however, fed up with the system soon flocked to join the ranks of the ELF. The ELF served to galvanise the people into action; it made them aware of another terrain of struggle; it allowed them to develop a camaraderie of purpose against the Ethiopians, it served to transform the Eritreans into a cohesive force by providing a rallying point. Due to the following peculiarities however, the ELF did not survive to remain a force to the end:

1. It was led by exiles living abroad whose horizons did not extend beyond very narrow nationalist aims;
2. It lacked clear ideology and had no programme to safeguard the interests of the oppressed;
3. Due to leadership struggles, religious and regional differences gained prominence in internal conflicts;
4. The leadership was extremely dictatorial in its attitude to the people within the country, wanting to direct everything from abroad.

At the same time younger recruits were demanding internal reforms within the ELF itself. The ELF responded by killing some 500 of its own activists who were asking for these reforms.

Three groupings of activists and fighters of the ELF stationed within the country withdrew from the ELF and regrouped to set up the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) in April 1970.

The ELF labelled the EPLF counter-revolutionary and set out to liquidate them. A formal resolution to this effect was passed by the ELF in 1971. This started a civil war between the two groupings.

b) CIVIL WAR BETWEEN THE ELF AND THE EPLF

Seizing the opportunity presented by this ugly scenario, the Ethiopians set out to destroy the Eritrean armed struggle and hence the potential revolution. The American and Israeli defence forces intensified their support of the Ethiopian army in terms of hardware as well as military strategists and advisors. They decided to focus their hatred on the EPLF as they represented the greater threat to their interests in the area. The EPLF therefore found itself fighting on two fronts.

The civil war lasted two and half years, until the Eritrean people stepped in and effected a cease-fire between the two warring sides. This conflict wreaked untold havoc on the progress of the Eritrean revolution.

The ELF continued to operate but increasingly occupied a peripheral role compared to the EPLF.

CHAPTER 5

THE DERGUE TAKES POWER IN ETHIOPIA

Marx said that every system has its own gravediggers and so it was to be with the despotism of Selassie. In the post World War II period he had undertaken a modernisation drive within Ethiopia. This led to expansion of the industrial sector, expansion of educational facilities, increasingly commercialised agriculture. These reforms relentlessly diminished the power of the feudal lords. The contradictions inherent in a society with feudal relations in the latter part of the twentieth century went into play. Thus the social forces unleashed in 1974 were a direct result of his modernisation process.

Workers and students became increasingly organised and militant, especially in Addis Ababa. Strikes and demonstrations increased.

Against this background, a crushing defeat of the Ethiopian army by the EPLF in December 1973, precipitated an army mutiny in those forces stationed in Eritrea. This soon progressed to a full scale revolt. Young educated officers, a product of the modernisation process, were waiting an opportune moment to seize power. Their motivation, however, far from being radical, revolved around petty issues related to their own status within Ethiopian society.

When news of this reached Addis Ababa, the students and workers organised themselves and also staged revolts. The country's first general strike involving 80 000 workers occurred in March 1974.

In the meantime sections of the revolting military had organised themselves and had coalesced to form the Dergue - Amharic for military council. Each unit of the armed forces and the police was represented on the Dergue. They represented the educated officer class and were thus very ambitious compared to the ordinary soldier. They depended on the students and labour unions for support but also felt threatened by them. The Dergue had no political programme or policy. Their primary motivation derived from improving their own salaries and conditions of service. The first person they looked to for leadership was a seasoned politico called Aman Andom. However ethnic rivalries also threatened to rent them apart as Aman and another leader Atnafu were from the ruling Amharic tribe. At this time Mengistu was attending central meetings of the Dergue as a representative of his unit. The leadership tried to diffuse the situation and suggested him as leader as he was from another tribe - the Oromo .

Selassie was still head of the government although the Dergue slowly wrested control of government affairs from the aristocracy - it was a takeover in slow motion. In the meantime the Dergue was being criticised by left groups, students and worker unions for only looking out for their own interests i.e. for improving their own living standards and status only; crowds called them sectarian, cowardly and selfish. Under pressure from the people, they finally deposed Selassie almost a year after they took power.

The next problem that faced the Dergue was that of Eritrea. Aman proposed a peaceful solution be sought. This was opposed by Mengistu's grouping which wanted to resolve it militarily. Aman resigned in protest. Realising that Aman could rally an opposition force around him Mengistu ordered him assassinated.

That same night the Dergue also ordered the execution of 59 other radical officers who supported Aman. This marked the beginning of yet another nightmare for both the Eritrean and Ethiopian peoples.

In December 1974 the Dergue launched its first military offensive against the Eritreans.

CHAPTER 6

THE EPLF

The essence of what the EPLF stood for is encapsulated in its National Democratic Programme (see appendix I)

There is no ambiguity in that programme as to whose interests are paramount. Adopted in 1977, they stood by this document till they gained total control of Eritrea. They always linked the struggle for national liberation to the struggle for social liberation. This is borne out by their consistent conduct.

Over the years the EPLF demonstrated two mobilisation tasks which are crucial for the development of any effective national liberation movement:

a) it has been able to build a strong organisation which has remained cohesive and b) it has shown a capacity to regenerate cadres.

This solid preparatory work took place between 1974 and 1978.

ORGANISATIONAL ACHIEVEMENTS

1. Their basic approach has been that of a people's war involving the gradual build-up of guerrilla struggle based mainly in the rural areas. This draws on widespread support amongst the people and parallels the liberation struggles in China, Angola, Indochina, Mozambique and Zimbabwe.

2. A feature present in most people's wars elsewhere was that of external support. This mainly took two forms:

- a) in the face of superior strength of the enemy they were able to fade away to bases outside e.g. Vietnam, Mozambique, Zimbabwe.
- b) concrete diplomatic, military, political assistance.

In this respect the Eritreans were unique. They were cut off from both means of support for most of the past 30 years.

This has meant obvious shortage of materials, has reduced the terrain for tactical maneuverability, has meant that strategic bases have had to be within the country. This has meant an even greater emphasis on self-reliance and popular mobilisation e.g. weapons are liberated from the enemy, or manufactured. Unable to withdraw across safe international borders and yet requiring safe bases poses a formidable problem as internal bases have to either be well concealed or highly mobile.

3. Self reliance has been the hallmark of the EPLF. An article in the New Statesman and Society of 7 June 1991 quotes an Eritrean as saying "we are ourselves; we have no political debts. " Despite harsh poverty they have developed a self reliant ethic. Nothing typifies this more than an entire industrial town that they had constructed in Northern Eritrea - what differentiates this from other towns you may ask - well it is entirely underground and remained hidden from the world for the duration of the war.

There are factories, foundries, metal shops, electronics plant, woodwork factories which produced crutches and school desks. Captured Soviet Mig21s were recycled to produce guns, buckets, ovens and X -ray equipment.

4. Organisation of the People

The success of the Eritreans has been to get the entire community active in the revolution. Special effort was made to involve women and youth. They have especially succeeded with women. More than 25 % within their own ranks are women. Militias were created in the liberated zones consisting of both women and men. Schools, health clinics, agricultural programmes were all run with the full participation of the people. Food cooperatives met 60% of the food and other requirements of the fighters. An effective communications network was built up.

5. Military achievements Their military achievements are unique in Africa. The armed struggle has deep roots in the population, being the longest in modern times. Very few armed movements worldwide have ever reached the stage that their armed struggle did, that of total capture and total routing of the enemy. In fact, a study of their armed struggles is almost a textbook case as outlined by Mao Tse Tung and Vo Nguyen Giap in China and Vietnam respectively. They described three phases:

1) strategic defence: characterised by mobile warfare, a strategy of retreat to extend the aggressor's means of communication with some hit-and-run guerrilla strikes.

2) preparation for counter offensive: guerrilla warfare becomes

widespread with strikes at the enemy's weak spots and mobilisation of the people.

3) counter offensive: revolutionary war where guerrilla tactics merely support positional attacks against the enemy's strong points.

6. Conduct of the EPLF cadres.

The conduct of the cadres was remarkable throughout the struggle. This more than anything has endeared them to the Eritrean people. It is reported that all they possessed were the clothes on their backs, a pair of sandals, a blanket and their arms. The blankets served to keep them warm at night and when they died they were rolled into the same blanket and buried.

Wherever they took control they immediately instituted measures to remedy the damage the Ethiopians had wrought. They reorganised farms, industry, local government all with the full participation of and for the full benefit of the local population.

For all this they never stole, assaulted, raped, or demonstrated authoritarian behaviour towards the people. The interests of the people were paramount to them. The humility and integrity which typified their behaviour was remarkable.

This contrasted sharply with the conduct of the occupying Ethiopian forces.

CHAPTER 7

CONDUCT OF THE DERGUE IN ERITREA

The Ethiopian authorities (the Dergue) had perfected a system of control and repression that they exported to Eritrea. These were known as kebeles or district committees. These committees were designed to monitor the every activity of the population and to provide authorities with intelligence reports. Membership was compulsory. Meetings were held weekly. Failure to attend these meetings even on the grounds of sickness was heavily censured and could have resulted in detention in kebele offices. Defaulters were interrogated and it was assumed that they were opponents of the system.

They also controlled the distribution of food, the selecting of conscripts to the army, etc.

The atrocities committed by the Eritrean collaborators and the Ethiopians in the name of these committees and by the occupying Ethiopian army are horrific. Widespread withholding of food rations, the selling of food rations donated free with money

going into the pockets of middlemen, appropriation of agricultural produce without compensation, assault, rape, widespread assassinations, the list is endless.

CHAPTER 8

FOREIGN INTERVENTION

In the majority of the ensuing battles the EPLF had routed the Dergue. By 1978 the EPLF was in control of the major part of Eritrean territory.

As for Ethiopia they were only able to retain hold over Eritrea via foreign aid. Pre-1977 the United States pumped in huge amounts of aid. In fact the United States supplied Ethiopia with arms worth more than half the aid supplied to the rest of Africa.

In return the United States was able to establish sophisticated military bases in Eritrea and Ethiopia. The US agency for International Development was very active in Ethiopia even after the military regime came into power.

In 1978 the Ethiopians despite US military aid were still being defeated by the Eritreans. They were also running into problems with the Somali-populated territory of the Ogaden. They asked the US for more help - the US refused. The Ethiopians responded by kicking out US personnel and installations and invited the Soviets into Ethiopia. Looking to their own geopolitical interests, as they had just been kicked out of Somalia, the USSR moved in with no thought to the dynamics of the struggle there. Overnight the Soviet Union moved into Ethiopia. More than 2 billion dollars worth of arms were sent to Ethiopia in a short space of time.

This provided the Ethiopians with the means to shift the balance of power in their favour. They were able to occupy most of the towns held by the EPLF. Buoyed by their success they launched a plan "to liquidate the Eritrean Revolution in three months." However once the EPLF had retreated to their base camps they held their ground.

Ethiopia conducted 5 massive campaigns against the EPLF between 1978 and 1981. All failed. The magnitude of these offensives have to be appreciated. For example: "OPERATION RED STAR". This was the sixth campaign, undertaken in February 1982. The Ethiopians had prepared for this for two years. Mengistu himself took command of this operation. Even the seat of Ethiopia's government was temporarily moved to Asmara, an Ethiopian-held town in Eritrea, so that Selassie could rule while trying to liquidate the EPLF. 120 000 troops were dedicated to the effort, with massive arms including chemical weapons.

The EPLF in the meanwhile had made preparations for a surprise preemptive strike. This they launched on 12 February 1982.

Casualties were heavy on both sides. 40 000 Ethiopian soldiers were killed. This massive strike still failed for the Ethiopian military dictatorship.

CHAPTER 9

PRELUDE TO THE OVERTHROW OF THE DERGUE.

After that battle the EPLF regrouped slowly and then slowly but relentlessly routed the Ethiopian army.

In the mid 1980's the Ethiopian people themselves were starting to rise up against the Dergue. The strongest force to emerge was the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF), in the province of Tigray which borders Eritrea. The Ethiopian army now had to do battle on two fronts. The EPLF and TPLF had a tacit alliance.

This two-pronged attack finally overcame the Ethiopian army in May 1991. Mengistu in the meanwhile had fled to Zimbabwe.

The TPLF with the help of the EPLF swept into Addis Ababa.

The whole of Eritrea had been liberated, while at the same time the Ethiopian people had rid themselves of Mengistu's dictatorial regime. A struggle that started off with just 13 fighters and 7 guns had turned into a force to be reckoned with and had beaten the largest and most well-equipped army in Sub-Saharan Africa, an army of half a million soldiers.

CHAPTER 10

THE FUTURE.

In Ethiopia, the TPLF has united with the other groupings of Ethiopia under the banner of the EPRDF - the Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Democratic Front. It is a country in transition and one can only await events there. They have taken no decision on Eritrea but to all intents and purposes acknowledge that the EPLF controls Eritrea.

As for the EPLF, they have consolidated their power over the entire country, and in keeping with their pre-liberation programme have made it clear that Eritrea will in fact go its own way from Ethiopia politically. However they have reiterated their undertaking to allow a UN supervised referendum to take place in Eritrea in 1993. In

addition they have guaranteed Ethiopia, being a land-locked country, the unconditional right of access to the Southern port of Assab, thus providing the Ethiopians with a corridor of access to the shipping lanes. The situation in this region is still unfolding. Time will show best what finally emerges.

The struggle of the Eritrean David against the Ethiopian Goliath concerns us in a number of ways. To mention but a few:

- I . It is an event of great importance taking place on our continent.
2. We identify with the struggles of the oppressed and downtrodden wherever they may take place.
3. Under conditions of extreme privation the Eritreans have built up a society that could be a model of development.
4. That this event could occur in a period when our own liberatory movement is in so weak a position can only provide us with the revolutionary optimism to go on with the struggle adhering uncompromisingly to our principles.

National Democratic Programme, Eritrean People's Liberation Front

Objectives

1. Establish A People's Democratic State

A. Abolish the Ethiopian colonial administrative organs and all anti-national and undemocratic laws and cancel the military economic, political and cultural treaties affecting Eritrea signed between the colonial power, Ethiopia, and other governments.

B. Establish a state that safeguards the interests of the people and does not serve those of foreign forces.

e. Constitute a People's Assembly through a free and democratic election of people's representatives. The People's Assembly shall draw the Constitution, passive laws, formulate policies, ratify new treaties and elect popular executive and judicial organs.

D. Protect the democratic rights of freedom of speech, the press, assembly, worship and peaceful demonstration as well as the right of nationalist political parties and nationalist associations of workers, peasants, women, students, youth and professionals.

E. Assure all Eritrean nationals equality before the law without distinction as to nationality, sex, affiliation, cultural level, occupation, position, wealth, faith, etc.

F. Punish severely Eritrean lackeys of Ethiopian colonialism who have committed crimes against their country and people.

2. Build an Independent, Self-Reliant and Planned National Economy

To develop the Eritrean economy there shall be private and public sectors in agriculture, industry and trade. The basic economic resources shall be state owned. Domestic capital investment in the private sector and foreign capital investment in the public sector shall be allowed and encouraged.

A. Agriculture

1. Put all land in the hands of the aggressor Ethiopian regime in the service of the Eritrean people.

2. Convert big farms requiring modern techniques into state farms and use their produce for the benefit of the people.

3. Implement an equitable distribution of land to make the land benefit the tiller.
4. Encourage the peasants to adopt modern agricultural techniques, introduce them to advanced agricultural implements and provide them with advisors, experts, veterinary services, fertilizers, wells, dams, transportation, finance, etc., to alleviate their problems and improve their livelihood and working conditions.
5. Provide the nomads with livestock breeding, veterinary and agricultural education as well as advisors, experts and financial assistance to enable them to lead settled lives, adopt modern means of animal husbandry and agriculture and improve their livelihood.
6. Provide for the peaceful and amicable settlement of land disputes and inequity among individuals and villages in such a way as to harmonize the interest of the aggrieved party with that of national construction.
7. Advance the economic and living conditions in, and bridge the gap between, the cities and the countryside.
8. Make extensive pastures and forests public property, preserve wild life and forestry and conduct a campaign of reforestation.
9. Maintain a proper balance between agriculture and industry in economic planning.

B. Industry

1. Nationalize all industries in the hands of Ethiopian colonialists, its Eritrean collaborators and foreigners hostile to Eritrean independence.
2. Nationalize big industries, mines, marine resources, communication, public transport and power plants.
3. Exploit marine resources, expand the production of salt and other minerals, develop the fish industry and explore available minerals.
4. Encourage Eritreans with capital to participate in national construction by setting up factories and enterprises in the private sector.
5. Strive to develop heavy industry so as to promote light industry, advance agriculture and combat industrial dependence.

C. Finance

1. Centralize banking and put all insurance companies and banks under the state to regulate economic activities and accelerate economic development.
2. Establish a state owned central national bank and issue an independent national currency.

3. Prohibit usury in all its forms and extend credit at low interest to save the people from exploitation.
4. Design and implement an appropriate tariffs policy to protect the domestic market for the nation's agricultural, industrial and handicraft products.
5. Formulate and implement an equitable and rational taxation policy to provide for the administration and defence of the country, sustenance of productive activities and the extension of social services.

D. Trade

1. Extend a network of land, air and sea communications and transport essential to develop the nation's trade.
2. There shall be state and private trade and the state shall regulate private trade to ensure its compatibility with national construction.
3. Ban the export of essential consumer goods and limit the import of luxury items.
4. Regulate the exchange and pricing of the various domestic products.
5. Strictly prohibit contraband trade.
6. Establish trade relations with all countries irrespective of political systems.

E. Urban Land and Housing

1. Make all urban land public property with leasing allowed under state regulation.
2. Review the incorrect nationalization of houses carried out by the Dergue.
3. Every national will be allowed to build houses for residence and rent.
4. Set a rational rent price that takes into account the prevailing standard of living in order to improve the people's livelihood.
5. Build houses as needed through modern plans to alleviate the shortage of housing and solve the problem of the people.

3. Develop Culture, Education, Technology and Public Health

A. Culture

1. Destroy the decadent alien cultures and disgraceful social habits spread by Ethiopian colonialism and other foreign forces 28

- to subjugate and exploit the Eritrean people and destroy their identity.
2. Eliminate the bad aspects of the cultures and traditions of Eritrean society and develop their good and positive contents.
 3. Provide, through the educational opportunities accorded the Eritrean people, for the proper awareness, respect and development of the history of Eritrea and its people, of the struggle against colonialism, oppression and for national independence, of the sacrifices and heroism as well as of the national folklore, tradition, and culture of the Eritrean people.
 4. Ensure that the Eritrean people remain proud and always cherish the memory of the heroic martyrs of the struggle for freedom and independence who, loyal to their revolutionary ideals, gave their lives for the salvation of their people and country.
 5. Establish cultural centres, clubs and facilities, such as theatres, cinemas, etc., to develop a progressive national culture.

B. Education and Technology

The educational policy of the EPLF aims to secure the development of industry, agriculture and technology in order to improve the livelihood of the people; to narrow and eliminate the gap in the levels of cultural development; and promote the national unity of the Eritrean people.

1. Combat illiteracy to free the Eritrean people from the darkness of ignorance.
2. Provide for universal compulsory education up to the middle school; each nationality may give elementary education in its own language or any other language of its choice.
3. Establish institutions of higher education in the various fields of science, arts, technology and agriculture; English shall be the language of instruction in education above the elementary level.
4. Teach Arabic as a subject at all levels of education.
5. Grant students scholarships to pursue studies in the various fields of learning.
6. Establish schools in the various parts of Eritrea, with special focus on the regions where education is not widespread.
7. Separate education from religion.
8. Provide free state education at all levels.
9. Integrate education with production and put it in the service of the people.

10. Enable nationals, especially the students and youth, to train and develop themselves in the sciences, literature, handicrafts and technology through the formation of their own associations.
11. Provide favourable work conditions for experts and the skilled to enable them to utilize their skills and knowledge in the service of the people.
12. El)gage in educational, cultural and technological exchange with other countries on the basis of mutual benefit and equality.

C. Public Health

1. Strive to provide free health care for all the people.
2. Eradicate diseases and promote public health by building hospitals and health centres as needed all over Eritrea.
3. Develop the country's traditional medicine through the application of scientific methods.
4. Establish sports and athletic facilities to cultivate a healthy population.

4. Safeguard Social Rights

A. Workers' Rights

1. Provide for the highest degree of organization of the workers and the raising of their productive potential as they are the ones who shoulder the heaviest tasks for the development of the country's industry and agriculture.
2. Abolish the administration, laws and sham trade unions set up by Ethiopian colonialism and its collaborators to exploit and oppress Eritrean workers.
3. Limit an eight-hour working day and protect the right of workers to rest one day a week and twenty five working days a year.
4. Promulgate a special labour code that duly protects the rights of workers.
5. Assure workers comfortable housing and decent living conditions.
6. Devise a programme of social security to care for and assist workers who, because of illness, disability or age, are unable to work.
7. Prohibit unjustified dismissals and undue pay-cuts.
8. Provide for the participation of workers in the management and administration of the enterprises in which they work.
9. Struggle to eliminate unemployment.

B. Women's Rights

1. Develop a union through which women can participate in the struggle for national liberation and for social transformation.

2. Outline a broad programme to free women from domestic confinement and raise their political, cultural and productive levels.
3. Assure women full rights of equality with men in politics, the economy and social life as well as equal pay for similar work.
4. Promulgate marriage and family laws that safeguard the rights of women.
5. Protect the right of women to two months' maternity leave with full pay.
6. Protect the rights of mothers and children and provide delivery nursery and kindergarten services.
7. Struggle to eradicate prostitution.
8. Respect the right of women not to engage in work harmful to their health.
9. Design programmes to increase the number and upgrade the quality of women leaders and public servants.

C. Families of Martyrs, Disabled Fighters and Others Needing Social Assistance

1. Provide necessary care and assistance to all fighters and other nationals who, in the course of the struggle against Ethiopian colonialism and for national salvation, have suffered disability in combat or in jails.
2. Provide assistance and relief to the victims of Ethiopian colonial aggression, orphans, the old and the disabled as well as those harmed by natural causes.
3. Provide appropriate education and training programmes to disabled nationals so as to make them productive.
4. Render necessary assistance and care for the families of martyrs.

5. Ensure the Equality and Consolidate the Unity of Nationalities

- A. Abolish the administrative systems, practices, laws, instituted by Ethiopian colonialism and others to divide, oppress and exploit the Eritrean people.
- B. Rectify all errors committed by opportunists in the course of the struggle.
- C. Combat national chauvinism and narrow nationalism.
- D. Nurture and strengthen the unity and fraternity of Eritrean nationalities.
- E. Accord all nationalities equal rights and responsibilities in leading them toward national progress and salvation.
- F. Train cadres from all nationalities in various fields to assure common development.
- G. Safeguard the right of all nationalities to preserve and develop their spoken or written language.

H. Encourage all nationalities to preserve and develop the positive aspects of their cultures and traditions.

I. Oppose individuals or groups who, for the sake of their parochial interests, create sectarian groups on the basis of nationality, tribe, province, etc., and obstruct the unity of the revolution and the people.

J. Each nationality may establish its own democratic administrative organ or organs compatible with its specific conditions.

6. Build a Strong People's Army

A. Pursue in the armed struggle for national liberation, the military strategy of people's war to liberate the people and the land step by step.

B. Build regional armies and people's militia forces to safeguard the gains of the revolution in the liberated and semi-liberated areas.

C. Build strong land, air and naval forces capable of defending the country's borders, territorial waters and air space as well as safeguarding the territorial integrity, full independence, progress and dignity of the Eritrean people so as to attain prosperity and the highest economic level of society. The people's army shall be:

Politically mature, enjoying comradely relations and steeled through revolutionary discipline;

Resolute, imbued with a spirit of self-sacrifice and productive, and Equipped with modern tactics, weapons and skills.

As the defender of the people, it serves the entire people of Eritrea irrespective of religion, nationality or sex. The basis of this army shall be the revolutionary force presently fighting for national independence and liberation.

D. Establish an advanced military academy.

7. Respect Freedom of Religion and Faith

A. Safeguard the freedom of religion and belief of every national.

B. Separate religion from the state and politics.

C. Bar religious education from all schools while allowing clerical institutions to provide only religious education.

D. Punish those who, whether during the armed struggle or in a people's democratic Eritrea, try to undermine the struggle and progress of the Eritrean people through religious discord.

8. Provide Humane Treatment to Prisoners of War and Encourage the Desertion of Eritrean Soldiers Serving the Enemy

A. Oppose the efforts of Ethiopian colonialism to forcibly conscript soldiers to serve as tools of its aggression to oppress and crush the Eritrean people.

B. Encourage Eritrean soldiers and "bandas" who have been forced to serve in the Ethiopian colonial army to return to the just cause and join their people in the struggle against Ethiopian aggression and welcome them with full rights of equality.

C. Provide humane treatment to Ethiopian prisoners of war, make them aware of the justness of the Eritrean cause, provide them with education and professional training, set them free and help them return to peaceful life in their country.

D. Punish severely the die-hard, criminal and loyal servants of Ethiopian colonialism.

9. Protect the Rights of Eritreans Resident Abroad

A. Struggle to create conditions for Eritreans resident abroad to join the armed struggle against Ethiopian colonialism, participate in the mass organizations and professional associations set up and, as Eritrean communities, safeguard their culture, identity and rights and strengthen their mutual co-operation.

B. Strive to protect the rights of Eritrean refugees, win them assistance from governments and international organizations and improve their social conditions.

C. Encourage them to return to their country and become participants in their country's daily struggle and development.

D. Conduct efforts for the voluntary repatriation and rehabilitation in the liberated areas of Eritreans who have been forced to flee their land and country by the vicious aggression and oppression of Ethiopian colonialism.

10. Respect the Rights of Foreigners Resident in Eritrea

A. Grant full rights of residence, work permit and citizenship on demand in accordance with the immigration laws to aliens who have openly or covertly supported the Eritrean people's struggle against Ethiopian colonialism and its collaborators and have not worked against the revolution provided that they wish to live in harmony with the legal system to be established.

B. Punish mercilessly resident foreigners who, as collaborators, lackeys or followers of Ethiopian colonialism, spy on or become obstacles to the Eritrean people.

C. Punish legally resident aliens who become tools of any hostile foreign power.

11. Pursue a Foreign Policy of Peace and Non-Alignment

A. Present appeals to the United Nations and its member states and conduct diplomatic activities to assert the legitimate right of the Eritrean people.

B. Welcome the assistance of any country or organization which recognizes and supports the just struggle of the Eritrean people without interference in its internal affairs.

C. Establish diplomatic relations with all countries irrespective of political and economic systems on the basis of the following five principles:
Respect for independence, territorial integrity and national sovereignty;
Mutual non-aggression;
Non-interference in internal affairs;
Working for equality and mutual benefit; and Peaceful coexistence.

D. Establish good friendly relations with all neighbours.

E. Expand cultural, economic and technological ties with all countries consistent with national sovereignty and independence and based on equality, without aligning with any global military organization or allowing the establishment of any foreign military base on Eritrean soil.

F. Support all just and democratic movements, as our struggle is an integral part of the struggle of the world's people's, in general, and the struggles of the African, Asian, and Latin American peoples against world colonialism, foreign intervention and racism in particular.

G. Become a member of various international and regional organizations consistent with the identity and independence of Eritrea.

Victory to the Masses!

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