

DEBTERAW



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THE TRUTH ABOUT THE EPRP
Part One

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NOTE

THIS PAMPHLET IS WRITTEN FOR YOUNG ETHIOPIANS, ESPECIALLY THOSE BORN ABROAD WHO DO NOT KNOW OR SPEAK LITTLE OF AMHARIC OR OTHER ETHIOPIAN LANGUAGES. THE AIM IS TO BRIEFLY PRESENT SOME ASPECTS OF THE HISTORY OF THE ETHIOPIAN PEOPLE'S REVOLUTIONARY PARTY (EPRP) AND TO DEBUNK THE LIES SPREAD AGAINST IT, THE FIRST MODERN POLITICAL PARTY IN THE HISTORY OF ETHIOPIA.

AS WE SAY IN ETHIOPIA, MAN YAWRA YENEBERE, MAN YARDA YEKEBERE. LET HE WHO WAS THERE AT THE EVENT SPEAK, LET HE WHO WAS AT THE FUNERAL TELL THE RELATIVES OF THE DEATH. OR, AS WAS SAID IN THE SEVENTIES, "NO INVESTIGATION, NO RIGHT TO SPEAK". WE INTEND TO GIVE YOU THE FACTS TO ENABLE YOU TO MAKE YOUR OWN CONCLUSIONS. AND THIS IS ONLY TO BE EXPECTED AS THE EPRP CONSISTENTLY AND COURAGEOUSLY STOOD FOR THE TRUTH, FOR JUSTICE, FOR DEMOCRACY.

PREFACE

The EPRP. The Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party. Ehapa in its Amharic acronym—Ye Ethiopia Hizbawi Abyotawi Party. It was formed on April 9/1972 as the first ever modern political party organized consciously to bring radical system change in Ethiopia. Now in 2006, the EPRP is still engaged in the long struggle for a democratic system in Ethiopia. Banned by three consecutive regimes, repressed brutally by all, the EPRP has become a major constituent part of the history of Ethiopia. Like it or hate it, this is one fact that cannot be avoided-- the history of Ethiopia since the seventies has to acknowledge the role and place of the EPRP. Expectedly, much has been said and written about this unflinchingly Ethiopian political party. Many true, and many more false. This pamphlet intends to start presenting the truth and to expose the lies that, by repetition, have come to sound as true to the uninformed. The EPRP was a vigorous and determined party that mobilized the people, and in particular the youth, and wrote valiant chapters in the history of Ethiopia. It symbolized courage, commitment, sane patriotism, democracy, initiative and creativity, sacrifice and steadfastness. Many loved and died for it because its cause

was noble, worthy and very much Ethiopian. Others detested it with fury and committed crimes and launched terror campaigns against it because it refused to give up its vow to people and country and walked the walk whatever the cost.

What/who indeed was the EPRP? Who formed it? Did enemies of Ethiopia establish it as some so falsely allege? Did it fan and support secession or did it struggle for the democratic unity of Ethiopia? Was it an Amhara chauvinist organization or a "Greater Ethiopia"/Aba Ethiopia/ fighter? Did it launch what its enemies call the White Terror? Did it carelessly throw its members into the jaws of the Red Terror machinery? Did it work for the CIA and Arab petro- dollars as the Mengistu regime alleged? Did it cry Viva Siyad Barre and support the invasion of the Ogaden by Somalia? What made/makes the EPRP tick? Why was it against the Haile Sellasie regime and then the Derg regime and now against the TPLF/EPRDF rule? Is it fighting for sectarian power? Is it really multi ethnic? Who were/are its leaders? Was it anarchist or did it stop the rain and cause famine as some Derg cadres alleged? Why is it clandestine, mysterious even? Do we have any reason to fear the EPRP? Actually, who is afraid of the EPRP? These and many more questions and false assertions will be treated in this pamphlet. This is no self- serving document but a glance at the truth, an attempt to start refuting the lies spread against the party by at least two successive regimes and their supporters. It is written to say to the young of today that their kin in the past set up this party to fight for Ethiopia and that it is still around, after 34 years, honoring its vow to the people to fight for democracy in Ethiopia. It is a party that deserves the support of the patriotic and progressive people and youth because the EPRP embodies and still sparkles with the revolutionary spirit of change, of courage, of defying the odds and crying Inachenfalen—we shall win-- true to the Ethiopian tradition of patriotism and the stubbornness to remain free whatever the cost. The EPRP had and has many enemies because Ethiopia has many local and foreign enemies who found in the EPRP an obstacle, a resolute foe. Where the EPRP has made mistakes, and it did make quite a few-- as it had no previous experience to rely on-- it had been the first one to criticize itself and to admit its mistakes. Yet, it has refused to accept the unfair and baseless accusations made against it by the very regimes that repressed it and by their followers. Please read on.

ONE

WHY AND HOW WAS THE EPRP FORMED?

Other times, other realities. What was then, at the time of Emperor Haile Sellasie, is lost on most of the youths of today. The Emperor has joined his ideological opposite, Che Guevara, in being an inoffensive icon, a photo on a tee shirt, popularized by the Rastas and their worship of him. The reality of his rule was very vicious even though, as we say in Ethiopia, the fresh corpse has made us forget the old one/tikus resa yeqoyewn yasresa/. The Derg and TPLF regimes are so bad that, in hindsight, some who had passed through the imperial regime have been forced to consider it benign. It was anything but benign. Called a "modern autocracy" by some who wanted to present it in a softer light, the rule of Haile Sellasie was not democratic at all. The exoticism he exuded to those outside the country was reflected inside by a harsh and centralized rule. Despite the trappings of a modern state (Constitution and all), it was a feudal regime that reduced the peasants into serfs forced by law and custom to hand over two thirds of their produce to the landlords. Dissent was punished brutally, no political parties were allowed, freedom of speech and of

the press were unknown. The majority of the people also suffered oppression and discrimination on the basis of their ethnic origin or religion. Many peaceful attempts were made to bring about change, even university students used to petition the Emperor and not to demonstrate against his rule. In 1960, army generals and officers staged a coup that was brutally foiled and it became clear, to the students and intellectuals at least, that the regime had to be changed by whatever means necessary.

The Ethiopian Student Movement got radicalized and, in 1965, the historic demonstration for "Land to the Tiller" was held. In feudal Ethiopia that had reduced the majority of Ethiopians unto serfdom this was the most revolutionary slogan that could be imagined. The regime responded by unleashing the police on the students and by expelling from the university 9 student leaders. After that, every year saw students on the streets with slogans calling for change and denouncing the imperial regime. It is a well-known story as it was the basis for the coming more organized and more bitter struggle. However, not many people really understand why the student movement got radicalized. The inability of the regime to reform itself is one of the main causes. There was also no national middle class to institute change from the feudal and retrograde system. Another factor was that the time was one of intense international struggle against imperialism, and the Haile Sellasie regime was backed by the United States. All over the world, struggles were being waged for democracy and for liberation from colonialism. These struggles were being assisted by what was then known as the Socialist Bloc (Soviet Union and China included). From whence also the attraction to the ideology of the Left. The success of the Revolutions in China, Cuba and other places was also a big factor. With Ethiopia so backward and the progressive youth so aroused to bring change, identifying with the world wide anti imperialist struggle and the adoption of radical left ideology as a vehicle for change was almost a given. During that time, anyone in Ethiopia who wanted real and meaningful change could not avoid being a Leftist.

indene Ho Chi Minh, inde Che Guevara
Fanno chaka giba tiglun litmera.
Like Ho Chi Minh and Che Guevara
Oh ye rebels got to the jungle to lead the struggle.

The world-wide student struggle in 1968 was also observed in Ethiopia by demonstrations and protests. It is within this framework and contest that the radicalization of the Movement and subsequently of the EPRP should be viewed. The advocates of reform who riled against the Ethiopian Left were not a viable force at the time or were allied/identified with feudal regime in one way or another and thus unable to be alternatives. The youth of the time, meaning the university students and intellectuals, were motivated by a burning desire to see Ethiopia changed in a democratic sense. Many university students came also from rural areas, from provincial towns and they knew the suffering of the vast majority of the peasants (85% of the population). In the cities, especially in Addis Ababa, the class difference was apparent for all to see: the opulence and decadent luxury of the Emperor and his ruling class contrasting with the dirt poor majority of the people. An Ethiopian nationalist could not avoid but chafe against the imperial regime that kept Ethiopia backward. That is why the students launched their struggle, peaceful protests against an insensitive regime. The arrogance of the power holders of the time can best be expressed by the Emperor's own words when he replied to Italian journalist Oriana Fallaci in 1973 as

follows:

"We were born of Royal blood. Authority is ours by right. A King must never regret the use of force...We have never been afraid to be harsh. It is the King who knows what is best for the people; the people themselves don't know it. We are not worried (by rebellion) or no more than necessary. Such episodes occur constantly in a country's history. There is always something moving, brewing. There are ambitious people everywhere, wicked people. The only thing to do is to deal with them with courage and decision. One must beware of uncertainty, weakness or conflicting emotions--they lead to defeat. We have never allowed Ourselves to fall prey to them. Force must be used." The Emperor should have been worried in time as the discontent of the people was brewing and about to explode. This mistake cost him his throne and his life but the Ethiopian students and intellectuals were no dupes of anyone. They were incensed by the sad and cruel reality of Ethiopia, by the suffering of the people, by the gross inequality. If there are people today with acute nostalgia for the Haile Sellasie period they must be people who did not know that time or who were part of the ruling class at the time. The vast majority of Ethiopians who suffered immensely under that regime have no real fond memories of it even if the subsequent regimes have been worse enough to make it appear "better". By early 1970s, Ethiopia was a country begging for a Revolution and the February 1974 Revolution erupted to wash away the imperial regime. However, this event was preceded by events that would have deep impact on the history of Ethiopia. By 1969, the university students were convinced that student protest alone would lead nowhere and that there was the need to get organized politically and to mobilize the people to struggle against the autocracy. August 1969, activist university students hijacked a plane and landed in Khartoum with the expressed intention of organizing the armed struggle. On December 1969, the regime's security forces murdered student leader Tilahun Gizaw. The line was thus drawn, the bridge blown up. The confrontation between the regime and those seeking change entered a new phase. Student movement leaders and intellectuals formed the EPRP in April 1972. The founding congress was held from April 2 to April 9. Previously, study groups were formed and intense discussion held on the then current situation in Ethiopia and on what was to be done.

Thus, there is absolutely no truth in the assertion that the EPRP was formed by foreign or non- Ethiopian elements. The EPRP was a genuine "Made by Ethiopians" group. It was formed to fill the gap or the need for a leading political party and to organize the armed struggle for the liberation of the vast majority of the peasants and working people. As presented elsewhere, it was formed as a Leftist party with a clearly set ideological choice, an anti imperialist and anti feudal force. The EPRP did not hide its ideology or priorities. It was forced into clandestinity because the imperial regime persecuted political dissent and grouping of any sort. It could be said that the years- long student and intellectual struggle culminated in the formation of the EPRP.

Other groups were to be formed subsequently and that is why we say the EPRP, formed in 1972, was the "first modern political party in Ethiopia". A homegrown progressive party formed by young Ethiopians yearning to bring democracy to the people and the country. Courageous Ethiopians with deeply held convictions and an optimistic certainty that the regime in power could be changed through arduous struggle formed the EPRP.

Inachenfalen--we shall be victorious--the EPRP founders believed in this.

TWO THE EPRP AND THE FEBRUARY REVOLUTION

When the 1974 February Revolution/Yekatit 66 Abyot/ erupted, the EPRP was clandestinely present in Ethiopia but not yet strong enough to assume the leadership role. This fact meant that the victory of the people's resolute struggle could not be assured as power was taken over by the armed officers organized as the DERG/ a word meaning committee/. Actually, the February Revolution saw a vast section of the people engaged boldly in the struggle for democracy. Students, teachers, taxi drivers, women, followers of the Moslem faith, soldiers and non-commissioned officers, prostitutes, etc all took part in demonstrations and strikes demanding for their rights. The organ of the EPRP, DEMOCRACIA, which was distributed clandestinely contributed immensely to strengthen the struggle and to spread consciousness. Workers staged a general strike and brought down a stopgap administration appointed by the Emperor. Police and soldiers did follow the order of the regime and did shoot to death many demonstrators but the tide of the struggle was not to be held back. While the EPRP struggled to assure the victory of the Revolution there were other forces who tried to put a brake on the Revolution, to stop the struggle, to champion limited reform and change. The DERG ousted the Emperor and established its own rule though it called it temporary provisional, to lull the people to sleep, to buy time and to strengthen itself. The EPRP was the first, if not the only one, to oppose the Derg's hijack of power, to expose its confused and confusing slogans, its false assertion that it will hand over power to the people.

The Derg took over the slogans of the progressives, sucked out the real meaning and proclaimed the slogans as law. It proclaimed land reform by nationalizing all urban and rural land, a flawed measure in the absence of the empowerment of the peasantry, people's power and democratic rights. As the EPRP stated from the outset, the peasant was not freed but turned into a vassal of the military dominated State. This was proved to be so in the 17-year of brutal Derg rule. While the Derg and its supporters claimed that the Revolution and the people need a mogzit/guardian/, the EPRP opposed this elitist concept and called for the formation of a provisional people's government (PPG) made up of the Derg itself, all political parties, all civic organizations, etc. The Derg and its supporters rejected this, as the officers had no intention of relinquishing power. The EPRP mobilized the youth, the workers, the civil servants, the progressives within the military to peacefully protest against the illegal Derg rule and it was clear even for foreign observers of the time that the EPRP was the most popular and well organized political party in Ethiopia. Alas, it was not long before the Derg abandoned its "aleminim dem" or bloodless Revolution slogan and started to execute people left and right. A case in point is the illegal and summary execution of more than 60 people-- high ranking elderly ministers and officials of the imperial regime, militants of the sub-Derg who had opposed the Derg's control of power, etc. Much more blood was to follow.

THREE THE EPRP AND THE RED TERROR

Repression by the Derg was striking at the EPRP and the people by 1976 though the Red

Terror was officially declared later on. There is now a shrill attempt by some quarters to allege that the Red Terror came as a response to the violence unleashed by the EPRP in the urban centers. But this is totally false. The EPRP had an armed wing in Tigray /to be known later as the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Army--EPRA/ but it was not even publicly declared or given permission to start operations. The introduction to the first political program of the organization made it clear that "if democratic rights are assured/respected" the EPRP will struggle peacefully for democracy. Let us recapitulate and check what happened at that time. Did the EPRP launch urban assassin squads as its enemies allege? Did it resort to violence to gain the political upper hand? The truth is that it did not. It was in actual fact the victim of the savage repression unleashed by the military regime, only resorting to self- defense belatedly, with the odds against it but refusing to fold its arms and perish. Let us refer from history to set the record straight:

“The Red Terror was officially launched by the Derg in 1976 when it declared open war against the EPRP. But what happened in between from September 1974 to September 1976? Was it all peaceful? Did the opponents of the Derg resort to violent actions pushing it, as some allege, to retaliate? Who fired the first shot in what was to become known as the urban underground war?” Between September 1974 and September 1976 there was no peace. A new war had started. The people did not raise arms during this time. The EPRP did not fire a single shot in the cities. The main means of protest was very peaceful: demonstrations, strikes, petitions, congress resolutions, etc. The people were merely trying to exercise the rights they had wrested from the feudal regime. They were also calling on the military regime to respect its words and to return to the barracks. The people protested peacefully, the Derg reacted very violently and as the EPRP was spearheading the popular protest the violence of the regime targeted it as “the number one enemy”.

The Derg took over power on September 12, 1974. On the same day it issued a proclamation that carried, among other things, the following articles: art. 8: it is hereby prohibited, for the duration of this proclamation to oppose the aims of “Ethiopia Tikdem”/Ethiopia First/, to engage in any strike, hold unauthorized demonstrations or public meetings, or to engage in any act that may disturb public peace and security. art.9: A special military tribunal shall be established to try those who contravene the orders enunciated in article 8 of this proclamation. Judgments handed down by the special military tribunal are not subject to appeal. In other words, the Derg was not going back to the barracks but telling the people to go back to their previous condition of servitude, muzzled and uncomplaining. As is to be expected, those who had launched the February Revolution opposed this fervently. The Confederation of Ethiopian Labour Unions (CELU) held its congress from September 15-17 (1974) and passed resolutions calling for the respect of democratic rights and the formation of a provisional popular government made up of all the political groups and vibrant forces of the society. The same demands were echoed by teachers, students, by some officers and soldiers of the Body Guard, by members of the Air Force, the Army Aviation and Engineering Corps and by employees in the civil administration. Leaflets, resolutions, protest demonstrations—those were historic times during which the people threw away the shackles of apathy and submission and rose up with courage to demand their rights. They were unarmed but powerful in their resolve and unity, in that they had an organization in the EPRP guiding the struggle.

The Derg, made up of 120 officers, had no intention of handing over power to the people.

Some intellectuals (including one who later became the ideologue of the Eritrean PLF) advised the Derg at that time and firmly told them not to hand over power to “civilians”. Labor and student union leaders were arrested or hunted down. The Derg used units of the Fourth Division to attack the barracks of the Engineering Corps: five soldiers were killed and more than seven wounded. Scores were rounded up from the Body Guard and the Army Aviation. More than 30 intellectuals and civil servants were also jailed. On October 23, unemployed youth gathered at the CELU HQ to register for jobs but the police intervened and shot dead one and wounded many others. Arrests and shootings... On the night of November 23, 1974, the Derg raised the decibel of violence by arbitrarily executing 59 people. The majority of these were high officials of the imperial regime, none were tried, the death sentences approved by a show of hands of the Derg members. The Derg labeled the unlawful action a “political decision”—many such illegal “political decisions” were to be made in the future not only by the Derg but also by the Meles Zenawi group. Some of the others executed along with the high officials of the Emperor were actually dissidents who had demanded the Derg’s return to the barracks. These victims were colonel Yigezu Yimenu and Captain Belaye Tsegaye from the Body Guards and NCO Bekele Wolde Giorgis from the Army Aviation. In addition, the Derg along with his two aides also killed the first chairman of the junta itself, Lt. General Aman Andom.

Immediately after these killings, the Derg dispatched more troops to Eritrea, thus opting for the use of force to deal with the problem there. Israeli trained special commandos were let loose in Asmara strangling youngsters at random with piano wire. Terror spread in the city and beyond and thousands of Eritrean youngsters fled to exile or to swell the ranks of the guerrillas. The violence of the Derg spread everywhere. It should be mentioned that the regime had conveniently issued yet another proclamation on November 16 to amend the Penal Code. Aside from stipulating for the setting up of special court martial the article made many ill-defined offenses punishable by death. Thus article 5 imposed the death penalty on “anyone who impairs the defensive power of the State”, an article targeting democratic officers and soldiers primarily. Treason, punishable by death, was also left undefined. Actually, even the military tribunals proved a sham; the executions were decided and approved by the Derg members, no due process of law whatsoever. For example, a special military court sentenced Br. General Tadesse Biru, other officers and student leader Meles Tekle to life imprisonment for opposing the Derg rule. The Derg revoked the sentence and imposed the death sentence on all and they were executed in March 1975.

There is more to highlight:

- in Yebu and Limma/Kaffa region/ more than 30 peasants were killed in April 1975;
- Dereje Legesse/an intellectual/ and eight other people were also executed in Limo around this same period;
- In Bitchena, Gojam, Derg member Major Endale Tesema, led troops against peasants and more than a thousand including children and old were massacred;
- In mid-February 1975, the Derg declared a state of emergency in Eritrea;
- During the May Day demonstration in Addis Ababa more than 21 workers and students were shot dead by soldiers;
- From May to June 1975, student unrest spread and their demonstrations were violently put down in every instance;
- On May 31, CELU opened a four-day congress but the Derg, which opposed the

resolutions for the respect of democratic rights, closed down CELU. Scores of worker leaders were arrested and others killed in several places.

- On June 15-16, security forces killed many protesting against the violence of the Derg;
- Between June 22 and July 8 alone, the State controlled media reported that the security forces have killed no less than 65 “reactionaries” in various places;
- In Bonga 150 peasants, in Felege Newaye area 80, etc were killed;

And so on all over the country. On August 3/1975, the EPRP publicly declared its existence by clandestinely distributing its program (in three major Ethiopian languages and English) all over the country. Democracia was formally identified as the organ of the EPRP and the regime got even jittery. On September 12/1975, during the “revolution Day” celebrations, demonstrators openly carried placards calling for the respect of democratic rights and an end to the repression. Again in September 1975, the Ethiopian Teachers’ Association (ETA) held its general congress in Jimma/Kaffa/ and passed resolutions reiterating their earlier June 1975: an end to the repression; the respect of democratic rights; the formation of provisional popular government, etc. The Derg labeled the teachers as “reactionaries” and unleashed its repression against the ETA. It announced on September 23:

"A few teachers were caught red handed while trying to distribute cheap subversive propaganda. The teachers were trying to sabotage the ongoing revolution by trying to disrupt national unity and to divide the people on tribal and religious basis in pursuit of their own selfish interests".

(What was called cheap and subversive propaganda was actually the congress resolution. It is interesting to note that the Derg of that time and the Meles regime now accusing the Opposition sound almost the same!)

On September 26, 1975 Ethiopian Air lines labor union members who were distributing union resolutions to workers were attacked by security forces and 8 workers were killed and many others wounded. Arrests and killing continued. Labor union leaders like Marcos Hags were tortured and beaten in prison. On September 30/1975, the Derg declared a state of emergency in and around Addis Ababa. Article 3 of the Emergency Declaration listed the following as “Prohibited and Unlawful Actions:

- Persons who assemble and demonstrate without permission and people who are found assembling except on public and religious holidays;
- People who stop work or deliberately stage a go- slow action;
- People who resort to any kind of strike;
- People who utter unlawful words in public or any other places;
- People who prepare, write, keep and distribute or make other people know of unlawful pamphlets, placards or pictures;
- People who encourage, urge, threaten, issue orders, share their opinions or force other peoples to stop work;
- People who violate the curfew order;
- People who disturb or violate the orders of the security forces and who do not cooperate with them in their duties;
- People who are absent from work without a satisfactory reason;

- Generally any person who disturbs the public peace.

In clearer terms anyone who opposed or thought of opposing the Derg was thus deemed a criminal. The Emergency officially continued till December 1995 but is stayed along with the Derg rule for 17 years. The Emergency law empowered security forces to “take appropriate and final measures” which meant nothing but murder, execution, shoot on sight. The death toll was very high. Actually, the draconian laws were made even more harsh months later by yet another Penal Code amendment (July 1976). The new articles increased the punishment for anyone who distributes “subversive literature” and the death penalty was imposed on anyone “who establishes contact, sympathizes with or assists anti people and anti revolution organizations within or outside the country”. Anyone who tries to leave the country illegally was also punishable by life imprisonment. The declaration of the Emergency heightened the repression. CELU was dissolved and its leaders attacked—the chairman Marcos Hagos was later to be murdered by the Derg. All those who called for the formation of a provisional popular government were to be labeled counter revolutionaries and repressed. Torture was becoming routine. Arrested people began to “disappear”. By labeling the EPRP, the trade unionists, teachers, students, etc, in short, all those who said NO to military rule as counter revolutionary and enemy, the Derg carried the conflicts further into the realm of violence. The repression was intensified. Thousands were arrested, hundreds killed.

A new factor that emerged at the time was the strengthening of the Derg-Meisone alliance. Meisone was the All Ethiopian Socialist Movement which was formed by Ethiopian exiles in Europe mainly and which returned to Addis to give what it called “critical support” to the military regime. It was opposed to the EPRP position of calling for the formation of a provisional popular government and opted to work with military to effectuate “change” from the top. Derg and Meisone set up the POMOA—the Provisional Office for Mass Organization Affairs. Under this cover, Meisone emerged as the advisor and right hand group of the Derg and it was followed by other miniscule intellectual groups like Wez League led by the late Senaye Likke, Malered, Ichaat led by the late Baro Tumsa and Assefa Chabo. The POMOA served the Derg as a political-police body, deeply involved in the repression and terror until the Derg turned against the intellectual groups in turn and decimated them. EPRP and the people called this group “banda”, the name given to traitors and Quislings who served Mussolini’s invading army. Let it be said here that the EPRP has, given the present situation in the country, left the past alone and collaborated with Meisone and others like it to get rid of the Derg and the Melees regime.

The EPRP was called “anarchist” and the intellectual allies of the Derg called for its decimation. On March 3, 1976, the EPRP issued a public communiqué exposing the Derg’s plan to unleash terror and to massacre EPRP militants and sympathizers. The Derg heightened the repression by sending its most psychopathic and feared Majors, Ali Mussa and Getachew Shibeshi (both perished in 1991), on a killing spree to east, south and the west. From Asbe Teferi to Jimma, the majors went on a rampage killing all and sundry arbitrarily so much so that many of their victims have become immortalized in revolutionary songs and poems. Dozens of EPRP members and sympathizers, innocent people, traders whose wealth was coveted by the Majors were killed brutally. The EPRP did not fire a single shot during all this time.

On April 22/1976, workers, actors and singers of the National Theatre and municipal workers linked to the theatre and cinema staged a demonstration and practically tested the Derg-Meisone April 20th National Democratic Program which had promised democratic rights to the people. The workers were demanding the right to form unions and to have their working conditions improved. Armed troops and baton wielding police attacked the peaceful demonstrators killing six and arresting more than seventy. The Derg-Meisone promise of democratic rights and proven to be hollow, false, a fake, a deception.

May Day 1976: one of the bloodiest and saddest days. Demonstrating workers, students carried placards calling for an end to the repression and for the respect of democratic rights. Very many were killed. Many were arrested and later executed.

June, July, August—the number of executed was increasing. On June 17, the Derg itself announced the execution of 17 people including Derg member Major Sisaye Habte. On July 5 a law was passed making hoarding a crime and weeks later some people were executed for “hoarding” a few kilos of ‘berbere’/red pepper/. In most cases, the charges were false or made up. In July 1976, the EPRP again issued a communiqué denouncing the repression and revealing the fact that Derg has brought into Addis Ababa the Israeli-trained Nebelbal army unit to unleash violence against the EPRP and the people. On July 16 alone, close to 1000 students were arrested. By August 1976, the mask was off and the war against the EPRP, the unions and all dissenters on. BY September 1976, the degree of the repression reached a new height. The Red Terror was preceded by violent repression, murder and mayhem of the Derg. Long before the EPRP resorted to self-defense or fired a single shot. This is the reality. The EPRP did not provoke the Derg, did not resort to urban armed struggle, and did not choose the armed struggle path while the political situation in Ethiopia was peaceful. The EPRP undertook self defense action only after years of repression and after the Derg publicly declared war against it and the repression became unbearable. As we are seeing now with the Meles regime, the repression was the reply of a politically defeated Derg to a victorious people’s struggle as bankrupt regimes can stay in power only by repressing the opposition and murdering the people at large. The people are duty bound to struggle for their rights. If provocation there were, it is primarily provocation by the ruling regime that denies the people their rights. Freedom never comes cheap and people have to pay the necessary sacrifice to regain their basic and inalienable rights. Tolerating a repressive regime is not wise and advisable—fighting against it is just and called for. Ethiopians the EPRP fought against a blood-thirsty military regime and paid heavy sacrifices. We do not ask why, the reason is clear for all to see. A really democratic regime does not turn violent because people stage protests and thus talk of provocation is misplaced. The Meles regime stole the voice of the people and resorted to repression to stamp out all opposition. The struggle waged by the people is just as in the past when the EPRP and the people said no to military dictatorship. Those who blame the people and the Opposition for resisting a repressive regime are mistaken in their assumptions, premises and conclusions. The EPRP has no regrets in that it organized and led the struggle against the Derg military regime. As we say in Ethiopia “ahyawn ferto dawlawn”—afraid of the donkey one beats the load. Te culprit is the Derg as is the Meles regime nowadays. Blame the criminal and not the victim. The repression and the Terror are the products of the Derg and not of the victims.

FOUR

AND WHAT ABOUT THE SACRIFICE?

Replying to an accusation by Amnesty International the Derg said on November 12/1977:

“if they say we don’t have to kill people, aren’t they saying that we have to quit the Revolution? The cry to stop the killing is a bourgeois cry”. And Meisone had said more or less the same thing when it wrote in February 1977(Voice of the Masses):”we are ready to unleash the red terror on the EPRP. Their blood shall serve as the water with which we will put out the fire of the counter- revolution”. And kill they did with fury and never before seen savagery that continues to scar the whole country up to now. The Derg declared open war on the EPRP on September 11/1976. The secret execution of EPRP members and supporters was followed up by officially announced killings. On November 2,1976, twenty-three EPRP members, most of them intellectuals arrested in September 1976, were executed. All had been brutally tortured; many were previously active members of the student movement in Ethiopia and abroad. On November 18,1976, twenty seven others were officially executed and though accused of raising arms against the regime almost all were detained long before the EPRP launched any armed action in the city. None of the above fifty were tried in any court of law. Of the 27, most were below 21 years of age and one, Babile H.Sellasie, was only 14. The Red Terror as such was launched on February 4/ 1977 but the period from September 1976 to that date was filled with the relentless killing of EPRP members and supporters by the Derg regime.

The EPRP launched what it called self- defense action after so much blood had been shed by the military regime. On September 23, 1976 the EPRP made an attempt on the life of Mengistu Haile Mariam (he was wounded) and on October 2, 1976, Fikre Merid, Meisone leader, was killed in Addis Ababa. Evidently, the EPRP did not first resort to violence to achieve its aims. The accusation that the EPRP lunched the “white terror” and thus “provoked the red terror” is a falsehood spread conveniently by the murderous Derg which had, from September 1974 till September 1976 had engaged in killing and terror all over Ethiopia and had declared open war against the EPRP on September 11/1976. This falsehood put aside, the next widely propagated and still echoed accusation refers to the allegation that “the EPRP sacrificed the youth”. This accusation is based on the twisted premise that the victims are responsible for their own deaths and that the killer is not to blame. Is the opposition responsible for the June 8/2005 massacre in Addis Ababa? The same with the EPRP. A war was declared against it. Its members and supporters were being killed all over the country. It had of course the “choice” of accepting the repression and bowing to the regime. This capitulation and spinelessness was not in the nature of the EPRP and thus it was not a choice at all. By September 1976, it was clear for all to see that Menigstu’s regime was politically defeated by the EPRP just as it became clear by June 2006 that the TPLF regime had lost the election to the opposition. The resort to savage violence was just a final attempt by the regimes to keep their power in place. The EPRP had no choice but to try to defend itself and the people. It was not a battle of equals but, as has been said often, there are wars that have to be fought no matter the odds. And the EPRP heroically rose to the occasion and, despite the loss and suffering, wrote pages of courage into the history of our people.

If the EPRP had, from the outset, taken up arms while the path of peaceful struggle was

open it would have deserved admonition and the label of provocateur. But this was not the case. It followed the path of peaceful protests and got violent repression in reply. Just as in May 2005. The Derg was unpopular and knew it too much like the Meles regime. If the contrary were the case, if the military regime was liked and backed by the people no amount of goading by the EPRP would have made the people rise against the regime. Actually, even slim prospects and hope of change make people wait. It is naivety to imagine that just a few demagogues will whip up the people into a rebellion against a regime they consider theirs or democratic. The people are never provocateurs—they are provoked by dictatorial regimes. Censorship was total—under ground papers like *Democracia* flourished. Parties were banned, parties went underground. Peaceful protests were forbidden, strikes spread. Arrests and executions became wide spread, resort to self defense became a necessity. Better death than slavery.

The struggle against the repressive regime was not to be quaint or costless. As the Harambee song puts it: Freedom is not free, you have to sacrifice, pay a price for your liberty. The struggle against Italian occupation forces in 1935 cost one million Ethiopian lives. It was a worthy and patriotic struggle. The military regime killed more than 200,000 people to stamp out the struggle against it. The cost was high but it was a cost that had to be paid. But, freedom never comes cheap. It is fair to say that the EPRP should have adopted tactics that exposed it less to the violent frenzy of the regime but it committed no error by opting to fight in self -defense. The Resistance against the Nazi regime in Europe cost very many lives. For every German officer killed the Nazis rounded up hundreds of hostages and shot them to death—we have not heard up to now any condemnation of the Resistance as provocateurs. The EPRP did not carelessly and callously throw its members into the jaws of repression. Many of its central committee and senior members (Tesfaye Debesaye, Kiflu Kebede, Yohannes Berhane, Melaku Markos, Mulugeta Sultan, Mulugeta Zena, Engineer Osman, etc) paid the ultimate sacrifice. Faced with a ruthless dictatorship there is no choice but to wage the bitter and costly struggle. Therefore, the EPRP heroically fought against the dictatorship and paid a huge sacrifice. It is not responsible for the killings and the Terror. It was the victim. Those who accuse it are mostly the Derg murderers and the TPLF satellites out to revise history. And these want to whitewash their crimes against the people. Other who looked from the sidelines while the life and death struggle was going on also look for justification and hide behind facile accusations against the EPRP. However, the EPRP pleads guilty for the “crime” of struggling against a brutal dictatorship. It is what it is doing at the present time too fighting against the anti-Ethiopian regime of Meles Zenawi that has killed countless EPRP members including central committee member Gaim sacrificed in Addis Ababa. EPRP members showed fantastic courage in the struggle against the brutal Derg. They manifested ingenuity and inventiveness never before recorded in the country. Young and old citizens turned into “mot ayfere”/death daring/ fighters by their faith in the cause of the people blazed the path for a generation to come. The martyrs continued the history and heritage of Ethiopia— that of saying no to servitude by any local or foreign force, that of striving to live a worthy life negating horrible existence as a quiet, zombie like and subdued being. Those who accuse the EPRP for having struggled against the military regime are kin of those who laughed at Ethiopian patriots who brandished their spears at the tanks of the Mussolini Italian invaders. In the end, history gives victory to the people—the Derg was defeated. The same with the Meles regime—the martyrs will, with their blood, have dug its grave.

FIVE

THE EPRP AND ETHIOPIAN UNITY

Yabyen Lemiye as we say in Ethiopia. The culprits often attribute blame on others. One of the issues on which those who have not even shed a tear let alone their own blood (for Ethiopia) accuse the EPRP of is the allegation that the party championed secession, damaged Ethiopia's unity, worked for the country's break up, served the Eritrean fronts and foreigners, etc. If a lie is sometimes a bit of truth that has gone wild this accusation has absolutely no shred of truth in it whatsoever.

Let us begin by situating the problem in its proper political perspective. In Ethiopia, there are at least 70 to 80 ethnic groups, some in their millions, some in their thousands. The feudal regime of the late Emperor did not treat all ethnic groups or nationalities equally. There was oppression and discrimination; some were more equal, more "Ethiopian" than others. This is the undeniable fact that those who formed the EPRP had to confront. In the South, this oppression was also linked to the land question in that the local peasants were reduced to serfdom obliged by law to hand over two third of their produce to the landlords. Curtailment on the use of language, culture and discrimination on religious ground were rife. These were the ugly features of the feudal regime, ones that anyone wishing for change could ignore. That is why the progressive students and intellectuals started to address the issue and to seek a solution for the problem.

The facts show that by 1960 the Eritrean Liberation Front had been formed and had started armed struggle in the lowlands following the dissolution of the federal arrangement (with Eritrea) by the imperial regime. There was unrest in the Ogaden, in Derassa, and in Bale the late Wako Gutu had launched an armed struggle that had ties with Somalia, and then there was the Metcha Tulema Movement calling for the respect of the rights of Oromos. As all this unfolded and *went on, the students and progressives who were to form the EPRP were students. The EPRP, it should be said again, was formed in 1972.*

Hence, to accuse the EPRP of inciting Eritreans or others unto secession is groundless. The Ethiopian Student Movement was multi ethnic and the revolution that these progressives envisaged had to involve all Ethiopian whatever their ethnic background. It thus meant that the problem of nationalities or ethnic grievances had to be addressed one way or another to lay the ground for a people's Ethiopia united on the basis of democracy. When the assertion was made that Ethiopia should not be a prison of peoples and nationalities, the underlying preoccupation was that Ethiopian can be united only on the basis of democracy and of equality and fraternity between its various ethnic groups.

The solution given by the students and progressives was dictated by their ideological bent. Recognizing the oppression and condemning it as unjust was primary and it was done. The right of nationalities was also recognized and this, according to the ideology, also included the right even to secession but this was immediately qualified with the call and insistence on unity on the basis of democracy. The recognition of the right did not mean an automatic support to secession and this was made clear from the outset in the party program and literature. The EPRP along with all progressives could be criticized for not seeing in time the dangers of narrow nationalism but its position was castigated by the Eritrean fronts. The ELF and later the EPLF attacked the EPRP as an Ethiopian chauvinist

organization because it refused to accept that Eritrea was “a colony of Ethiopia” and deserving of immediate and unconditional independence. In fact, the EPLF of Isayas Afewerki allied itself with the TPLF because the latter recognized Eritrea as a colony and wrote pages of documents in support of the Eritrean position. In any case, the recognition of the rights of nationalities was expected to lay the ground for trust and confidence amongst all the people and, as events showed, it proved right in that Ethiopians of all ethnic groups were mobilized and organized within and around the EPRP to wage the struggle for democracy. Up to now, the EPRP is multi ethnic.

The EPRP supported the democratic essence of the struggle of the Eritrean people without endorsing the program, agenda and political positions of the fronts and its call for a federal and peaceful solution for Eritrea was rejected both by the Eritrean fronts and the Derg. When the TPLF issued its manifesto in 1976 asserting that the contradiction between ethnic groups/nationalities in Ethiopia was primary and that the Ethiopian people cannot live together as a consequence and that Tigray and others have to be independent, the EPRP did NOT applaud or support this ridiculous and dangerous position. On the contrary, the EPRP publicly attacked this narrow nationalist stand and called for the unity of the oppressed people of all ethnic groups as Ethiopians. This led to the continuing contradiction between the TPLF and the EPRP. The EPRP did NOT support the call by the TPLF for secession—it opposed it and, as a consequence, had to bear the war that the TPLF and its allies waged against it to drive its guerrilla army out of Tigray.

The EPRP is accused of supporting secession? Where and when? The accusers would not point out for sure other than recycling the Derg propaganda. The TPLF and EPLF accused the EPRP as an Ethiopian chauvinist force. The TPLF name for the EPRP is “abay Ethiopia”—Greater Ethiopia—and Meles Zenawi has written several brochures to explain why the TPLF considers the EPRP chauvinist, bourgeois and reactionary. In other words, the EPRP was NEVER an advocate of secession—it only argued for equality and democracy as a basis and guarantee for durable Ethiopian unity.

The EPRP was attacked from both extremes. The chauvinists who refused to admit that there was ethnic oppression and discrimination in Ethiopia rushed to label it as a force against Ethiopian unity because it acknowledged the oppression and allied for change. The narrow nationalists like the TPLF and OLF, who were all out for secession at all costs, attacked it as a chauvinist party striving to maintain Ethiopian unity under all circumstances because it refused to blindly support their demand for secession. Amhara for one, anti Amhara for others—the EPRP did not sit well with both extremists but its democratic and uncompromising Ethiopian position served it to rally all genuine democratic and progressive Ethiopians of all ethnic origin and religious background. This multi- ethnic composition was and is manifested by its leadership and membership and by the fact that its supporters come from almost all over Ethiopia, including Eritrea.

We can say with confidence that there is no one, no force or group that has the moral authority to put in doubt the “Ethiopianity” /Ethiopawinet/ of the EPRP. Name per se is not important but the EPRP defined itself as Ethiopian and not as Amhara, Tigrean, Oromo, etc on an ethnic basis. Hence, it never compromised the interest of Ethiopia for sectarian gains as a party. It could have accepted the conditions and demands of all from near and afar and thereby compromised the interest and future of Ethiopia just to get to the top but

this was not its choice or conviction. To illustrate this, let us take the case of Somalia. The EPRP did have relations with the Somali government but it refused to sign a communiqué with the so-called Western Somali Liberation Front as this front was claiming at least one third of Ethiopia—up to Nazareth or Adama- as Somali territory. The TPLF signed a communiqué vilifying “Abyssinian colonialists” and ceding Ethiopian territory to Somalia and thus got all military, political and diplomatic help (not to mention diplomatic passports) from Mogadishu. Actually, the Derg, and Derg remnants as well as the shameless TPLF accuse the EPRP of backing the Somali invasion of the Ogaden in 1977. Mengistu used this war to rally nationalist fervor around his regime (as Meles did during the war against Eritrea in 1998) and in the process moved to liquidate the opposition whom it conveniently and falsely accused as “pro Somali” (as Meles accuses its opponents of being in the pay of Eritrea).

The EPRP, true to its clearly expressed principles, did not ever back the reactionary military regime of Somalia. When the Somali incursion into the Ogaden started in 1977 it condemned this and clearly stated that the interest of the Somalis in the Ogaden cannot be assured by an invasion. Some quarters were/are still unable to understand its condemnation of both regimes (that of Mengistu and Siyad Barre) that were both trying to solve their internal problems by resorting to nationalism and war. True enough, the Mengistu regime used the war to consolidate its power and attack the EPRP with fervor. If truth be told, the Siyad Barre regime of Somalia killed many EPRP members and refugees linked to the EPRP were subjected to torture and ill treatment in Somali refugee camps. Yet, there are still diehards who still accuse the EPRP of supporting the Somali invasion but they do so without any concrete proof to back them up. Just rumors and lies. Had the EPRP put first its own organizational interest and not that of Ethiopia, it would have acted like the TPLF: accepting the diktat of the Sudan and blowing up bridges and handing over Southern Sudanese refugees, telling Libya’s Kadafi that Ethiopia is Arab, accepting whatever America ordered, etc. Intransigent the EPRP may have been called, but this is due to its refusal to compromise the interest of Ethiopia. Let us recapitulate:

- The Eritrean fronts demanded that it accept their claim that Eritrea is a colony of Ethiopia. IT REFUSED and suffered the consequences as the fronts backed the TPLF that accepted their theses with enthusiasm.
- The TPLF declared that ethnic contradiction was primary and that all nationalities should, secede but the EPRP opposed this divisive, anti Ethiopian and narrow nationalist stand. The TPLF and its allies waged successive wars against it.
- The Sudan and its allies wanted the EPRP to undertake anti Ethiopian actions in exchange for military and political assistance. The EPRP refused and paid the price for its refusal.

Some say the EPRP was not tactical though the EPRP was well aware of what tactics meant but had just refused to forego Ethiopia’s interest under the cover of tactical considerations. The aim of the EPRP was not to assure power for itself whatever the cost. Its mission was to assure the sovereignty and rights of the people. It had no intention of coming to power by becoming the TPLF minus the name. Hence it refused to be “tactical” if this meant selling out Ethiopia. Patriotism can sometimes be the hiding place of scoundrels. The EPRP was a patriot in the most genuine sense of the term. Its members could have all successfully led their private life but they refused to succumb to this choice by putting their

country and people first. The regional and international situation favored forces that acted against the interest of Ethiopia—the EPRP refused to betray Ethiopia, come what may. The Mengistu regime sold the country's sovereignty to the Soviet super power just as the previous regime had done so to America. They were not nationalist, not really Ethiopian. The Meles regime is worse—it does not even consider itself Ethiopian. The EPRP differed and differs. It is committed to Ethiopia and her people. No compromise on this. If it recognized the right of nationalities it did so NOT to encourage separation but to advocate for unity on a new democratic basis. Ethiopia's problems of nationalities were there long before the EPRP appeared on the scene. It should be credited for acknowledging and confronting the problem and of trying to give it a democratic solution while affirming and fighting for the unity of Ethiopia on a democratic basis.

Can others make such claims in all honesty? Should those who supported the chauvinist regime and politics of the feudal regime even utter a word against the EPRP? Should the partisans of the repressive and savage Derg who sold the country to Soviet imperialism be allowed to comment on the consistent and genuine Ethiopia and her people First stand of the EPRP? Who is the one to give the time of day to the proclaimed anti Ethiopian TPLF to question the Ethiopian credentials of the EPRP? The answer is clear: thousands of EPRP members died for Ethiopia defining nationalism in a democratic content. Can others say the same? At present the EPRP is firmly against the traitorous regime and its foreign backers. It has not bowed down to foreign or ferenji pressures, has not sacrificed Ethiopia's interest for organizational benefits. True enough some call it intransigent but it pleads guilty to the charge as its "fault" is refusing to deal on Ethiopia's future with her enemies. The EPRP has not compromised to the anti Ethiopia TPLF regime. It has not accepted promises of bureaucratic positions in exchange for betraying the people. It has not acquiesced with secessionists at any time. In other words, the EPRP has defined and given more content to Ethiopian nationalism—not jingoism or chauvinism but democratic and based on the rights of all her people. No chauvinism, no narrow nationalism—Ethiopia is our country, and our "difference" is our strength and bond. Such was and is the stand of the EPRP, the foremost Ethiopian modern political party. When it comes to wars fomented by reactionary regimes the EPRP has condemned and exposed the regimes' inner motives while calling on the peoples involved to uphold fraternity and to resist bloodshed. The war between the Siad Barre regime and Mengistu was primary a war between the two dictators with their own political agendas. Siyad Barre invoked the plight of the people in the Ogaden to justify his invasion and to rally the Somali people around him. Mengistu invoked defense of Ethiopia to use the national feeling of Ethiopians for his own purpose of consolidating his failing grip on power. In 1998, the TPLF regime, the very force that threw Ethiopia unity to the wolves, dressed itself in national-Ethiopian garbs and called on the people to march against Eritrea. Some were duped into imagining the Meles regime as the defender of Ethiopian sovereignty. The EPRP had, as in the past, exposed the costly game being played by the TPLF and events that followed which brought human and territorial loss to Ethiopia have proven it to be correct. And those who supported Meles have been shamed by the result. With good intentions and hoping to enhance the voluntary unity of the people the EPRP did recognize the full right of self determination. It was bale to mobilize the living and vibrant section of the Ethiopian society and to wage a committed struggle against the dictatorship. The EPRP never went the ethnic way. Others called this and that but it was and remains ETHIOPIAN by conviction and composition. Those who followed Meles Zenawi into the pit of ethnic organization cannot say the same and can

have no moral ground to criticize the EPRP on this basis.

After a few years of struggle and learning from its own experience the EPRP redefined what self determination meant to it and openly declared its opposition to any secession. For the Eritrean problem, it forwarded the federal solution as the best alternative. Years and years of violent attack by narrow nationalist and secessionist forces is enough proof that the EPRP stands for Ethiopian unity. The TPLF and its allies waged war against the EPRP both in Tigray and in Gondar and enemies of Ethiopia who wanted the liquidation of the multi ethnic EPRP helped them in this destructive campaign. The TPLF took power after waging a bloody war against the EPRP in Gondar and Gojjam and at the time when EPRP leaders and members captured by the TPLF were suffering it is necessary to remember that quite a few of present day critics of the EPRP were hailing the TPLF as democratic or trying to share power with it. EPRP leaders have been disappeared by the TPLF and others like Gaim had to be martyred in Addis Ababa struggling against the divisive TPLF.

The EPRP did not subject Ethiopian unity and the interest of the people to tactical considerations. In this it never bowed to foreigners who promised it the sky if only...if it only took certain actions and positions, which were not in Ethiopia's interests. The reply by the EPRP was in the negative—it still is. That is why it declares that who blindly follow the diktat of foreign powers or countries to the detriment of the interests of our people cannot preach “nationalism” to the EPRP. The EPRP believes that the future of a united Ethiopia is based on the establishment of a democratic system. A system that upholds the rule of law, equality amongst the people, assures self administration and the people's direct participation in politics. The EPRP is opposed to those who reject this path and doggedly opt for separation or secession as such a choice will not benefit the people though it may appear fruitful to the elite seeking exclusive power and fiefdom. The record is very clear and a barrage of rumors and false accusations cannot change it. Who struggled against the chauvinists and the narrow nationalists from the outset? Who collaborated with them? Every Ethiopian knows the answer and can presently see who stands for Ethiopia and who has succumbed to the Weyane virus of ethnic division. The EPRP was and is and will continue to be unaffected and free from the virus that is threatening the very existence of Ethiopia as a united country.

SIX

EPRP AND THE UNITED STRUGGLE OF THE PEOPLE

Some people have failed to realize that the difference between the Derg and the EPRP were fundamental just as the differences that the EPRP has with the TPLF are for the most part irreconcilable. The tendency to label the Derg Left “just as the EPRP” and to declare “they were all the same and fought only for power” is basically wrong. Evidently, political struggles revolve around the question of State power but the struggle waged was not primarily for the interest of an organization but for the rights of the people. If the EPRP had been after its own power, that is to say to have its members named to executive positions the offer was there during the Derg period and was on the table also in the early 1990s so long as the “EPRP accepted to be a teletafi or satellite” of the TPLF. There is Left and Left just as all rightists are not basically the same. The EPRP wanted the military Derg to relinquish power and leave its place to a provisional popular government. The EPRP slogan of the time was “democraciawi mebt lechikunotch algedeb”—full and

unrestricted democratic rights for the people. The Derg refused to heed this call and resorted to violence to eliminate the EPRP thereby provoking a bloodshed that almost wiped out a generation.

The chasm between the TPLF and the EPRP was dug by the TPLF itself when it got formed on a narrow nationalist basis and issued a Manifesto which proclaimed that the main contradiction in Ethiopia is that that exists between nationalities/ethnic groups and thus the only solution is for each to separate and form its own independent State. The EPRP was fiercely opposed to this destructive position and held talks (nine times) with the TPLF leadership to no avail. The TPLF leaders attacked the EPRP as chauvinist, Amhara, Greater Ethiopia advocate, and called upon it to leave Tigray altogether which they tried to assure by violent means. Thus, the divide was wider than the alleged adherence to leftist political positions.

All this is to illustrate that the question of the united front or struggling in unison against the common enemy is not an easy issue. The usual critics of the EPRP allege that

- The EPRP is opposed to a united struggle unless it dominates it;
- The EPRP dissolves or breaks up united fronts;
- The EPRP is vengeful and excludes those it hates from united fronts.
- Etc.

We shall show that once again that this false but has been repeated so many times like the other lies that some people assume it must be true. Since its formation the EPRP has tried to struggle in unison with other democratic organizations. The merger of the founders achieved the process of the formation of the EPRP with other groups of which the Abyot group was one. When the Derg made a call to “all progressives” the EPRP did not reject the call outright but laid down fundamental conditions for the success of such an undertaking: that it includes all political groups including the groups like the TPLF. The Derg rejected the demand as it had no intention of sharing power with anyone. In the nine talks with the TPLF the EPRP proposed to them to “merge if we have the identical programs and objectives; to form a united front against the Derg on the basis of a minimum political program if possible; and if all this is not conceivable to cooperate on the ground against the common enemy and to avoid any clashes. Again, it was the TPLF that rejected this offer and demanded that the EPRP leave Tigray altogether. Almost all organizations pass through an adolescent period during which they bask in the support of the people and imagine that they and only they can bring about the salvation of millions. The EPRP had such a brief moment but soon overcame it and realizing that the struggle needed to involve all the people approached the question of the united front on two levels.

1. To unite the vast majority of the people along a common political program and objective, that is to say the struggle for democracy and equality, land to the tiller, etc...
2. To form a united front with democratic organizations whenever possible. Both approaches were undertaken in earnest and the EPRP was able to mobilize millions. It also approached the then existing Ethiopian National Liberation Front/IBNEAG in its Amharic acronym/ in order to form a front. Internal problems of this front made any agreement difficult. The EPRP had also working relations with an Afar democratic movement, which later opted to join the Derg. The EPRP formed a front with the EDU/ideologically its opposite/ and struggled for a time effectively. Putting aside all previous enmities and

grievances, the EPRP joined Meisone and others to form the Coalition of Ethiopian Democratic Forces (COEDF). The TPLF and OLF were invited but refused to attend the meeting that formed the COEDF. This front worked effectively till it outlived itself and left its place to the UEDF.

In all front arrangements the EPRP did not insist on having a voting power in proportion to its size but had/has only one voting voice equal to all other groups however tiny. Such is also the way it works and worked within the UEDF. It was just one amongst 15 and the fact that the AEUP and EDP left the UEDF after its formation is more linked to their own ambition and agenda rather to any misdoings within the UEDF. The EPRP, along with the UEDF, refused to join the Alliance for Freedom and Democracy because it believed that the AFD will not advance the struggle of the Ethiopian people and is more tuned to being an instrument of those forces that preach secession as their primary political objective.

The united front is formed by organizations that come around a minimum political program (in the present context to save Ethiopia from the TPLF onslaught and to assure democracy) and accept the fact that one single organization cannot tackle and solve the myriad and complicated problems of Ethiopia. As almost all organizations pass through a sort of adolescent period during which they imagine everyone in the country backs them and awaits from them salvation for eternity, it is understandable that some organizations assume that they are the one and only medicine for Ethiopia's ills. However, such delusion should end without much delay. The EPRP understood that unity of democratic forces is and will be necessary for victory and has always been in the forefront of the search for a viable united front. It had left aside its justified grievances and rancor, ignored its wounds and tried to work with its previous enemies. Sadly enough, some of these, some who worked with the Derg and took part in the repression, had turned against it and attacked it. The United Front is a voluntary undertaking by groups and organizations that decide to come together. It is not a forced marriage or "telefa" of one group by another. When a united front loses its usefulness and its mission ends it will disband or dissolve. The EPRP cannot be blamed for that. As an organization with only one vote in a front—for example the UEDF—the travails and problems of the front cannot be laid at the door of the EPRP alone. Such is the reality.

In short, the EPRP was and is one of the strong bulwarks of all united front efforts so long as such efforts serve the Ethiopian people's struggle. If not, the EPRP will not be part of such an undertaking. In any front that the EPRP decides to be part of it has and is worked/working on the basis of equality/one vote/ and so the question of domination or "only mine must pass" type of stand have no place. It is just baseless. An illusion. False.

SEVEN

WHY THE FEAR? WHY THE PREJUDICE?

It is evident that a whole lot of prejudices and false accusations concerning the EPRP have been spread by its enemies—recalcitrant Derg members and cadres, criminals of the Red Terror, the TPLF and its hirelings, those who had betrayed the organization and foreign enemies of Ethiopia. They are not few these detractors of the EPRP, no. Yet, we can safely say that there is a lot of fear involved in the whole process. Fear by the criminals that the EPRP means vengeance for the savagery they brought down upon the people. Fear

by the betrayers who have changes camp to serve the enemy of the people. Fear by those who have heard only the revised and false history of the EPRP. Those who were children during the seventies and have been exposed only to “history” as written by the Derg and the TPLF are to be excused if they have negative attitudes towards the EPRP. The lies are many and they are being prepared by many with their own axe to grind. The EPRP was and still is a clandestine organization. As it was denied legality and the enemy was ferocious it had to be secretive, to go deep underground. Its militants had to carry cyanide pills and were forced often to commit suicide because they were sure to be brutally tortured and did not want to pass secrets that would cause more death. The EPRP never had the chance to function legally inside Ethiopia, to work openly amidst the people. Fear of the “mysterious and the unknown” affected some people and led them to unrealistic imaginings and conclusions vis a vis the party. The EPRP has yet to write its own authentic history though some attempted to register their version of this history. This absence has also helped pseudo historians to write falsehood about the EPRP, to attack it as anti democratic and anti Ethiopia even. But the truth, as we tried to comment upon, is elsewhere.

A valiant and heroic generation is what the EPRP is all about. Youngsters and relatively older Ethiopians, educated and erudite, many assured bureaucratic posts and comfortable lives threw all this away to serve the people who had paid for their education. This was a generation that believed it can assault the sky, grasp and tame the clouds, defeat a well armed enemy supported by a superpower, a generation that welcomed sacrifice with revolutionary songs convinced that victory will in the end smile at the people and all pests and monsters will be defeated. Their commitment and courage shocked and surprised many—the Derg alleged they must have been drugged! Why should they die for the masses, scoffed those who opted to pursue their own individual comfort inside the country or abroad, quietly awaiting the passing away of the storm, to say “alena” to the new power holders, here we are new master, use us. For those shamed by their own past, the EPRP is a nagging bad conscience, a reminder of the courage and dedication that they lacked. For those who had served the Derg in one way or another, as advisors, Red Terror activists, etc and are now hiding within so called opposition groups the EPRP is better off non existent, so that the past can be buried, their role ignored. And all this while the EPRP had publicly stated that the past must handle itself and reconciliation is the best option to learn and move ahead. In other words there is nothing to fear from the EPRP unless one has become the enemy of Ethiopia.

For its members, the EPRP has meant the means of continuing the Ethiopian combat against oppression in all its forms. The new generation has not shamed the past that gave it an independent country despite the upper hand held by vermin that have made it to the palace. The important point is that the struggle continues and the EPRP symbolizes that, a determined and arduous struggle for more than 34 years. Those who fail to grasp the stride of history conclude that the EPRP has not wrested power and therefore it is defeated. They lose sight of the fact that the EPRP has achieved significant victories that have imposed their indelible stamp on the country. The very idea and concept of organization, the lessons of the mass struggle against the Derg, the urban and rural armed struggle, the mobilization and politicization of millions, the organization of women and the popularization of their cause, the experience of clandestine struggle, the lessons of collective leadership and much more are the fruits of the EPRP. A rich experience, a history of courage. The EPRP is an

inextricable part of the people and their history. That is why the ongoing struggle against the enemies of Ethiopia benefits immensely from the presence of the EPRP on the side of the people. And that is why, in reverse, the enemies of Ethiopia like the TPLF consider the EPRP as enemy number one and have launched against it a relentless campaign of denigration, false accusation and liquidation.

to be continued.....

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