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PEOPLE'S VOICE

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People's conference in EPRDF liberated area

INTERVIEW WITH TPLF CHAIRMAN

THE WAY TO DEMOCRATIC UNITY

**SPECTACULAR VICTORIES IN
NORTHERN SHEWA**

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THE DERG SCOFFS AT PEACE TALKS

The peace talks between the TPLF and the Derg, were unilaterally terminated by the Derg's delegation on 29th March, during the third round of preliminary peace talks, held in Rome. The manner in which the Derg terminated the talks, and the insubstantial reasons it gave for its actions, expose its true intentions for coming to the peace forum.

Successful completion of the preliminary talks would have meant the start of substantive talks, in which the TPLF's peace proposal would have been tabled. The Derg would have found it difficult to reject these proposals without losing face completely. So it chose to disrupt the preliminary peace talks. A review of the events leading up to the first round of these preliminary talks on November 4th 1989, shows that the Derg has never sincerely sought a peaceful solution to the problems in the country.

Following a resolution of the TPLF Third Congress, the central committee of the TPLF formulated its peace proposal on 31st March 1989. The Derg turned a deaf ear to the repeated calls by the TPLF to come to the negotiating table. Even the fact that the Derg was ousted from Tigray was not cause enough to bring the arrogant regime to the peace table. However, the TPLF's peace proposals were gaining acceptance, both by the Ethiopian people in general and also by the army. During the May 1989 coup d' état, the army in Asmara advanced the basic elements of the TPLF eight-point peace proposal as a foundation for a peaceful solution to the war. It was then that the Derg found it expedient to give the impression that it was ready for peace, and thus declared that it would hold peace talks "with all opposition groups and without preconditions".

Almost immediately, however, the then foreign minister Berhanu Bayeh told journalists that the decision was meant only for Eritreans and not for other opposition forces. Furthermore, at the same time as it was negotiating for the preliminary peace talks, it was preparing a massive offensive in southern Tigray, which it launched in August 1989. In the ensuing battles, EPRDF forces routed the Derg's army in southern Tigray, in northern Wello and Gonder, and continued to push further south, crushing the 605th army corps. This finally forced the Derg to enter into peace talks. Contacts were made in London in September 1989, and a protocol was signed for the start of preliminary peace talks, with the Italian government as an observer.

It was clear then, from the very beginning, that the Derg was not inherently interested in the peaceful resolution of the conflicts in Ethiopia. Its main purpose was to give the impression that it was seeking peace. It even tried to give the impression that it was the initiator of the peace call; which is ridiculous. The initiator was clearly the TPLF. But the Derg wishes to confuse this fact, so that the differences in the nature, tactics and strategies of the two organisations, the TPLF and the Derg, may not be highlighted.

The Derg is the root cause of the war. It came to power through violence and is maintaining itself through a war, waged against those who seek peace, justice and equality. The TPLF's eight point peace proposal clearly shows the road to peace in Ethiopia: it includes respect of all democratic rights, release of all political prisoners, dismantling of the Derg's security apparatus, expulsion of Foreign military personnel, establishment of a provisional government, resolution of the Eritrean question through peaceful and democratic means and a ceasefire, to ensure implementation of the above points. All these points are anathema to a regime like the Derg, because they impinge on its very survival. And that is the crux of the matter: why peace

remains unattainable so long as the edifice of the regime is structured on war.

The peace talks broke down for two reasons. Firstly the Derg refused to accept the reality, to which the TPLF adhered as a matter of principle, that its ally in war, the Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement (EPDM), is also its ally in peace, and should be party to the main peace talks. To accept that the two organisations have a joint delegation at the main peace talks would have been not only logical, but would also have the advantage of facilitating implementation of agreements reached, without problems. However, the Derg is not interested in the attainment of a peace agreement, but rather in divide and rule; so it rejected the proposal of a joint TPLF/EPDM delegation as a way out of continuing the talks.

Secondly, the Derg insisted that the TPLF should deal only with questions pertaining "to the autonomous region of Tigray". This stand practically robs Tigrayans of their birthright of Ethiopian nationality, by asserting that they cannot enter into peace negotiations pertaining to Ethiopia as a whole. That right is not for the Derg to give or to take away. Still, it will be recalled as a footnote to history, in exposing the nature of the Derg and its understanding of Ethiopia and Ethiopians. As Tigray is part and parcel of Ethiopia, any hope of solving problems in Tigray, in isolation from the problems in the country as a whole, is wishful thinking on the Derg's behalf.

The TPLF has done all it could to ensure the success and continuity of the Rome talks. It maintained constructive positions and was flexible when necessary. Thus, it put forward two proposals. One was to defer the two outstanding problems - who should attend and what the agenda should be - until the substantive peace talks; alternatively, it proposed continuing with a fourth round of preliminary talks to resolve these problems. Either of these proposals would have ensured that the peace talks continued. The Derg rejected these proposals, however, and the talks broke down. It understood negotiation to mean imposition of its dictates and ultimatums. The Italian government observer, on his part, failed to fully play his role, in that he did not try to convince the Ethiopian government that it should consider the TPLF's proposals. Instead, when the Ethiopian government's delegation insisted that five months was sufficient time for preliminary peace talks, and that the talks should be discontinued, he conceded, and the talks broke down.

Even now, the Derg prefers war to peace. While still trying to give the impression that it desires peace, it is simultaneously blocking the peaceful resolution of the problem, presenting flimsy excuses for not coming to the peace talks. This time, as a pre-condition for peace talks, it is calling for the EPRDF to abandon its position on the peaceful resolution of the Eritrean question. At the same time, it has already proclaimed a fresh mobilisation for war. The EPRDF knows that, like previous mobilisations, this one cannot save the Derg from defeat. But it continues to call on the Derg to negotiate for peace so that further bloodshed and devastation in the country may be avoided. If the Derg does not give up its intention of dragging the country down the drain with it, there is no alternative left to the EPRDF but to intensify the struggle and destroy the Derg. Hence, the EPRDF emphatically reminds the Derg that it should come to peace negotiations with an open mind, in the presence of serious, impartial and committed observers, abandoning its flimsy excuses which prevent the start of peace negotiations.

THE DERG OBSTRUCTS THE WAY TO DEMOCRATIC UNITY

In recent years, the Derg has launched massive propaganda campaigns revolving around Ethiopian unity and sovereignty. The purpose of this mendacious propaganda is to undermine the democratic forces who are struggling for a democratic unity of the people, and allow the Derg to appear as the protector of Ethiopian unity, thereby lengthening its stay in power. By talking expediently about unity, it wishes to obscure the genuine issue of self-determination facing the country, and preempt consideration of the root causes of the national question and its proper resolution, thus further aggravating this problem and making democratic solutions difficult to attain.

Enforced unity versus genuine unity

It is an incontrovertible fact that unity is better than disunity. But what type of unity? Unity which is based on violence and repression is detested by the people, and they are fighting against it. The Derg and its predecessors have been using violence and repression, throughout the years, to suppress national struggles. However, their actions have not brought about a genuine unity of the people; rather they have continuously exacerbated the problem and blocked the way to democratic unity. Unity which is based on injustice, suppression, massacre and slavery is not in the interests of the oppressed peoples. It is untenable and generates further discord and, above all, creates chaos in the country. The needs and interests of the oppressed peoples must be taken seriously, and understood in the language and values of the people themselves.

The people opt for unity when they are sure it is for their own advantage; when they are certain that unity is ensuring their democratic rights; when they are able to participate in the country's basic political decisions through democratic means, and on an equal basis. In the absence of democratic rights, there would not be any genuine and reliable unity, however much one talks about unity and sovereignty. In short, a genuine democratic unity of the people will come about only when the system which is based on oppression of nations and nationalities is

destroyed, and when the people attain full democratic rights.

It is clear that a genuine unity of people cannot exist if the people's rights are suppressed. Unity imposed from above remains simply territorial and cannot be genuine unity at all. What should be sought is the unity of the people in which their well-being is the decisive element. Advocating unity simply by orchestrating feudal and anti-democratic values is futile, and only adds fuel to the fire. Instead, confidence should be placed in the people; that is, the people must be left to decide their future, and the future of the country, without anyone attempting to decide on their behalf. It should also be recognised that, in a country like ours, where there is bitter national oppression, unity cannot be achieved without fulfilling the necessary democratic rights for it; unless the anti-democratic system is destroyed and replaced by a democratic system, and the right of self-determination is recognised and implemented. The fulfilment of such conditions will surely enable the people to discover that their interest lies in unity, and will allow them to live in harmony and progress together. To try to attain unity by using force and violence, only generates hatred and strife and disunity.

For the last 15 years, the people of Ethiopia have clearly demonstrated their opposition to the undemocratic Derg regime. A regime which has only been able to hold on to power because of the massive help it has acquired from foreign

powers such as the Soviet Union, Cuba and, more recently, Israel. These supporters have enabled the Derg to expand its army, so that it is now one of the largest in Africa. In addition to this enormous army, the Derg has established a state security apparatus, which consists of a network of spies reaching down to the remotest village. Through the army, the security forces and this network, the Derg rules by oppression.

Self-determination denied

The Derg's concept of unity is entirely different from the real unity desired by the oppressed people and the democratic forces, who are consistently struggling for their national self-determination and for a genuine peoples' unity. A unity in which all peoples are considered as important as each other, and where there is no dominance of a particular nation as there is under the Derg – the dominance of a chauvinist ruling class. The Derg advocates a blanket geographic unity, with borders north, south, east and west. Any nation/nationality which struggles for self-determination is accused of undermining unity and is therefore admonished, and must remain subjugated and oppressed. Thus, the Derg categorically rules out the idea of there being any sort of self-determination, as a democratic means of resolving the problems of national oppression.

It is clear from past and present experience of the rule of both Haile Selassie and of the Derg, that dictatorial processes of

geographic unity lead only to discord and will not bring about a truly united Ethiopia. Lasting unity for a country cannot be secured by force. To use force for such a purpose is inherently counter-productive, and will ultimately obstruct unity. The Derg, however, still continues to wage war in the name of unity. This year alone, it has forcibly conscripted 300,000 soldiers to suppress people's democratic rights and the rights of self-determination. It claims to be fighting for unity, when, in fact, all the Derg is doing is keeping itself in power, by denying the rights of the people. By posing as the protector of Ethiopian unity, the Derg hopes to make it appear that its fall will be a danger to this unity. On the contrary, the fall of this regime will be the strengthening of the oppressed people's unity.

In his May Day speech, Mengistu shamelessly likened himself to Emperor Theodros. He complained that he was being abandoned, and in a vain attempt to rally people, he declared that he would die fighting. But, more tellingly, in late June, the *shengo* [parliament] passed yet another mobilisation decree. Mengistu proclaimed: "let us die a little, starve a little", as if millions have not already perished in war and starvation during his rule. It is the people that have to die and starve – not Mengistu and the members of the ruling class.

Tribal propoganda used to divide the oppressed

Instead of promoting unity, the Derg encourages disunity, and makes use of tribal propoganda to divide and rule; it attempts to play nations and nationalities off against each other, whipping up hatred between them so that it may more easily keep a dominant hand. The Derg fears real unity of the people. Their strength will lead to its fall.

It would be quite wrong, though, to assume that the dictatorship is upheld solely by the Derg. There are other forces who give sustenance to the regime, out of a desire to maintain certain of its anti-democratic features. Some have a vested interest in the perpetuation of chauvinism, and are coming to its aid as they see it crumbling. Other political forces have adopted a stance similar to the geographic unity stance of the Derg. Their stance might appear different from the Derg's, and sometimes even opposed to it, but in essence, the two stances are remarkably similar.

Washington demonstration promotes chauvinism

On 25th April, for instance, a demonstration was held by Ethiopians in Washington (D.C.). The procession took, as its main theme, the slogan "one country, one people", and under the cover of this slogan, unabashedly lauded Mengistu's soldiers "who die defending our unity", and condemned the democratic forces who are struggling against the fascist regime. To reduce the diversity of peoples and nationalities into the straight jacket of a "one country, one people", is, in effect, to advance chauvinism, which is an obstacle to real people's unity. It is to deny the identity and the rights of the oppressed peoples, in favour of the dominant nation. Far from uniting Ethiopia, the banner promotes suppression of nations and nationalities, and consequently, the denial of their democratic right to self-determination.

From this, it is a small step to the slippery road of military solution, a step the Washington procession made figuratively, from a safe distance, praising the Derg's killing machine in the name of "defending our unity". For appearance's sake, the demonstration called for an end to the war, but there was no doubt whose side it was on.

Other forces, such as the EPRP, have taken a stand on Ethiopian unity which undermines the right of national self-determination. For a long while, the EPRP has been content to enunciate its support for the right to self-determination for nations and nationalities in Ethiopia. Recently, however, it has evolved a stand whereby, on one hand, it recognises the right to self-determination, and on the other, precludes its expression. This stand, in relation to Eritrea, is put thus:

"Notwithstanding the right of self-determination of the Eritrean people.... it is appropriate and timely for the [Eritrean] question to be presented *short of secession*, within the umbrella of a democratic state that will be established in Ethiopia, from the standpoint of lasting peace, lasting unity of the oppressed, and common prosperity" (EPRP, *Democracia*, Vol. 15, September 1989, p.7 Original in Amharic).

This clearly shows that the EPRP restricts the people's right to self-determination. In contrast to the Derg and its ilk, the EPRDF sees unity as a voluntary unity of

people, based on equality. As a revolutionary democratic front, the EPRDF starts by accepting, not denying, the existence of national contradictions in Ethiopia, and it recognises the right to self-determination and the struggle for its implementation, which are necessary prerequisites for a democratic and reliable unity. To simply advocate unity without recognising the right to self-determination, would be to give in to geographic unity.

The Derg and its cohorts claim that the EPRDF's position is contradictory and talk of "Woyane treachery". As we have seen, for them, Ethiopian unity is merely geographic, and from their standpoint, EPRDF's approach may well appear, not only contradictory, but even incomprehensible. Others who, unlike the Derg, may think in terms of genuine unity, seem to believe that it is possible to advance this cause while somehow restricting the right of self-determination. On the basis of such a flawed political stand, the EPRDF's position is attacked as encouraging the dismemberment of Ethiopia. For instance, the EPRP argues as follows:

"The TPLF has not only rejected pluralism and sovereignty of the people, but it has also gone as far as saying, (in public meetings and radio interviews), that if it comes to power, Ethiopia's territorial shape will be changed by the automatic secession of those who want to do so [secede]. In this serious decision, there is no place for the position of the Ethiopian people since they are not to be asked, but presented with a fait accompli, with 'whether they like it or not' " (EPRP, *Ethiopia The Democratic Alternative*, December 1989, p.20).

In effect, what the EPRP is saying is that the right of self-determination should be restricted, that a minority should cease to have its rights if the majority objects. This is the negation of the right of self-determination. It would make the right of self-determination subject to the politics of horse-trading, in which sufficiently large numbers of nationalities could easily form a tactical alliance to create a majority and remove any restrictions on the attainment of their individual objectives. So, the position of the EPRP, and others who argue like it, is not only a denial of basic rights of the people but also inept politics. The EPRDF believes that it is not the right of self-determination that should be denied, but the oppression of nationalities that should be removed.

The right of self-determination is already

on the agenda of Ethiopian politics. It cannot be wished away. It is of paramount importance that this issue is handled correctly. The EPRDF is convinced of the correctness of its stand. Thus, its programme aims:

"To ensure the right of self-determination of the oppressed nations and nationalities, up to and including secession.

- a) First and foremost, to provide political and democratic solutions for the oppressed nations and nationalities. The oppressed nations and nationalities must come to their own decisions and not allow any other forces to decide on their behalf..... To respect and implement the decisions taken by the oppressed nations and nationalities.
- b) Recognising that unity of the oppressed nations and nationalities can be realised only when a democratic atmosphere is created and democratic government established, and recognising furthermore that unity based on equality, serves the interests of the people better than secession, to struggle to create a democratic government based on voluntary unity which ensures people's equality and rights."

(EPRDF; The Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front, A Democratic Alternative for Ethiopia, October 1989, p.10)

The EPRDF is practically promoting unity among the peoples of Ethiopia in the liberated areas. It explains to people, the nature of the ruling class – why and how it oppresses the peasantry, the working class and the various nations and nationalities. It explains how imperialism, particularly soviet social imperialism, seeks to dominate Ethiopia by supporting the fascistic regime against the Ethiopian people. It shows the necessity and the means of attaining genuine unity among peoples of different nations and nationalities, so they may remove the fascistic regime and build a strong, united and democratic Ethiopia. It attempts to instruct prisoners of war that the Derg is the real enemy of the people, and through its treatment of prisoners, it affirms fraternity. Furthermore, the EPRDF is creating structures which enable the democratic participation of the people, and in turn provide a means by which the people themselves can reaffirm their unity.

Where the Derg sows animosity, the EPRDF paves the way to democratic unity; where the Derg bombs Ethiopian identity from the hearts of the people, the

EPRDF restores it; where the Derg betrays Ethiopia's independence, the EPRDF fights against imperialism; where the Derg reduces Ethiopia to a mere formal or geographic unity, the EPRDF attempts to bring life to genuine people's unity.

It is important to be aware of the objectives behind the current campaign of the Derg and its ilk on Ethiopian unity. The intent is not to strengthen unity, or even to defend it from alleged external enemies. Through such concerted propaganda, at home and abroad, the Derg and its ilk hope to shift the focus of the struggle away from the survival of its regime. Internally, they hope to break the people's unity that grows from day to day, in the final struggle against the fascistic regime. Externally, they wish to provide an opening for yet more foreign intervention, by dragging Ethiopia into the regional conflicts of the Middle East.

The manoeuvres and propaganda of the Derg and others like it have no substance; the people will learn who the real enemy is - the chauvinist and oppressive system. Through their struggle, they will destroy the Derg's regime and attain genuine unity. The machinations of the Derg will not be able to prevent this.

INTERVIEW WITH MELES ZENAWI, SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE TPLF

These interviews with the secretary general of the TPLF, deal with key issues facing Ethiopia. They show, succinctly, the views of the TPLF and its stand on many questions which deeply concern the peoples of Ethiopia. The false propaganda and subterfuge of the Derg and its supporters are laid bare. Issues that are deliberately confused by the Derg are raised and discussed in a forthright manner, affording readers the opportunity to make a critical appreciation of the existing situation. We hope that publication of these interviews, initially broadcast by the Voice of the Tigrayan Revolution, during February and March 1990, will clarify events as they stand in Ethiopia today.

ON THE PEACE TALKS

Q. Comrade Meles, in the first round of peace talks, which were held between our organisation and the Derg regime, an agreement was reached concerning the language to be used in the talks, documentation and publicity; and in the second round, agreement was reached regarding who should chair the talks and who the observers should be. Why did a difference arise concerning the chair and the observers? What does the difference signify?

A. The difference regarding chairpersons and observers who would participate in the substantive talks, arose from the basic understanding the two parties have of how the peace talks should be conducted. The TPLF wanted the peace talks to be conducted in an open forum, so the people could follow the talks directly or indirectly. Since the TPLF believes that the decisive force for peace is the people themselves, who are thirsty for peace, it wanted to broaden the opportunity for the people to participate indirectly in the process of the peace talks. One alternative, which enables this to be achieved, is to allow more chairpersons and observers to participate in the talks, and give their independent view on the talks. It was because of this belief that the TPLF advocated for more chairpersons and observers who hold neutral positions.

But the Derg wished the talks with TPLF to be held, as much as possible, in secret. All its efforts were to ensure that the peace talks were conducted behind a screen, lest its anti-peace stands be unmasked in public. Thus, it proposed in the first round of talks, that it would be adequate to have one chairperson and one observer for the substantive peace talks.

Briefly, the difference relating to third parties – the chair and the observers – was that one side stood for peace talks attended by several witnesses who were manifestly non-partisan, while the other wanted to have one or two partisans posing as witnesses. Furthermore, the Derg desired observers and chairpersons from countries who are friendly towards it, and who would not therefore testify from a neutral position: such as President Kaunda of Zambia, who is an ardent supporter of the Derg regime.

Q. How was this issue resolved in the second round of the peace talks?

A. We managed to reach agreement because the Derg rectified its positions in the second round of talks. This is because its stand of having one observer and one chairperson could not convince anyone and was untenable. For instance, when holding talks with the EPLF, the Derg insisted on having two chairpersons whilst the EPLF wanted a single one. In the end two chairpersons were appointed. When talking to us the Derg wanted one chairperson but could not sustain its argument as it could not explain its conflicting positions. Eventually the Derg yielded, when various governments exerted pressure on it, and accepted the appointment of two chairpersons and four observers. Subsequently, it was possible to agree on the chairmanship of Italy and Kenya, and observers being from the governments of Nigeria, Sudan, Sweden and Uganda.

Q. Prior to the commencement of the second round of peace talks, the Derg castigated our organisation for broadcasting the proceedings of the peace talks on its radio station, saying this was contrary to the agreements on publicity reached in the first round. Did we really contravene the agreement? Was this matter raised in the second round of peace talks?

A. The TPLF had repeatedly explained that, as a matter of principle, it strenuously opposes any peace talks hidden from the public behind a curtain. Hence, it had not, and could not, have entered into an agreement which negates this stand, either before or after the start of the talks in Rome. In earlier talks held in London, which opened the way for the subsequent talks in Rome, it was the TPLF which proposed that the talks should be transcribed on tape. It did this so that the people would have the opportunity to follow the proceedings of the talks. Although the Derg did not like the idea, it was made sufficiently clear to the Derg that the TPLF would not participate in talks otherwise. So the talks were taped. One of the reasons for the TPLF's suggestion that the talks be conducted in Amharic, rather than in a foreign language, was to enable the people to listen to the tapes without need of translation. The agreement we made regarding publicity was that each side should refrain from making public declarations while the talks were in progress. In between talks, however, both sides were allowed to make constructive statements publicly.

We have stuck to this agreement. While the talks were being held, we did not make any public declaration. The agreement did not specify what is meant by constructive. Hence, each side reserves the right to make public whatever declaration it judges to be constructive to the peace talks. For us, to be constructive is to present the proceedings in their entirety to the people. To let the people understand the true situation directly through taped dialogue. What could be more constructive than broadcasting the actual proceedings? So, the publicity we have made is constructive and in accordance with our agreement. We will continue in this manner in the future.

It is well-known that the Derg has been making a big show of this in its media, alleging that we have breached the agreement. Accordingly, we thought that the Derg might raise this matter as a big issue in the second round of talks. In the event, it did not. At the beginning of the talks, it proclaimed that the TPLF had made unconstructive public declarations, contrary to the agreement, but only managed to present certain unspecified evidence to the chairperson. It is one matter to present exclusively for the chair so-called evidence, and another to provide evidence for open inspection. On our side, it was made clear that the Derg was free to present any government whatever "evidence" they wished.

At any rate, our agreement allowed each side to make public declarations that are constructive. What was meant by "constructive", the agreement did not elaborate. Our interpretation of the word and that of the Derg, may be different. The reason why the word was not defined is because it is difficult to reach an agreement on its definition. So the agreement left it open for the two sides to interpret the word "constructive" in their respective ways. As for us, there could be nothing more construc-

tive than presenting the true proceedings in their entirety. The Derg's representatives were clearly unable to substantiate their allegations, and so we continued to the next topic on the agenda.

Q. Up to now, an agreement has not been reached regarding the participants in the substantive peace talks. What were the respective positions of the two sides taken on this matter in the second round of peace talks? Why does our organisation insist that a joint delegation of EPDM and TPLF participate in the substantive peace talks?

A. On the issue of participation in the substantive talks, both sides advanced, in the second round of peace talks, more or less the same positions as they had adopted in the first round of talks. The TPLF proposed that the peace talks should be between, on one side, the joint representatives of EPDM and TPLF, and, on the other side, the representatives of the Derg; while, for its part, the Derg proposed that the peace talks should be between itself and TPLF only. The contention of the Derg was that TPLF and EPDM can enter into negotiations only individually and not jointly.

There are several reasons, basic and procedural, as to why our delegation submitted that there should be joint participation. It is known that the Rome peace talks had, as one of their objectives, an agreement regarding procedures for holding the main peace talks. In these successive peace talks, one of the key procedural issues on which agreement is being sought, is the determination of who should attend the substantive peace talks. Because of this, one of the items on the agenda agreed upon at the commencement of the Rome peace talks, was that of determining the composition of participants, stated in the English text as "make-up of delegates to the main talks". Accordingly, it would be procedurally correct for TPLF to make detailed presentation of the participants it desired on its side at the substantive peace talks.

While this constituted the procedural aspect of TPLF's argument, the fundamental issue, it believes, is the necessity of including in the talks, all protagonists of both sides, if peace is to be attained. At the present moment, it is well-known that TPLF and EPDM have created a united front in which they work together. Consequently, all the military engagements currently underway, take place through this united front; the armies of the two organisations are fighting side by side. It is not possible to stop this war by reaching settlement with TPLF or EPDM separately. If peace is desired, it is essential that the forces which are engaged in military struggle, side by side, should jointly participate in the forum of peace talks.

The Derg should accept this view, if it genuinely wants peace. Particularly as the *Shengo* [parliament] has declared publicly its readiness to negotiate with all opposition organisations; the Derg should respect the decisions of its own *Shengo*, and be willing to admit that organisations can seek to enter into negotiations jointly. By inviting one party into negotiations and precluding the other half, it is not possible to conduct meaningful peace talks. This is the reason why TPLF insisted that the substantive peace talks should be ones in which both TPLF and EPDM participate jointly.

Another fundamental point, which should be considered, is that EPDM and TPLF not only fight side by side, but also have the

same stand regarding the resolution of the war that is being waged in our country. Both organisations have made public their readiness to conduct peace talks with the Derg. Thus, it can be deduced that they have identical views on peaceful resolutions of the problems and are equally ready for negotiation. This would enable them to present a joint delegation for the substantive peace talks.

Based on the foregoing points, our team of delegates forwarded their demand for joint participation of the two organisations – a demand which should have been conceded, if the Derg was genuinely seeking peace, instead of contending that the talks can be conducted only if we are disjointed. The delegation of the Derg kept to its argument that since the talks were started between itself and the TPLF, a third party should not be added. This was a flawed argument which cannot bring a peaceful resolution to the actual ongoing war.

Q. Why is it that the Derg's government has advanced such a stubborn stand against negotiating with a joint delegation of TPLF and EPDM?

A. The Derg's inflexible stand on this matter is not solely due to an incorrect viewpoint; it has taken this view mainly because it does not wish to conduct the peace talks in good faith. To prevent organisations, which are united and struggling together, from forming a common negotiating platform in the peace talks, is to deliberately avoid a peaceful solution. The Derg's insistence that these organisations should negotiate separately, clearly shows its intention to use the talks as a means of divide and rule. Unless the Derg reviews its stand, it is not possible to imagine the start of the substantive peace talks.

Q. Comrade Meles, in the first round of peace talks there were no decisions made on the agenda for the substantive peace talks, and the matter was left open. What were, in fact, the proposals on this issue made by the respective sides, during the second round of talks?

A. The differences which prevailed on the issue of the agenda for the substantive peace talks were very fundamental. On our part, we presented the peace proposal of our organisation, which has already been widely publicised. Up to now, only this detailed proposal for a peaceful solution of Ethiopia's problems exists; it was put forward by the TPLF in March 1989, and has subsequently been endorsed by the EPDM. To this day, the Derg has not gone beyond making pronouncements of its readiness to engage in peace talks, with certain opposition organisations; it has not forwarded tangible proposals for a peaceful solution.

Bearing this in mind, our team of delegates advanced the view that the agenda for the substantive peace talks should comprise the peace proposal made by the TPLF in March 1989, and endorsed by the EPDM. Furthermore, the team suggested that, were the Derg to make its proposal for a peaceful solution, it should be accepted as a second component of the agenda. The delegation of the Derg did not accept our constructive proposals. Instead, it forwarded two interrelated arguments.

First, the argument was that the TPLF can only discuss Tigray and not the overall situation of the country. "The general condition of Ethiopia is not your concern. You can only discuss

Tigray". Second, it was held that the basic aim of the substantive peace talks, should be to discuss the implementation of the constitution of the PDRE in Tigray, through peaceful means, as in other parts of Ethiopia. These two points were meant to constitute the agenda.

Our delegation gave detailed objections to the Derg's presentation. It rejected the view that there should be first class citizens who are entitled to engage in talks about the whole country, and second class citizens, who should be restricted to their region, and not be concerned with the overall situation of the country. Rejecting any such discriminatory policy, our delegation expressed its fundamental belief that all Ethiopians are equal, and that all have the same right to enter into talks about the country as a whole. It explained that its right to negotiate on matters concerning the country as a whole is inalienable, and was not a point for discussion with the Derg.

While the TPLF is an organisation struggling for the triumph of a democratic Ethiopia, in which the rights and interests of all Ethiopian peoples, including the people of Tigray, will be respected, it believes that the problems facing the people of Tigray will be solved when the problems of all Ethiopian people are resolved. To say "the overall situation of Ethiopia is not your concern", that "you cannot enter into negotiations on these affairs", is to deny that the members of TPLF and the people of Tigray are Ethiopians. Apart from taking away their inherent right and labelling them second class citizens, it demonstrated to us the lack of preparedness, on the part of the Derg, to conduct meaningful peace talks.

With regard to the argument that the solution lay in implementing the constitution of the PDRE in Tigray, this was ridiculous. Since the policies of the Derg, and the constitution of the PDRE, are the sources of the problems in the whole of Ethiopia, including Tigray, a peaceful solution is to be found, not in implementing the constitution of the PDRE where it has never been implemented, but in changing the constitution itself, and replacing it with a better one. Thus, our delegation attempted to show that, if peace is desired, the agenda for the substantive peace talks should include, in fact, how to replace this very constitution with one which will ensure the respect of the rights and interests of the people.

Q. It is known that our organisation is struggling to bring about peace and democratic unity in Ethiopia. Why is it then that the Derg advanced the view that TPLF should discuss Tigray and not enter into talks about the country as a whole?

A. The position advanced by the Derg on this issue, especially its stand that the TPLF and the people of Tigray have no right to enter into peace talks about the country as a whole, has surprised everyone. Through various contacts made after the peace talks, it was learnt that the Derg's stand was unexpected and was not supported even by the Soviets, who have been propping up the regime. Nevertheless, anyone who has properly understood the nature and motives of the Derg could have foreseen that the Derg's tribalist stand would come to the forefront.

Although the Derg attempts to present itself as an advocate of Ethiopian unity, its prime motive is the retention of its power. Today, more than at any time in the past, it has become very clear that its main objective of keeping itself in power, is in conflict with the aim of maintaining the unity of the Ethiopian people; at

this juncture it is doing all it can to maintain itself in power and leaving the issue of unity on the sidelines.

The insidious and primitive propaganda, that the Derg and its ilk are currently advancing, will no doubt leave a scar on the lasting unity of the Ethiopian people. At the same time, it is known that this type of agitation is now one of its mainstays for holding on to power. Had all Ethiopians raised their arms in unison, it is evident that the Derg would not have lasted in power a single moment. Hence, the Derg fears the unity of the people above all else. Because of this, it is engaged in tribalist agitations, which can pose severe problems for further generations. In order to trigger internecine strife between people, attempts are being made to portray one side of the people as the enemy of the Derg and of Ethiopian unity, and another side as supporters of the Derg and of Ethiopian unity. This agitation might help the Derg to lengthen its stay in power, but does not serve the unity of the people. On the contrary, it can seriously undermine the unity of the people.

The Ethiopian people as a whole clearly have a bitter dislike for the Derg government, and have struggled against it unflinchingly. For various reasons of historical conjuncture, I think it is obvious that among the various struggles of the peoples of Ethiopia, the one in Tigray appears relatively more developed. The Tigrayan people's struggle, led by the TPLF, aligned with other democratic, revolutionary organisations and other struggling Ethiopian people, is hastening the end of the Derg regime. Moreover, because the oppressed people of Ethiopia are conducting a common struggle against the Derg, fighting side by side, a strong foundation is being laid for the democratic unity of our country, based on trust and shared involvement. This augers well for the basic unity of our country, while it signals doom for the Derg.

Consequently, to minimise the danger that looms over its power, the Derg is engaged in subversive activities which undermine the lasting unity of the people. It uses cheap rumour-mongering and backward tribalist propaganda, in an attempt to isolate the TPLF and the Tigrayan people from the other oppressed peoples of Ethiopia. In addition, Tigrayan residents in central parts of the country are being taken from their homes at night and murdered, while the people of Tigray are being subjected to horrific daily bombings. All this is done to erode the belief in Ethiopia and its unity, that Tigrayan people hold, and to subsequently pressurise the TPLF, so that it will abandon its firm stand on the democratic unity of the country.

The Derg and its cohorts are apprehensive, both of the well-developed struggle of the Tigrayan people, and of the struggle of other oppressed Ethiopians, with whom there is unity. They know full well that, should this unity continue, the rule of the Derg will be short-lived. Thus, they seek, on the one hand, to isolate other Ethiopians from the TPLF and from the Tigrayan people, and on the other hand, to pressurise the TPLF and the Tigrayan people, into altering their stand on Ethiopian unity, thereby isolating themselves from the rest of the Ethiopian people. So long as this conspiracy helps to strengthen their hold on power, they are not concerned in the least about the dangerous consequences of their acts on the unity of the people.

During the second round of talks, held in Rome, the Derg's representatives proclaimed openly that the overall situation of Ethiopia was not the business of the TPLF nor the people of Tigray and that they couldn't discuss these affairs. This view,

which I have tried to explain earlier, arises from their general attitude, which is predictable. At any rate, whatever the Derg and its cohorts say or do, they cannot upset the firm stand of the TPLF and the Tigrayan people on the democratic unity of the Ethiopian people. The unity between the people of Tigray and other oppressed people of Ethiopia, which is dramatically gaining strength from day to day, cannot be weakened. Any attempt to diminish it is futile.

Q. In the first round of peace talks, our organisation suggested measures which can improve the environment for peace talks. It suggested the acceptance, by both sides, of free passage for food aid, so it could reach the affected population and save lives, and it also suggested refraining from making the civilian population and economic installations military targets. What suggestions were made on these issues by both sides during the second round of peace talks?

A. Concerning the points raised, the position taken by the Derg's delegation in the second round of peace talks, was that it could only discuss the issue, but could not make decisions. Furthermore, it was made known that the Derg government will be taking its own measures in respect of the famine aid, and that it would be possible to discuss the measures taken by the Derg unilaterally. The Derg delegation was there to discuss, and to reach an agreement on how to bring about peaceful solutions to the problems of the country in general. For such a delegation to say that it could only discuss, but could not decide on the proposals of the TPLF, concerning the protection of the civilian population and economic installations from military attack, was found unacceptable by our delegation.

Either the delegation of the Derg was conducting the talks, not to reach an agreement about the far weightier, difficult and urgent matter of peace, but simply to engage in dialogue. Or, their insistence that they can discuss, but have not been empowered to conclude an agreement about not targeting the civilian population and economic installations, is designed to deliberately undercut constructive talks and pre-empt agreement.

At any rate, we made clear our rejection of discussion for discussion's sake, and suggested postponement of the issue until the Derg makes clear its readiness to reach an agreement, rather than simply discuss. Accordingly, the matter was postponed. In respect of the famine, we made it clear that we were there not to listen to the decrees of the Derg, but to arrive at agreements. So long as the Derg was not prepared to come to an agreement, we expressed the view that the appropriate platform for publicising its decrees was its own radio station and not the peace talks. The issue was thus postponed until the next round of talks.

I think, here, there is a basic issue which needs attention. The Derg has constantly professed its sorrow over the loss of lives through war, and blamed "terrorists" for the destruction of economic installations. Our organisation proposed that, rather than await the finalisation of the attainment of peace in the country as a whole, an agreement be made to exclude the civilian population and economic installations from military attacks. Yet the Derg insisted that this matter could be raised only for discussion purposes and that no agreements could be made. This exposes its objective of massacring civilians and destroying economic installations. Its claim that "terrorists" are killing people and destroying the country's economy etc, may be likened to the clever thief who tries to escape capture shouting: "thief! thief!", while mingling with his pursuers. The Derg attempts to hide its

crimes in a similar way.

Q. Comrade Meles, it is said that there were differences of opinion regarding the date for the third round of peace talks. What was the essence of these differences?

A. Differences have emerged between the two sides about the fixing of dates for the next round of talks. While the Derg proposed the convening of the third round of talks after six weeks, our delegation suggested that it be held after three months. Our suggestion was vilified and presented by the Derg as evidence of lack of preparedness for peace on our part. We do not believe that the peace talks would be effective simply because we were to arrange meetings on a weekly basis. Progress towards peace will be made faster, not by the frequency of meetings held, but by the constructive ideas brought to the meetings. As I tried to explain earlier, the Derg has stuck stubbornly to positions which obstructed peace. In such a situation, rather than holding meaningless weekly meetings, we believe it is preferable to allow the Derg another three months, so that its supporters and advisers may have time to help it change its stand. Above all, we also believe that it is essential to allow time for the Ethiopian people to make a thorough appraisal of the differences that have emerged during the proceedings of the talks. This will enable the people to exert pressure directly and indirectly on the side which is obstructing peace, and thereby make its contribution towards making the talks more fruitful. In short, the reason for our proposal to hold the third round of talks after three months, was to provide time for the Derg to rectify its stand.

An additional reason for proposing a longer interval, was the time required by our delegation to undertake the journey from liberated Tigray to Rome, and back. If the Derg does not come to the third round of talks having improved its stand, it would be impossible to imagine that, even after a three month interval, the talks would be efficacious.

Q. The presentation made by the Derg government's delegation at the first round of peace talks, has already been assessed by the Ethiopian people. To what extent was its presentation constructive in the second round of talks?

A. In the second round of talks, the Derg delegation not only proceeded with its usual inflexible anti-peace stand, but, especially at the beginning of the talks, engaged in deliberate acts of disrupting the talks. We listened patiently when members of the Derg delegation were talking; they used the peace talks, as they often do, as a platform for their propaganda and lies. When we started to talk, they persistently raised irrelevant and inappropriate points of order to disrupt the proceedings, in a manner more befitting a street hassler. They behaved in such a way that the Italian convenor was forced to suspend the meeting. The following morning, the convenor took aside the leaders of the two delegations, and arranged for an order precluding any intervention from either side, when each was making their presentations. In this way, the disruptions of the Derg's representatives were put to an end, and the meeting could continue. Their behaviour in the talks gave a bad impression, not simply of their government, but also of our country. It probably raised, in the mind of the observers, the question: how has a country such as Ethiopia, with centuries of civilisation, come to be ruled, for such a long period, by persons such as these?

Q. The peace proposal of our organisation contains the motion

that a transitional government be constituted of all opposition forces, including the Derg. In several quarters, it is felt that this idea will not be accepted by the Derg. Taking this observation as a starting point, some people doubt the meaningfulness of the peace talks. What is the view of our organisation in this regard, Comrade Meles?

A. In considering this issue, the focus should not be on which side will benefit or lose from a solution which will bring permanent and lasting peace, or which side may accept it or reject it. Above all else, the focus should be on what kind of solution will ensure, for our country, real and lasting peace. Once the appropriate resolution for peace is posited, any political force which claims to be concerned about the welfare of the country and desires peace, should follow the route towards peace, irrespective of whether this benefits it or not. For any party to do otherwise, means that its intention is promotion of self-interest, rather than of peace.

Our organisation has proposed the establishment of a provisional government composed of all opposition forces including WPE, to bring forth a peaceful solution. It has made suggestions for a cease-fire agreement and for the realisation of the democratic rights of the people, including the means to enable them to resolve their problems democratically. These proposals were made primarily for the attainment of peace, and the respect of the rights and interests of the people. They are not forwarded either to benefit or to harm any political force. Therefore, if the Derg has the slightest regard for the welfare of the country and a desire for peace, it should accept these proposals. Had the Derg been concerned about the welfare of the country and had it desired peace, it would have accepted our peace proposal. But the Derg will not accept any meaningful solution, unless the opposition submit to its interests, irrespective of the concern for the country and the desire for peace. The talks will either bring about peace or reveal, once and for all, that the Derg stands not for peace, but for its own self-interest.

Q. Comrade Meles, let us move to a different topic. It is known that, in addition to the peace talks, our delegation has engaged in wide-ranging diplomatic moves abroad. What were the aims of this diplomatic initiative, and what were the results?

A. As stated, our delegation has undertaken wide-ranging diplomatic moves in the past few months. These moves were made in two areas; one in neighbouring countries, and another in Europe and North America. During its tour, our delegation met with nearly all the heads of state of the neighbouring countries, and discussed with senior government officials of the United States, the Soviet Union and important European countries.

In the neighbouring countries, the objective was to explain the actual situation in our country, and ask the respective governments to help contribute towards the ongoing efforts being made for securing peace in our country. Furthermore, the tour aimed to convey the desire of the Ethiopian people, to have good neighbourly relations, based on non-interference in internal affairs, and cooperation for mutual benefit. This was done with the purpose of creating propitious conditions for improvement of relations between neighbouring countries, after the demise of the Derg. The outcome obtained in this regard was very satisfactory.

The contacts made with the two super-powers and the European governments were intended, on one hand, to explain the current situation in our country, so that they might help the ongoing efforts to secure peace. More importantly, the objective was to explain that the Ethiopian people have, throughout history, fought for the freedom and integrity of their nation. Any effort by outside forces to impose their supremacy in Ethiopia, is bound to create havoc and instability, and is destined to fail. At the same time, however, we sought to emphasise that the Ethiopian people are keen to have relationships based on equality and mutual benefit. It may be said that the result was generally encouraging.

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EPRDF'S PROPOSAL FOR THE SMOOTH AND PEACEFUL TRANSITION OF POWER IN ETHIOPIA

The question of the resolution of the problems of Ethiopia in a peaceful manner, and the restoration of peace to the country, has now become an issue of the very survival of our country. A just and lasting peace, however, can only be attained through full and consistent democracy. Peace and democracy are inseparable in the context of the problems of our country.

If peace and democracy are to be restored, the present government must be replaced by a provisional government, in which all the political trends in the country are represented. Such a provisional government must restore all the democratic rights of the people, allow all political forces or groups in the country to operate legally and openly, and conduct a free and fair election for a constituent assembly under international supervision. Then, and only then, can elections for a democratically constituted government, which will resolve all the problems of the country in a democratic manner, be carried out, on the basis of the new constitution.

The Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), has consistently been calling for peace, ever since it was founded by the Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement (EPDM) and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF). It has been struggling for the implementation of its comprehensive peace proposal. The second plenary meeting of the leadership council of the EPRDF, has further developed its previous peace proposal, and presents it in the form of a fully-fledged programme for the smooth and peaceful transition in Ethiopia.

PROGRAMME OF THE EPRDF FOR THE SMOOTH AND PEACEFUL TRANSITION IN ETHIOPIA

1. To stop all the wars going on in the country and form a provisional government in which all political forces participate, so as to resolve all the problems in the country peacefully and democratically:
 - a. To conduct a persistent struggle, to persuade the present belligerent regime to accept the programme for a smooth and peaceful transition in Ethiopia, together with the armed struggle that is being waged. To enforce a negotiated cease-fire and to form a provisional government in which all political groups, including the party presently in power, will participate, if and when the government accepts the above-mentioned programme.
 - b. To remove the present government by force and form a provisional government in which all other political groups will participate, if the present government persists in its rejection of a peaceful and democratic resolution of the problems in the country.
2. To create favourable political conditions whereby the freely expressed will of the people will be the supreme arbiter:
 - a. To restore all the democratic rights of the people without any restrictions.
 - b. To make sure that all political groups have the unrestricted right to explain their views to the people, organise them and conduct peaceful political work.
 - c. To completely dismantle state organs that have been specifically created to suppress the peaceful and democratic political activities of the people.
 - d. To release all political prisoners and allow political refugees to return to their country without fear of reprisal.
 - e. To close all foreign military camps in the country and to make sure that all foreign military personnel leave the country.
3. To guarantee peace and stability in the country as a whole:
 - a. To make sure that all armed political groups enforce a negotiated cease-fire. To prohibit all attempts at stock-piling of arms and increasing of armed forces by any political group during the transition. To invite an international peace-keeping force into the country to further guarantee peace and stability during the transition.
 - b. To make sure that the provisional government spares no effort in the quest for the resolution of the wars in Eritrea, and in the different parts of Ethiopia, in a peaceful and lasting manner. To make sure that the provisional government publicly declares its intentions to safeguard the democratic rights of the people, including the right of self-determination, and to settle the wars through the fully and democratically expressed will of the people. To make sure that the provisional government takes concrete action to create conditions whereby the wars will be resolved through a democratically conducted referendum. To allow all sides in the present wars the right to carry out political work peacefully and democratically, irrespective of whether they wish to participate in the provisional government or not.
 - c. To work for regional peace and stability, as peace and stability in Ethiopia can be guaranteed only if there is peace and stability in the region as a whole, and in the world at large.
4. To make sure that the provisional government has a definite life span and definite tasks:
 - a. In order to give all political groups enough time to explain their views to the people and, at the same time, in order to make sure that the people have a government of their choice which will solve the problems of the country in a democratic and lasting manner as soon as possible, the provisional government shall function for a period of no more than two years.
 - b. The main tasks of the provisional government shall be to fully restore the democratic rights of the people, to guarantee the right of all political groups to conduct political work freely and openly, to conduct elections for a constituent assembly, to make sure that the constitution of Ethiopia is adopted in a fully democratic manner, and to hand over power to whoever wins in a free and fair election, conducted on the basis of the new constitution.

- c. In addition to the tasks mentioned in 4B, the provisional government shall have the following tasks:
- i. To carry out economic reforms to alleviate the suffering of the people, by agreement among all the groups participating in the provisional government.
 - ii. To help victims of the war and to take immediate steps to rebuild the war-torn economy.
 - iii. To safeguard general peace and stability in the country.
5. To democratically resolve the problems of the country on the basis of the freely expressed will of the people:
- a. To form a democratically constituted constituent assembly after a period of peaceful and democratic work by all the political groups, and free and fair elections of delegates to the constituent assembly.
 - b. To guarantee the right of all political groups to democratically compete for the election of their members to the constituent assembly, and to present their proposals for the constitution of the future Ethiopia to the constituent assembly. The constituent assembly shall draft a constitution after considering the views presented to it, and the constitution shall be adopted in a democratic manner.
 - c. To hand over political power to the political group / groups that win(s) the election that will be conducted immediately after the adoption of the constitution, on the basis of the constitution adopted by the constituent assembly.
 - d. To help the democratically elected government form a unified army and state organs.
 - e. To conduct all the elections under international supervision, to make sure that they are conducted in a free and fair way.
 6. To try to get acceptance, for the programme for smooth and peaceful transition in Ethiopia, among all political groups and people of the country. To hold constructive discussions on the issue with all political groups. To create a forum through which all forces that support the programme can coordinate their struggle for its actualisation.

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ON THE ERITREAN AND NATIONAL QUESTION

Q. One of the most complicated issues at present is the Eritrean question. Some parties say it is a national question, others say it is a colonial question. Different positions are taken regarding the solution. What is the stand of our organisation on this issue?

A. The political content of the question does not lie in its historical evolution and categorisation; whether it is a national or a colonial question is an issue on which arguments could be held for days on end. Where finding a solution is concerned, the historical evolution and its categorisation can be left to historians, as this would not have a fundamental bearing on the political content of the solution to the problem. The main focus, therefore, should be not on categorising the question, but on finding a solution to the Eritrean issue, which has confronted the Ethiopian people for more than twenty-eight years.

Another point that we must highlight when we treat this question, is that the differences existing between the various Ethio-

pian political organisations on the Eritrean question, do not lie in being for unity or not, nor in failing to understand the necessity of Ethiopia having seaports. Any Ethiopian political organisation would wish to see a large, united Ethiopia with seaports. The TPLF's wishes are no different in this matter; it would wish to see a united Ethiopia with seaports.

The differences are manifested not in the desires and needs, but in how these can be achieved. The basic difference lies in how these desires are conceived in the present situation. It is this fundamental issue that the Derg and its ilk deliberately wish to cover up; but it must be addressed fully.

Some political organisations, including the Derg, maintain that whether the Eritrean people like it or not, Eritrea must remain as part of Ethiopia. They contend that if the Eritrean people do not accept this, it must be imposed on them by force of arms. In fact, this is not a new policy. It is a policy that Haile Selassie and subsequently the Derg have tried to implement for twenty-eight

years. I do not think that it is difficult to realise the consequences of this policy. The Haile Selassie regime tried to implement the policy for thirteen years. Thousands of soldiers were deployed in Eritrea. The regime razed innumerable villages to the ground. But all this did not bring the Ethiopian people peace, nor the benefits they should attain from having a larger Ethiopia with seaports. The Ethiopian people gained nothing by sacrificing their sons to the Eritrean war. On the contrary, the problems intensified, broadened and became more complex. The massacres and cruelties forced more unarmed Eritreans to resort to armed resistance and struggle. The viciously cruel acts perpetrated against them in the name of unity, caused them to take a gloomy view of unity.

Even after the fall of Haile Selassie's regime, during the Derg's era, no new solution was presented. The Derg said that it was a problem inherited from the previous government, and that a peaceful solution would be found. But, in reality, all it did was proclaim clemency, saying that the "bandits" must lay down their arms. It gave no other solution and bided its time, in the hope that it would secure a decisive military victory. It is to be recalled that, 15 years ago, Mengistu Hailemariam, during a demonstration in Addis Abeba, had declared, with full confidence, that the Eritrean problem would be solved immediately by the army already stationed in Eritrea. The talk of a military solution has been repeated many times since. It is sustained by empty hope.

The consequences, however, were found to be even worse than under Haile Selassie; massacre of the Eritrean people is now more common than ever before. This has made the problem more profound and broad; and the Eritrean people's regard for unity has been eroded. Far from being solved by the army that was stationed in Eritrea in 1975, the problem has gone from bad to worse, and more than half a million additional Ethiopian youths have lost their lives. Yet the scale of the war has not diminished. The Ethiopian people have received no benefits from the unity and the maintenance of seaports, that was claimed to be ensured through force of arms, and the destruction of Eritrea. Rather, the Ethiopian people have been obliged to sacrifice their children and surrender their meagre income to finance the war.

It is clear then, that the undemocratic view that unity will be imposed through force of arms has achieved nothing; it has instead worsened the Eritrean problem during these last twenty-eight years of suffering. The problem has increased in depth and dimension, and the solution is becoming more and more complicated. It has caused death and suffering to reign in our country. It has prevented our people from benefitting from unity and seaports.

Although our organisation, in common with any Ethiopian, wishes to see a large united Ethiopia with seaports, it does not believe that this desire can be realised through the subjugation of the Eritrean people. Massacring people is inhuman and anti-democratic, and cannot be an option for our organisation. Therefore, we strongly oppose the bankrupt policy of the last twenty-eight years, that tries to impose unity in Eritrea through oppression and massacre.

Our organisation maintains that the problem must be solved within the context of people's democratic rights, in a peaceful and democratic way. The war must stop. Let those who are for Eritrean independence, and those who are opposed to it, present their case to the Eritrean people without imposition, and let the

Eritrean people choose from the options presented, through a referendum with international observers. Our organisation believes that the implementation of the people's decision is the only solution to the Eritrean problem. This is what we mean when we say that the Eritrean problem should be resolved through peaceful and democratic means.

Q. Some maintain that the Eritrean question should not be viewed only in the light of the Eritrean people's right to self-determination, it should also be viewed in the light of the rights and interests of the Ethiopian people. They hold that the Eritrean people's right to self-determination should therefore be restricted. Does the stand which seeks a solution to the Eritrean issue through referendum, contradict the rights and interests of the Ethiopian people?

A. I think it would be useful to examine this question from two aspects; namely, from a general theoretical aspect and in concrete terms as it is manifested in our country. When viewed from a general theoretical perspective, it is obvious that all the democratic rights of the people are interconnected and cannot be implemented separately. If the oppressed people are to have the rights to freedom of speech and expression, and these rights are seriously meant to be exercised, instead of being put in a constitution as adornments, then the right to organise freely must also be respected and implemented. Freedom of expression and of the press cannot be conceived and implemented without the freedom to organise freely and vice versa. In the same vein, the right to elect and recall leaders at any time, the right to free speech and expression etc, cannot be of any use without the right to conduct peaceful demonstrations, and organise strikes. Equally, the right of electing and recalling leaders and conducting peaceful demonstrations without the right of free speech and expression, are useless. In short, since the democratic rights of the oppressed people are interconnected and cannot exist separately, they are either all implemented fully, or all are suppressed. The right of self-determination is an integral part of these democratic rights and should be seen in this context.

A basic conclusion that should be stressed here, is that if the democratic rights of a certain people under a regime are suppressed, then the rights of other peoples under the same regime, will surely be suppressed. If the right to self-determination of a certain people is suppressed, not only will all other democratic rights of this people be undermined, but also the democratic rights of all the people under that regime will be too.

As we know, the recognition of the right of self-determination means accepting that people have the right to order their lives as they wish – whether it concerns regional autonomy, federation, or forming an independent government – without anyone claiming to act on their behalf. It means also, recognising that if people opt for unity, they maintain the right to order their internal affairs the way they see fit. The rights mentioned above are the rights of all people and cannot be usurped. That is what acceptance of the right to self-determination means.

It follows that where the right to self-determination is not respected, freedom of expression, freedom to organise, and the conducting of peaceful demonstrations etc, cannot be respected either. If a people who are denied the right of self-determination are granted the right of freedom of expression and the right to organise freely, there is no doubt that it will use these rights to remove the obstacles to the realisation of their right to self-determination.

Either the right of self-determination is allowed or the rest of the democratic rights are suppressed. Hence, when we talk about the democratic rights of the oppressed, it should mean all democratic rights, including the right to self-determination. The issue of respecting the people's right to self-determination, should not be seen in isolation as it is not a case of either respecting or denying a single democratic right; ultimately, it is a case of respecting, or not, all democratic rights.

If, under a certain regime, the right of self-determination of a particular people is suppressed, it is inevitable that its other democratic rights will also be suppressed. This is not all. A government that undermines the democratic rights of one part of the population, will also undermine the rights of the other peoples as well. To suppress freedom of expression for one part of the population, while leaving others free, is untenable, since the latter are bound to advocate for the rights of expression of the suppressed people. Thus, either the rights of all the peoples will be respected, or the rights of all of them will be undermined, to varying degrees.

How do the foregoing theoretical deductions relate to the reality in our country? In particular, what do they mean in relation to the Eritrean question? I think the answer is clear. To say that the Eritrean people's right to self-determination should be suppressed means, without doubt, that the Eritrean people's rights as a whole should be undermined. Consequently, it means that all the rights of the peoples under the same regime that is suppressing the Eritrean people's democratic rights, will also be undermined, as democratic rights are indivisible. It is said that no man is an island; what affects one will affect another. Likewise, when the rights of a certain people are suppressed, the rights of other peoples under the same regime will be suppressed. To say that the Eritrean people's right to self-determination should be respected, is not only to confirm that the democratic rights of the Eritrean people in general should be respected, but similarly, that the democratic rights of the Ethiopian people in general should be respected.

Genuine Ethiopian democratic forces have long struggled for the Eritrean people's right to self-determination, mainly because they were fully aware of the reality of this situation. They realised, correctly, that recognition of the Eritrean people's rights, far from conflicting with the Ethiopian people's rights, is in fact a necessity, if the rights of all Ethiopian peoples are to be respected. Aware that democratic rights are inseparable, they uphold the respect of the Eritrean people's rights so as to ensure the democratic rights of the Ethiopian peoples. When we examine the issue from its general theoretical aspect, the conclusion we arrive at is that to respect the Eritrean people's rights, is not to contradict the general objective of respecting the Ethiopian people's rights. Indeed, it has to be concluded that if the rights in general of the Ethiopian people are really to be respected, then the rights of the Eritrean people must be respected.

When we examine the issue in concrete terms, the conclusion we come to is no different from that above. The rejection of the proposal that the Eritrean problem be solved in a democratic and peaceful way, following the decision of the Eritrean people, is tantamount to advocating rule by force of arms over the Eritrean people. It cannot imply anything else. The experience of the last 28 years has clearly taught us that attempts to rule by force can create only resistance and defiance, which consequently lead to war. What have the Ethiopian people gained from a war that arose from the rejection of a democratic solution? If, by the

Ethiopian people, we mean the oppressed masses and not the ruling classes, then there has been no gain.

Those who are dying in a war started by the ruling classes, are the children of the oppressed. In the Eritrean war, no less than half a million youths from the oppressed masses have fallen. The ruling classes and their children have not shared this fate, except perhaps accidentally, and then the numbers are negligible. No prosperity or development has resulted from the nominal unity or the seaports. On the contrary, because of the war, the country's economy has been ruined to such an extent that recovery will be extremely difficult. There is no development, but poverty is increasing from year to year. The ruling classes, however, lack nothing. Now, as before, they live in luxury. It is the oppressed masses who are deprived and are suffering. How can it be said, then, that the attempt to rule by force has not severely damaged the interests of the Ethiopian people. How can it be contended that the resolution of the Eritrean issue, in a peaceful and democratic way, does not vouchsafe the interests of Ethiopians.

In order to understand the impact that the Eritrean question has on the rights of all the peoples of Ethiopia, it is necessary to look back and see how the problem evolved.

After the defeat of Italy, in the second world war, its colonies were placed under protectorateship. Eritrea, being one of them, was in this position for 12 years, under British protectorate. When the case was taken to the United Nations, it was decided that Eritrea should be federated with Ethiopia. Leaving aside, for the time being, the question of whether the decision was democratic or not, let us look briefly at developments since the federation, and at the war that is still going on.

The treaty on federation allowed Eritrea to have its internal administration and parliament. It allowed the Eritrean people rights of freedom of expression, of assembly and of strikes, even if in a restricted manner. Consequently, there were several political parties in Eritrea at that time, and there was what can be considered a free press. In addition, there was a provision in the treaty, that the arrangement could not be changed unless both the contracting parties requested the United Nations to do so.

When the Federal agreement guaranteed the above-mentioned restricted democratic rights to the Eritrean people, the monarchical, anti-democratic regime was in full power in Ethiopia. It is not possible for a state to be sustained for long, with one part democratic and another undemocratic. It was inevitable that either the restricted democratic rights in Eritrea would be allowed also in Ethiopia, and lead to the abolition of the undemocratic rule, or they should disappear altogether in Eritrea. There was no other choice.

The choice of the Haile Selassie government was clear and simple. Instead of introducing the democratic rights ensured in Eritrea to Ethiopia, and bringing an end to monarchical rule, it abrogated the agreement and the rights granted by the Federation. The Eritrean people wanted to have their rights respected; so they took their case to the United Nations and expressed their opposition in a peaceful way. Since the anti-democratic system could not tolerate opposition, the consequences were imprisonment, death and exile. It is because of these events that the war started. Yet, even then, Haile Selassie's regime did not try to find, through moderately democratic means, a solution to the problem and normalise the situation. Allowing democratic solutions would have meant dismantling the anti-democratic system. Thus, Haile Selassie's regime preferred to: "Feed bullets to

the disobedient." The fire of war that ensued is now so intense that it cannot be extinguished.

When the Derg says that it has inherited the Eritrean problem from the feudo-bourgeois regime, it is being more truthful than it realises. While it cannot be said that the Derg is telling the truth consciously, there are occasions when it blurts out the truth. One such occasion is when it says that it inherited the Eritrean problem from Haile Selassie. The Eritrean problem was created because Haile Selassie undermined the Federal agreement, and the democratic rights guaranteed therein. He had a reason to do so. He did not want the Ethiopian people to enjoy these rights and endanger his system. In other words, Haile Selassie bequeathed the Eritrean problem to us because he wanted to sustain his rule by suppressing the democratic rights of the Ethiopian people.

Instead of solving the inherited problem, the Derg has made it worse. If it is to solve the Eritrean problem, it has to allow the democratic rights of the Eritrean people. But if it does so, it cannot suppress the democratic rights of others. So the choice it had is either respect the democratic rights of the Eritrean people and those of the Ethiopian people, or, if it is to suppress the democratic rights of the people in Ethiopia, it must also do so in Eritrea. The ruling classes have created and worsened the Eritrean problem and have brought it to a stage where it cannot easily be resolved, only in order to maintain their anti-democratic system, and suppress the democratic rights of the Ethiopian people. The order: "Feed bullets to the disobedient", is aimed at the opposition, regardless of who they are! It is not possible to respect the rights of the Ethiopian people while, at the same time, suppressing the rights of the Eritrean people. The Eritrean problem was created by the ruling classes who had to suppress the democratic rights of all the Ethiopian peoples.

In short, it is clear that the ruling classes, by suppressing the rights of the Eritrean people, did not spare the rights of the others. As I have tried to make clear previously, it is only the resolution of the Eritrean issue in a democratic manner that will also ensure the democratic rights of the Ethiopian peoples. This is the reality of the situation, and cannot be doubted. To be sure, the Eritrean problem was created and aggravated by the deliberate actions of the ruling classes, to facilitate the oppression of the Ethiopian people and repress their democratic rights. That is why genuine Ethiopian democrats and progressives have been struggling so long for the Eritrean problem to be solved in a peaceful and democratic way. Thus, those who, under the cover of safeguarding the Ethiopian people's rights and interests, advocate the curbing of the Eritrean people's rights, including the right to self-determination, are knowingly or unknowingly following the policy of the anti-democratic ruling classes.

Q. Comrade Meles, there are also other views on the subject of the people's right to self-determination. Some people hold that the right to self-determination is now out of date, and that it destabilises unity and would dismember the country. If this is so, why does the TPLF insist on the implementation of the principle of self-determination? And does this principle imply dismemberment of the country?

A. Before answering the question, I think it is important to make a general observation. Nearly all the Ethiopian political organisations that have an interrelated history with the Ethiopian student movement, (TPLF, EPDM, EPRP, MEISON etc), express

their support of the principle of the right of the oppressed peoples, nations, and nationalities to have self-determination, up to and including secession. Even the Derg, when it found it expedient to snatch slogans from the people and use them in an anti-democratic way, had stated that it accepted the right of oppressed peoples to self-determination. What all forces who claim to accept the principle of the right of self-determination were primarily emphasising, was that the recognition of the right to self-determination opens the door for lasting and democratically-based unity and not dismemberment of the country. I do not understand why, when the TPLF advances the same principle, it is taken to mean dismemberment of the country.

However, let us go back to the question and examine it in some detail. It is popularly said that the Ethiopians cherish their independence and keenly guard their unity. We fully believe and accept the validity of this saying. Unlike the Derg and others like it from the ruling classes, who have turned it into an incantation, for us, this popular saying represents a veritable axiom. Indeed, the Ethiopian people keenly guard their unity.

What do we mean when we say this? For us it means one thing, and one thing only: that the Ethiopian people firmly believe in a unity forged by their own will, without anyone forcing them to unite, or imposing themselves as the defender of their unity, and killing, torturing and imprisoning them for it. The above popular saying implies, according to us, that once there is recognition of the democratic rights of the oppressed masses and the right to self-determination, the people, given a chance to choose democratically between unity and secession, will choose unity. This is how we interpret the popular saying that the Ethiopian people keenly guard their unity.

To attest the manifest desire of the Ethiopian people for unity, on one hand, and presume, on the other, that given the opportunity to choose between unity and secession the people will opt for secession, is in truth to believe that the people do not want unity; it is to doubt that they actually stand firm for unity. It leads to advancing the incorrect idea that the Ethiopian people will not choose unity of their own free will, but only through concerted coercion and the threat of arms.

We believe that the Ethiopian people do jealously guard their unity; they want to live united and equal. They do not require guardians and a coercing force for that. We believe they can maintain their unity of their own free will. In this light, our insistence that the right of all oppressed peoples and nations to self-determination be respected, not only affirms our complete faith in the respect of the oppressed people's democratic rights, but it also affirms that we do not have a single doubt about the Ethiopian people's intention to guard their unity. Having put this clearly, there is another issue that should be mentioned. The oppressed people's right to self-determination, seen in the light of the Ethiopian people's manifest desire for unity, amounts to assuring Ethiopian unity; why, then, the war? Why not accept the existing unity and leave it at that? Isn't the question of self-determination a hair-splitting exercise of the elite? If, in the end, what is wanted is unity, what use is it to argue whether the right to self-determination should be respected or not? These questions must be addressed. In our view, the differences on this principle are neither a matter of semantics nor hair-splitting. They are fundamental political differences.

We strongly insist that the people's right to self-determination should be respected, and that the people must be allowed to

demonstrate freely, through the exercise of their democratic rights, that they stand for unity. For the genuine realisation of Ethiopian unity, the people do not require either the monarchical system or the guardianship of the Derg and its ilk. It needs to be revealed that Ethiopian unity can be realised without the ruling classes. The ruling classes pretentious claim that they are the guardians of such unity is a hoax, and must be exposed as such; a united Ethiopia must emerge, not of the ruling classes, but of the oppressed peoples.

Moreover our advocacy for the existence of a united Ethiopia in which all the people live together, by their own free choice, and alternatively for the right of self-determination, means that the unity based on inequality should be replaced by a new unity based on equality. We are saying that unity must not be based on intimidation or violence; but rather on the people's realisation that unity is beneficial for them. It must not be based on coercion and contempt, but on equality and mutual respect. Such a unity will have a strong foundation unlike the existing situation, where the ruling classes manipulate nationality differences as a means of divide and rule, in order to prolong their stay in power.

Our insistence on the respect of the right of self-determination, up to and including secession, does not signify dismemberment of Ethiopia. Not at all. Since we are aware of the Ethiopian people's conviction regarding unity, we do not have the slightest doubt that when asked to choose democratically between unity and secession, they will choose unity. Those who doubt this are the anti-people forces, who insist that Ethiopia will disintegrate unless force is applied. The view that they advance in this regard is wrong and inherently undemocratic.

In other words, the difference of opinion on the issue concerning the respect of people's right to self-determination, is not based, in essence, on integration or disintegration of Ethiopia. For the practical result of the respect of the right to self-determination will not be other than the ensuring of unity. The difference between those who support the right of self-determination and those who propose to restrict and suppress this right, is not that of integration or disintegration of the country. The difference lies in the basic issue of what kind of united Ethiopia we want to see.

"We Revolutionary Democratic Forces, to strongly advocate, as we do, that the people's right to self-determination, like any other democratic right of the exploited peoples, be implemented without alteration or restriction, is to connote that there should be an Ethiopia which stands through the free choice of the people; an Ethiopia where there is equality and respect among the peoples." We are saying, there should be a unity that does not require the guardianship of the ruling classes; we are saying, there should be a unity which forecloses the opportunity for the ruling classes to maintain their regime of oppression and exploitation, in the name of unity. To insist on the democratic rights of the people, is to insist on an Ethiopia that fulfils the objectives that I have mentioned. When the ruling classes say that the right to self-determination must be curbed, they want an Ethiopia that suits their exploitation. I think it is useful to look at this aspect in more detail.

Like everybody else, the ruling classes say that the Ethiopian people stand firmly for their unity. The Haile Selassie regime used to say the same thing; they could not say otherwise because the people's devotion to unity was clear. But, having stated this truth, they turn around and claim that without them, the ruling

classes, the unity of Ethiopia cannot be respected. If democracy reigns, and one of the democratic rights, namely, the right to self-determination is implemented, they contend Ethiopia will disintegrate. Under Haile Selassie's regime, it used to be said that the crown was the symbol of unity, and without the crown the country would disintegrate. It was held that to advocate respect for the principle of self-determination was to advocate the undermining of the unity of the country. The Derg claims that its existence is the guarantee of unity, and respect of the right of self-determination will lead to the dismemberment of the country. All the ruling classes sing the same song with different tunes.

The Derg contends, on one hand, that the Ethiopian people firmly stand for their unity, and on the other hand, it says that Ethiopia will disintegrate if the people are granted the right of self-determination – which should in fact ensure their conviction for unity through democratic means. This is conflicting and confused; indeed, the ruling classes are false when they claim that without their protection, Ethiopia will disintegrate. If the Ethiopian people were given the choice to democratically decide between unity and secession, and they were to choose the latter, then it would mean that they are not for unity; that they have no belief in unity. Inversely, if they do have conviction in unity, given the opportunity to choose between unity and secession, they will not opt for secession. Hence the declaration by the Derg and the other ruling classes that the Ethiopian people are for unity on the one hand, and their claim that unless they guard the country's unity it will disintegrate, on the other hand, is clearly contradictory. Why do the ruling classes advance this contradictory view? Is it because they are not aware of the contradiction? No, they are well aware that their premises are contradictory. But it suits them to appear concerned and talk of unity day and night, because they hope this will help them to remain in power.

The Derg knows very well that the Ethiopian people stand firmly for unity. If the ruling classes want to stay in power through dissimulation and obtain acceptance from the public, they are forced to do two things. Firstly, they must give the impression that without them at the helm, Ethiopia will disintegrate. If they succeed in conveying this effectively, it would mean that the people will tolerate the oppressors for the sake of unity. Secondly, the ruling classes must portray as anti-unity, all revolutionary democratic forces who oppose them, and who advocate the respect of the oppressed people's rights, and they must try to distance these forces from the people by manipulating the people's sentiment for unity. To do this, the ruling classes will not hesitate to expound the sort of contradictions mentioned above.

To conclude, insisting on the people's rights to self-determination does not entail the disintegration of the country. It does entail, however, the crushing of the ruling class, and the creation of a united Ethiopia of the oppressed, where equality, mutual respect and justice are the hallmarks. To advocate the restriction or suppression of the rights of self-determination is not to guard unity; it is to advocate an Ethiopia where democratic rights are suppressed, where the ruling classes can do whatever they want, where suspicion and discrimination reign and where there is crisis and strife. This is, then, the difference between us – the revolutionary democratic forces – and the ruling classes, on the issue of the right to self-determination. We desire the crushing of the present ruling class and the emergence of an Ethiopia built on true equality. Hence, we insist that the people's democratic rights, including the right to self-determination, be fully imple-

mented, with no restrictions or impediments. The ruling classes want to divide the oppressed and play them off against each other, so that they themselves may do as they wish. That is why the ruling classes desire the suppression of the right of self-determination and other democratic rights. That is the difference between us and them.

Q. It is generally felt that the people of Eritrea take a gloomy view of unity. On the other hand, the people of Ethiopia do not wish Eritrea to be separated from Ethiopia. Indeed, in some quarters it is claimed that the people of Ethiopia will pay any price for this. Thus, it is contended that the TPLF should revise its stand on the Eritrean question. How does our organisation view this?

A. To start with, we should ask ourselves who would be the beneficiaries among those who hold such a view. Is it those who say, whether the Eritreans like it or not, we should hold Eritrea by force. Are they the ones who, in the main, fall on the battlefield, the oppressed whose meagre income is snatched from them to feed the war. Or is it those who brag from the comfort of their luxurious quarters? Although some segments of oppressed people, to whom the issue is not clearly presented, may hold this view, it is the ruling classes who advance this position, because it serves their interests.

As I have tried to show, this view does not benefit the oppressed, but serves to prolong the power of the ruling classes. Many examples can be given to prove this, so to further clarify the point, let us examine one of them.

As we know, from the very moment that the Eritrean problem began to worsen, just as there were forces, during Haile Selassie's time who created and exacerbated the problem, so were there democratic forces who advocated for its peaceful and democratic resolution. Of the earliest ones, the Ethiopian student movement can be cited as a clear example. What did Haile Selassie's regime say when the Ethiopian student movement articulated for a peaceful and democratic resolution of the problem? It alleged that University students were conspiring to sell Eritrea to the Arabs. Haile Selassie's regime claimed that it was the crown that strengthened the unity of the country, and that the student movement was treacherous, that it intended to cut off part of our country and sell it. A movement which advocated a peaceful and democratic solution, before the problem created by the regime worsened, was said to be conspiring for Eritrean secession. Haile Selassie's regime created the Eritrean problem to sustain its anti-democratic rule. And it used the situation to condemn the forces who opposed anti-democratic rule, and isolate them from the people. The magnitude of oppressed masses misled by this clever trick, and who helped maintain the anti-democratic rule by supporting the crown, was not small.

The Derg is no less guilty than Haile Selassie in this matter. After inheriting the problem, it fuelled it. It has labelled "secessionist" those forces who say that the policy of forced rule is anti-

democratic, bankrupt and ineffective. It has been trying to prolong its stay in power, and to mislead the people by presenting itself as an advocate of unity; while accusing the forces who struggle to replace tyranny with genuine democracy, of being anti-unity. The advantage it has gained from this situation cannot be underestimated; it has helped the Derg to prolong its stay in power while the plight of all oppressed people continues. In fact, the Derg has condemned even its own generals who have been massacring people under its instructions, claiming that they conspired to disintegrate the country. The generals rebelled against it and challenged it by contending that the Eritrean problem should be resolved peacefully; they realised that the policy of forced rule was a bankrupt policy.

So, the view that advances a military solution to the Eritrean problem has served the interests of the ruling classes; it has helped them to stay in power. But it has been adversely affecting the oppressed masses in all aspects of their lives. Because of this, and following the path of earlier democrats, we stand by our position in saying that the rights of the people to self-determination should be respected. One sector of the population cannot be free while the other is oppressed. Following such democratic principles, bequeathed to us by Waleign Makonen and others, we uphold our position that the Eritrean issue should be resolved through peaceful and democratic means. We shall firmly struggle against the ruling classes who created this problem through their policy of rule by force; it is a problem that has grave consequences for succeeding generations. We shall strive untiringly to make clear our position to those who unknowingly follow the view of the ruling classes. But we shall not campaign to involve the oppressed masses in an endless war.

Q. Comrade Meles, let me add another question on the Eritrean problem. There is a certain concern expressed by many people that if the Derg army in Eritrea is defeated, the Eritrean opposition organisations might declare independence in the resulting turmoil, before the people have a chance to decide their own future through a referendum. In this connection what is our view?

A. When we say the Eritrean problem should be resolved peacefully and democratically through self-determination or referendum, we mean all alternative choices should be presented to the people, who should decide what they want without any pressure. This is our unswerving stand. Therefore, we strongly oppose any modus operandi that contradicts the people's right to make their own decisions. Whether Derg forces are present in Eritrea or not, the issue should be resolved in the democratic way elaborated earlier. It should not be an issue to be resolved through inappropriate methods under conditions of turmoil. We oppose anything, from whichever side it may come, that negates this basic democratic principle. Incidentally, as far as we know, Eritrean organisations do not hold the position that the problem should be resolved without allowing the people to make their free and democratic decision on the issue.

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STATEMENT ISSUED BY THE TPLF ON THE OCCASION OF THE 15TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE TPLF

February 18th, 1990 marks the 15th anniversary of the beginning of the armed struggle of the Tigrayan people. It is a day on which the people of Tigray look back over the course of the 15 years of struggle, assess the changes and developments which have taken place, and review their determination and commitment in those years. It is a day on which they envisage the struggle ahead for total victory, and for peace, equality and democracy. In short, it is a day on which the people take stock of both the spectacular and dramatic changes which have taken place during this, the 15th year of their struggle, and the tasks which lie ahead.

It is an incontrovertible fact that the people of Tigray, led by the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), have scored major comprehensive victories in their struggle against the Derg. They have liberated the whole of Tigray from the oppressive rule of the fascist Derg. They have established organs of self-administration (baitos). They have implemented far-reaching and revolutionary land reform; land reform which has enabled the Tigrayan peasant to benefit from the fruits of his labour.

This determined and resolute struggle has earned them the respect, the admiration and envy of those who were trying to undermine the TPLF's struggle. The TPLF has dealt the Derg deadly blows, rendering it weak and totally ineffectual. As a result, the Derg's very existence is precarious.

This last year has been significant not only because the people of Tigray have liberated Tigray from the grips of the Derg, but also because they, with the EPRDF, have routed the enemy from other extensive areas in northern Ethiopia. For this last success, they have worked in close collaboration with other democratic struggling Ethiopian peoples and organisations. These manifold victories have made the Derg desperate, and have no doubt, brought the day of its downfall even closer.

The Derg has always entertained the sinister motive of containing our activities and confining the TPLF to Tigray. It hoped that, inside Tigray, we could be gradually weakened, and eventually eliminated altogether. But, what the Derg does not want to understand and did not count on, was the fact that the Tigrayan people are Ethiopians. It was thus a great blow when the TPLF joined hands with other Ethiopian democratic organisations, forming the EPRDF, and moved into central Ethiopia. This determined move on the part of the TPLF, has become an even greater threat to the Derg than the liberation of Tigray.

Our motive in joining hands with other democratic forces and moving into the rest of Ethiopia is very clear. The fate of the Tigrayan people is tied to that of the rest of Ethiopia. We believe

that the rights of the Tigrayan people can only be safe-guarded and their interests satisfied, when they, together with the other Ethiopian democratic organisations, fight against the Derg, wipe it off the face of Ethiopia and finally establish a democratic government which will respect these rights.

Since the establishment of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), most of the rural areas of Wello, Gonder and northern Shewa have been liberated including several towns.

The people in those areas who have been victims of the Derg's atrocities, and who have borne untold sufferings, no longer have to bear these injustices passively. They have welcomed the EPRDF forces with open arms, with great joy and enthusiasm, and have given them their full support. Moreover, they have openly expressed their commitment and eagerness to join the struggle by saying "you must not leave us, we must together destroy the Derg".

Within a very short period of time, we have won great victories over the Derg by launching a series of attacks. During this period, we were able to rally the people to our side, and these were the same people the Derg was trying to mobilise against the TPLF. These people are today organised and brought into our ranks - into the ranks of the EPRDF. Contrary to the Derg's plans and expectations, the people were inspired to express openly their commitment to the elimination of the Derg, by joining hands with our forces. This development has frustrated the Derg so much that it is acting more and more like a person with a deranged mind. As our struggle is intensified and our forces forge deeper and deeper into central Ethiopia, the final demise of the Derg draws nearer and nearer. That is why the Derg is massacring people indiscriminately, using any means available to it.

The slogan "everything to the war front", has become the hallmark of the Derg's war policy. The war-cry "everything against Woyane" [the TPLF], has been intensified more than at any other time. Accordingly the Derg is deploying all resources against us. It continues to forcibly conscript hundreds of thousands of young people into its army, sending them to the war fronts to be either cannon fodder or victims of the Derg's own killing squads. The aim of this frantic preparation and military campaign is to weaken us and to eventually recapture Tigray, if it can, and/or stifle our activities in central Ethiopia.

The Derg does not mince words in expressing its hostility towards the people of Tigray, making it open and official. It is

slandering and abusing the people as a whole. It is hanging Tigrayans who live in areas under its control. Daily disappearances and killings of Tigrayans have become common occurrences in cities and towns under the Derg.

The Derg, in its final days, is desperately trying to regain the initiative it has lost. To this end, it is conducting anti-people propaganda. In addition it has now openly turned to Israel for military support. In its desperate hour, it acts with no restraint, destroying the people and the country. This requires us to deal with the Derg quickly and resolutely, and bring the regime to an end. This is the only sure way to bring peace, justice, equality and democracy to the people. It is the only way to bring to a glorious conclusion the 15 year heroic struggle of our people.

As the day of reckoning approaches the Derg has made new proclamations of reforms, desperate to save its skin even at this final hour. In so doing, it hopes to dupe the Ethiopian people in general, and the struggling masses in particular, into complacency. It is trying to portray a new image of itself, as a government of reason and reconciliation. Yet the struggling forces know, the Ethiopian people know, that the Derg is tottering on the brink of total collapse. These frantic and desperate moves will not extricate it from the desperate position in which it finds itself. We are aware that the people's 15 years of struggle and the victories they have recently scored, have pushed the Derg to adopt its present behaviour.

On this day of the anniversary of our struggle the most important issue in the minds of the Ethiopian people is the prospect for peace. We believe that the question of peace should be given prominence above everything else. It will be recalled that we have made repeated calls for peaceful resolution of the conflict in Ethiopia. The Derg turned a deaf ear, and showed no interest whatsoever in peace talks. It was the May 1989 coup attempt, by its very own "loyal" officers, that finally jolted it into reacting, and making halting moves towards peace. It will also be recalled that the Derg forces in Asmara had, in fact, supported the TPLF peace proposal. This act shocked the Derg to the core; so much so that it announced its wish to engage in peace talks with all opposition forces. Even then, it was still wavering and undecided. It kept changing its position and saying that the call for peace talks applied only to Eritrea and not to Tigray. As a result, the Derg wasted considerable time before acceding to our call for peaceful resolution of the conflict.

It was our repeated and persistent call that finally brought the Derg to the table and forced it to hold talks. These talks, which were chaired by the Italian government, centred mainly on procedural matters and not on anything substantial. Despite the fact that it has, time and again, attempted to project itself as peace-loving, and despite its new pronouncements of reforms, the Derg continues to prepare to wage war against the people. It is to this end, in fact, that it has forged a stronger link with Israel. It is also with this in mind, that a high-level delegation, with Israeli advisers, has been despatched to the USA.

However, we are for peace, and we shall continue to struggle for peace. We are fully aware that one-sided peace is an impossibility, as it could be construed as recapitulation. We shall not disarm, and we shall not retreat from our struggle, but in the meantime we shall work for peace.

Famine still poses a serious threat to millions of people. Recent relief operations carried out by the Joint Relief Partnership (JRP), have not even met their own targets. International and internal pressure forced the Derg to allow free passage of food aid in theory, but deliberate obstruction prevents its full practical application. As a result, contrary to what was promised, not enough is reaching the needy. The Derg is, in effect, using food aid as a weapon in its attempt to starve the people into submission. If progress is to be made, other means must be sought; the cross-border operation and the internal purchase schemes are the most valuable and effective alternatives. We believe more lives will be lost unless the world redoubles its effort of channeling food through these avenues.

On this occasion, we reaffirm our commitment to the just and democratic struggle of the Eritrean people for self-determination. The Derg and its predecessors, under the pretext of unity, have flagrantly violated the inalienable rights of the Eritrean people to decide their own destiny. Despite all the Derg's attempts to quell the Eritrean people's struggle, it is forging ahead, causing enormous damage to the Derg. The TPLF believes that the just struggle of the Eritrean people must be resolved peacefully and democratically. A political solution by the Eritrean people themselves, as opposed to a military solution imposed by the Derg, would enable the Eritreans to decide their own future. We also take this opportunity to reiterate our support of the Oromo people's struggle for self-determination.

On this day, when we are jubilantly celebrating the 15th anniversary, we renew our vows to fight the Derg and make sure that it is destroyed completely. We shall never allow the Derg to return to Tigray. We shall not give it a chance to stand in the way of the successful advance of the EPRDF. We shall redouble our effort, fight even more resolutely in order to destroy the Derg. We shall intensify the activities in central Ethiopia and extend them even further afield. This is the only way to crown with glory the 15 year struggle and sacrifice of our people.

In the last 15 years, the heroic people of Tigray in advancing the revolution to its present stage, have made great sacrifices, paying with their lives and their property. The day of their victory is in sight. Nevertheless, the people should continue the struggle even more resolutely to bring it to its inevitable conclusion. They must frustrate and foil the Derg's desperate moves. The people's army should be strengthened, and even greater solidarity with other Ethiopians formed. This has been the path the Tigrayan people have been following, and this will be the way ahead until the Derg is destroyed.

We are entering the final phase of our struggle. The Ethiopian people who have suffered so much are about to enter an era of peace, justice, equality and democracy. The Tigrayan people, along with TPLF, are proud partners with all Ethiopian revolutionary democratic forces in this final hour.

**LONG LIVE THE JUST AND DEMOCRATIC
STRUGGLE OF THE ETHIOPIAN PEOPLE**

FAMINE RELIEF COMPROMISED

As we go to press, the famine situation in northern Ethiopia enters a critical phase. The four million affected by famine face a grim future. There are a number of reasons for this. It is an accepted fact that more than 90% of these four million famine victims are in areas outside the control of the Addis Ababa regime – specifically in Tigray, northern Wello and in Eritrea. This is in sharp contrast to the situation during the last famine of 1984-5 when the Derg held the towns along the major communication arteries. Then, people were forced to get food for distribution from the garrison towns. This is not the case today. There are no garrison towns in the famine areas. What is more, the bitter experience of 1984-5 has taught us that it is neither healthy nor productive to set up large feeding camps. The best option is to bring food to where the people are, and help them to continue with their farming and development projects of soil and water conservation.

Help could be channelled to the people through REST in Tigray, ERO in Wello and by ERA in Eritrea; the only charities working in the drought-affected areas where more than 90% of the victims live. Furthermore, it was agreed that aid could be channelled through the war zone from the port of Assab, by the Joint Relief Partnership (JRP), a consortium of churches in Ethiopia.

Severe famine still a threat

Unlike the famine situation of 1984-5, the current famine is not getting adequate press coverage, or the attention that it deserves, from the world community. Let there be no doubt that severe famine still poses a very grave threat. While it is well known that the JRP operation has failed to meet even the limited targets it set for itself, it is distressing to see that the world media is trying to create the impression that the famine has been averted by the work of the JRP, and the free passage of food through the government-held areas. This misrepresentation deliberately undermines the most efficient ways of channelling food aid, which are the internal purchase and the cross-border operations. Those who are truly concerned should consider these latter operations as a means of ensuring food reaches the needy before it is too late.

Internal purchase very effective

REST uses internal purchase to distribute aid quickly and efficiently to those who need it. Food aid, even when the world is ready and willing to give, takes much more time to reach the target areas. There

is surplus grain available for purchase in western and southern Tigray. This has now been estimated by an independent mission, sent out by the charities, at 110,000 metric tonnes, which is equivalent to one third of the requirement. Internal purchase has two major advantages. It is closer to the people, thus cheaper and quicker to transport than bringing food in from abroad. Secondly, by creating an internal market it encourages the peasant farmers to produce more next season, and injects cash into the economy and stimulates it. However, internal purchase cannot fully meet the needs; external food aid is indispensable. But, despite the clear advantage and merit of this scheme, it has been met with a great deal of scepticism and cynicism. As a result, the response has been less than gratifying.

REST's second strategy is the cross-border operation where its fleet of about 250 vehicles operate from the Sudan. Next to internal purchase, this is the most reliable way of delivering aid. Most responsible agencies feel it is perhaps the only way to deliver food aid into northern Ethiopia. REST is not only able to transport the food, it also has a network of experienced and time-tested, dedicated field staff who can, and do deliver food to the doors of the needy. REST people work closely with

the relief committees of local authorities who are fully responsible for the distribution of food aid, according to need.

Cross-border operation short of supplies

From January to May, REST transported and distributed 57,894 metric tonnes of food, through the cross-border operation alone. It could have done more if aid had been forthcoming. Today, REST's warehouses are empty, and once the rains come in earnest, cross-border operations will grind to a halt. The unnecessary deaths that REST and the people of Tigray have avoided, through careful management and distribution of food aid, could still occur, probably sooner than later. People, weak with hunger, will have to trek in search of food. They will not be able to stay on and farm. This is the scenario we have been trying to avoid, and we might have succeeded, had it not been for the actions of the Ethiopian government, and the JRP's vulnerability to government manipulation.

JRP not on target

With free passage, the idea is to transport food from the port of Assab, through the

war zone, to the needy in the north. Despite the lack of a negotiated agreement with the Derg, we have unilaterally ceased to push on with the war on this front. We have offered all the help that is required of us to the JRP. But, as mentioned earlier, the JRP does not seem to have the capacity to deliver food on the scale that is required. Many people in the affected areas will starve because the promises made have failed to materialise. We ask all those who insisted that this was the most realistic approach, what their assessment of JRP's work to date is. Surely they can see it has not been able to meet, by a long shot, the target it set for itself.

JRP at mercy of Derg regime

The JRP is a consortium of local church organisations and is subject to government manipulation. The government deliberately withholds supplies of diesel and

spare parts and no longer allows the use of Dessie as a loading point. It now insists that the JRP load at Assab where priority is given to the loading of war materials. It insists that only two twelve tonners a day are loaded and that the JRP wait until a convoy of 13-15 vehicles are loaded and assembled before they start off. These and other administrative obstructions are used as deliberate delaying tactics. Furthermore, the JRP follows the Derg's policy of urging the people to travel long distances to towns for food. As was obvious from the 1984-5 famine, this causes unnecessary suffering; on arriving at the distribution centres people were rounded up in the Derg conscription campaigns, they were exposed to diseases, and displaced from their environment, so they were not able to carry out farming duties to prepare the land for the coming of the rains. Consequently, REST has urged the JRP to take food to the people and has offered to distribute aid itself to the respective areas, under JRP supervision, if

this is desired. But, the JRP could not consider this proposal; other agencies are not permitted to work side by side with it.

We have kept our end of the bargain in this gentlemen's agreement because we believe people are more important. But, if our people are going to suffer because we subscribe to a misguided and unworkable policy, it will be futile.

We, therefore, urge the international community, and concerned governments, agencies etc to put pressure on the Derg regime to ensure that the safe-passage channel operates to full capacity. Priority must be given to humanitarian issues and not to politics. Above all, we again stress the need to use both the internal purchase and the cross-border operations, which are the most efficient ways of averting a famine of huge magnitude. If these two means of distribution are used the effects of famine may not be totally avoided, but they will be greatly reduced.



Trucks set off on the cross-border operation

ON THE PROPAGANDA PERPETRATED AGAINST THE TPLF BY THE DERG AND RIGHTIST FORCES

Q. Comrade Meles, the Derg is not the only one making allegations against us. Other forces are intensifying their attack on our organisation. Recently, the ex-foreign minister of the Derg regime, Goshu Wolde, likened us to the Derg, and castigated us as "monsters". What is the view of our organisation on this issue?

A. It is no secret that the Ethiopian people speak of the Derg government as a man-eater. So Goshu Wolde's characterisation of the Derg as a monster is not far from the public's perception. But while this characterisation is appropriate and accurate when used by oppressed Ethiopian people, when recounted by the likes of Goshu Wolde, it reminds us of the story of the monkey, who goes to town and, coming across a mirror, sees its own reflection in it and exclaims: "if I were as ugly as that creature I would kill myself."

Goshu Wolde's posturing is no different from that of the monkey. The man was a highly placed senior official of the Derg throughout the period when the Derg was massacring people, forcing parents to buy back the bodies of their dead children for 50 and 100 Ethiopian birr, and in general committing the deeds which have earned it the label "man-eater". He was involved in these massacres. Now, when the Derg government is beginning to crumble, he cleverly absconds and places himself at the disposition of foreign governments, posing as a fighter on the eve of victory, castigating the Derg as a monster. But it should be recognised that, just like the monkey, he is, in effect, characterising himself as a monster.

As stated, Wolde has also described the TPLF as a monster, no better than the Derg. By comparing the policies and actions of the TPLF and the Derg, I think it is possible to see the banality of his contention.

Apart from the Derg's failure to redistribute land equitably, it has severely exploited the peasants by forcing them to sell their produce at low prices to government marketing organisations. It creates collective farms and resettlement camps and villages, and oppresses and exploits the people.

The TPLF stands for equitable distribution of land. It upholds the right of the peasant to sell his produce freely at market prices anywhere. It rejects the forcible establishment of collective farms, villages and so on. It permits the oppressed peasants to leave the collective farms and villages to which they have been forcibly sent by the Derg. These policies have been put into effect in the liberated areas.

Having nationalised the means of production and distribution

in the name of the proletariat and the oppressed masses, the Derg has enabled its bureaucracy to operate these enterprises as they wish, and to derive luxurious living from them. But the proletariat and the oppressed masses have not obtained any benefit from these nationalised enterprises. On the contrary, their rights and interests have been undermined, more than at any other time.

Apart from this, the regime has severely reduced the scope of the indigenous owners of capital, to use their capital in ways that develop the economy of the country, as well as benefitting themselves. According to the TPLF, nationalised enterprises ought to be genuinely under the control of the proletariat and the oppressed masses who, through their independent trade unions and other means, should have a direct and determinant role in the operations of the nationalised enterprises; and the beneficiaries should be the oppressed masses.

The Derg has suppressed the democratic rights of the people, who must either obey, or suffer the consequences. The TPLF, however, believes that the democratic rights of the oppressed people should be respected without any restrictions. It recognises that the oppressed people need not only support the government or party in power, but should have the right to express its opposition through speech, the press, demonstrations and strikes. These rights have been widely put into practice in its liberated areas: the people discuss freely, without any restrictions, the basic issues which arise; they elect and recall their administrators democratically, and make their own decisions. If there are issues arising from our organisation's policies and practices which the people oppose, their right to oppose them in speech, in writing, or in demonstrations is respected. These rights have been put into practice. All the above-mentioned points are clearly enshrined in the programme of the TPLF.

Furthermore, the TPLF has not confined itself to the foregoing. It does not seek to impose what it considers to be beneficial to the Ethiopian people. It does not propose using force to remove the Derg and impose the implementation of its programme. On the contrary, it stands for the creation of a transitional government consisting of all political parties, not only strong political organisations, but also organisations which are miniscule when viewed in terms of political and military strength – such as EPRP. With the respect of the democratic rights of the people, and the creation of conditions for political organisations to freely and democratically address their objectives, the people should democratically make their choice from the range of options presented. The programme of TPLF and EPRDF can be realised if, as stated, the people believe it to be beneficial to them and vote for it.

As I have tried to explain briefly, there is a world of difference between the objectives and practices of the Derg and those of the TPLF. It is because of this that, on one hand, the oppressed people of Ethiopia bitterly dislike the Derg, while on the other hand, they give warm support to the EPRDF and the TPLF. This is not only evident in the high level of support given by the people in the areas already liberated by the EPRDF; it is also becoming clear that the oppressed masses outside the liberated areas have similar sentiments. The peasantry from Gojam, Arsi, Wollega etc are repeatedly sending messages asking the EPRDF to extricate them from the Derg's rule. They have well understood that the EPRDF and the TPLF, far from being monsters, are the means to their salvation.

Goshu Wolde's allegation that TPLF is a monster, no better than the Derg, does not arise from lack of understanding. He realises that the TPLF is against the interests of the members of the ruling classes, such as himself, and that it has both the objective and the means to destroy the interests of the ruling class. Whilst Wolde, as a senior official was, together with his friends in the ruling class, engaged in selling the country to the Soviets and massacring people, the TPLF fought against him. The regime for which he stood has been shaken by the TPLF. His current efforts to return to power, by placing himself at the service of the United States, and acting as an agent of Emperor Amhayes, and other remnants of the old ruling class, are being persistently unmasked by the TPLF. He is bound to realise that, as the support for EPRDF and TPLF increases by the hour, the days are numbered for the likes of him. Hence, it is natural that, while the oppressed people uphold EPRDF and TPLF as the means to their salvation, for Wolde and others like him, these organisations naturally seem like monsters.

Q. Wolde has said that he will fight these two monsters simultaneously. How does our organisation view this?

A. I think it is important to understand that these are not simply the views of an individual. Wolde now reflects the feelings of the remnants of the ruling class. He is advancing the views of the Ethiopian People's Democratic Alliance (EPDA), of the Ethiopian Democratic Union (EDU), of Emperor Amhayes etc. He also reflects the standpoint of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP), which has now completely abandoned its pre-1978 stand of limited revolutionary democratic views, and adopted a stand no different from that of the EPDA. Thus, the question which has been posed should be considered, not simply as Wolde's view, but that of the members of the old ruling class.

To return to the question, we are approaching a period in which the democratic revolution of the oppressed people, initially aborted in 1974, is consolidated and invigorated through EPRDF. The day is drawing nearer when the revolution will attain its goal and remove the ruling class entirely from power; it will bring into realisation the respect of the people's democratic rights and their economic interests and put our country on the path to development. Consequently, both the new ruling class, which seized power in 1974, and the remnants of the old ruling class who indulge in wishful thinking about making a comeback, are, with their foreign masters, presently engaging, more than ever, in desperate endeavours.

More than anything else, these forces have been frightened by the rapid acceptance that the EPRDF has gained from the people.

They see the oppressed peasantry and people in general rapidly rallying around the EPRDF; a people's army is being forged, based on the reliable support of the people; the oppressed are in the ascendant. As the oppressed rise up, so the sun sets on all the ruling classes. Thus, they accommodate their differences and join forces against the organisations of the oppressed people. Since they recognise that the source of power of the organisations arises from the people, they focus on isolating and estranging the people from these organisations. It is for this reason, that the ruling classes and the remnants, from Mengistu to Goshu Wolde to Emperor Amhayes, train their information media on the EPRDF, the TPLF and the EPDM. An articulated campaign of vilification against these organisations, is thus being waged by the media of these forces, and the media controlled by their foreign masters. They see that the EPRDF's attack on them has the backing of the oppressed people, and that this will lead to the realisation of the issues of the aborted February 1974 Revolution; its objective will be attained once and for all, and the country will be rid of the ruling class.

Goshu Wolde's response ought to be viewed in this context, rather than in isolation. This is a conjuncture in which the ruling classes have set aside their differences to join their forces against the TPLF, the EPDM and the EPRDF. Wolde's response is that of a member of the ruling class. His main fight is carried out against our organisation. Wolde's struggle is not against the Derg and the TPLF, but against the TPLF, the EPDM, and the EPRDF. His claim that he will fight against the Derg arises from his recognition that he will be condemned widely by the Ethiopian people, if he were to support the Derg openly. Otherwise he has neither the intention nor the desire to struggle against the Derg.

While we regret that there is internecine strife between various groups of the oppressed, we do not condemn the struggle against members of the ruling class, such as Wolde. He can fight if he chooses, but we invite him to come near and get a taste of real struggle, instead of feigning to fight from a comfortable chair in America, in the service of the United States' government.

Q. The Derg has recently conducted intense propaganda using individuals who are alleged to have been members of the TPLF. On our side, there has not been a detailed response for each point raised. Why have we not responded to these issues?

A. We are all in favour of engaging in discussions and arguments on basic political issues. We welcome mature criticisms of our objectives from our opponents; we do not shun them. In instances when such arguments are raised, we, on our part, also present our views in detail without hesitation. If the Derg is willing and has the courage to engage in such debate, we are ready to do so at any time, in public.

But we do not wish to engage in gossiping and cheap talk. This is not only because we have other relevant things to do, and have no time for cheap talk, but also because we believe that getting involved in such matters is a sure sign of political bankruptcy. Whilst there are, at this moment, several basic political issues which have appeared on the scene, we do not wish to waste time arguing about the ancestry of individuals and such things. The respect we hold for our own aims, and for the people, would not permit us to indulge in such things. We leave cheap politics based on kinship etc, to the tribalists. They can wallow in the mud of their squalid behaviour, but we shall not stoop to their level.

Spies recruited by countries apprehensive of the growing strength of the EPRDF, spread cheap gossip about individual's ancestry, and these get echoed by the Derg. These spies happen to fall into the Derg's hands and, to save their skins, they say anything and everything they are instructed. If the Derg wishes to spin propaganda from this rubbish, we can only take it as evidence of its political bankruptcy, and encourage it to continue. However, we will not fall into the mud in which it wallows.

Viewed from another perspective, we feel that the Derg's recounting of ancestry and gossip, will have the effect of significantly aiding our organisation. To start with, the fact that the Derg has put forward the spreading of such gossip as its main activity is a significant victory for the TPLF; it evidences the Derg's political bankruptcy. Reactionary forces in general are engaging in all the cheap propaganda that they can muster against the TPLF and the EPRDF. Even the people who do not know the TPLF and the EPRDF well, are bound to notice the cheapness of the propaganda and recognise it as lies. Even if the propaganda creates doubt, for a limited time, in some people's

minds, in due course they will be apprised of the truth and shed their doubts, either through explanations from people who know the TPLF and the EPRDF well, or through the practical activities of the organisations themselves.

In this process, we believe that the people will learn several important lessons. They will learn, from experience, the extent to which forces of reaction are perpetrating cheap and false propaganda against revolutionary struggling organisations. This lesson will, in the future, enable the people to see through the sort of propaganda which can be made by reactionary forces against the TPLF and other revolutionary democratic forces. It is inevitable that the ruling classes, when cornered, will resort to gigantic lies and cheap propaganda, and invariably the people will recognise this propaganda for what it is. All this is useful political immunisation for the struggle that will unfold in the future. Nothing could be more useful for EPRDF, the TPLF and all Ethiopian people, than this political immunisation. So, let them wallow in their mud. We can only tell them to go ahead, while we will keep out of the mire. But, we are ready to engage in an open and mature debate with any political force at any time.

ON THE CHANGES IN EASTERN EUROPE

Q. Comrade Meles, it is widely said that the TPLF takes Albania as its model. What is the position of our organisation on this matter?

A. Among the achievements which the Albanian people accomplished through their struggle, there are many which can be admired. A small country, with a population of not more than three and a half million, Albania has nevertheless resisted powerful countries. It has defended its national independence and honour, without being subservient to anyone. This is admirable. At a time when Third World countries and the countries of Eastern Europe are finding themselves burdened with debt, it is all the more encouraging to see that Albania is free of debt.

Despite the fact that Albania is not economically well-developed, it has fulfilled the basic economic interests of its people. In Albania there is no unemployment or lack of food, nor any shortage of such basics as clothing. Education and medical services are entirely free. Every citizen is educated up to grade eight [junior secondary level]. The great majority of the people have completed at least secondary school education. During the revolution, there was not enough food produced to feed the then one million people, even for six months. But today, agriculture in Albania is comparable to that of countries with high agricultural productivity. There is an excess output in agriculture, which is sufficient, not only to feed the three and a half million people, but also to be used as fodder for cattle and other livestock. In our view, all these achievements are admirable, and cannot lightly be dismissed.

However, we do not simply intend to repeat in Ethiopia what has taken place in Albania. We do not accept such things as models; we do not believe in models. We are struggling to find a concrete solution to the real problems of our own country. Our

objectives are clearly stated in our programme.

But, having said that, it does not mean that we can't learn from the experience of others – Albania for that matter, or any other country – adapting the lessons from their experience, to the conditions in our own country. Nor does it mean that we do not desire to establish relationships with other states, providing such relationships do not undermine our national independence and honour, and do not lead to intervention in our internal affairs, but foster mutual interest and respect. We learn from the experience of others, and we really need to establish good international relations. Other than this, we look for a solution which is related to the conditions of our country; we oppose any attempt to just copy what has happened in Albania or in any other country.

Q. At present, rapid changes are occurring in Eastern Europe. The Eastern European states have collapsed. How does our organisation view these developments?

A. To understand the rapid and admirable changes which have taken place in Eastern Europe, it is necessary to examine, in brief, the nature of the system in those countries, which was, in essence, no different from that of the Derg. The system was completely undemocratic; the people's democratic rights were suppressed. In fact, these were prison states. A few bureaucrats wallowed in luxury, in the name of socialism, while the broad masses were exploited. In a word, it was an anti-people system of bitter oppression and exploitation. It was a system that mobilised the people and encouraged violence. Thus, in the course of time, it was obvious that it would disintegrate.

Seen in this light, the rapid changes which took place in Eastern

Europe, show that any anti-people system, however strong it may appear, will fall in due course. An anti-people system, which suppresses and exploits, will not escape a people's uprising, however hard it tries to defend itself. The events also show that any imposition on the people will eventually fail, and once again, prove that there is no force capable of deterring the people, once they have risen up against oppression.

In this respect, I think the changes which have occurred in Romania offer an important lesson to our country. Of all the governments of Eastern Europe, the Derg regime most resembles the Romanian government of Ceausescu. It is known that the so-called constitution of the People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia was copied, by the dictator Mengistu, from Ceausescu's Romania. Ceausescu had an anti-people security force known as the Securitate and so has Mengistu's government a similar apparatus. Thus, the people who struggle against Mengistu and his lackeys, can learn many important lessons from the movement which toppled Ceausescu's government. It was evident that the Ceausescu army had participated in the killing of people during the first days of the uprising. However, when the army learned that the people were not going to give in, despite the massacre, it was left with two alternatives: either to continue massacring its own people, or to join the people and rise up against the Ceausescu government. Having chosen the second alternative, it rose against the Ceausescu regime. Ceausescu and his Securitate were isolated, and finally fell within a relatively short time. As there was no force capable of deterring the joint uprising of the people and the army, the agony of the Romanian people came to an end within a few days.

The Ethiopian people, and especially the Derg's army, can and should draw many lessons from the changes which occurred in Romania. The army in Ethiopia is massacring the people in a war which is waged in order to maintain the Derg government. The army, itself, is falling on the battle fronts. It is impossible that the massacres being perpetrated will deter the people who have already risen against the government. These events leave a black spot on the history of our country's army. It is also useless, as has been proven by recent experience, to try to topple such a government through a coup d'état. Just like the Romanian army, the Derg army should have mobilised the people for an uprising; had the army turned its guns on the Derg government, and joined the opposition forces, the Derg would not have lasted more than three or four days, and the Ethiopian people would have suffered less. This is an important point. What the Ethiopian people and history demands from the Derg army is that they learn from events which have taken place in Romania.

Q. Comrade Meles, in this connection, the main issue raised in some quarters is that the TPLF, taking note of the developments in Eastern Europe, should change its stand on socialism. What is the stand of our organisation on this issue?

A. In the first place, one thing should be clear. The TPLF is a broad based revolutionary, democratic front, comprising elements who have divergent views on socialism. Therefore, unlike the Marxist-Leninist League of Tigray (MLLT), the TPLF does not have a unified stand on socialism. The issue should not, therefore, be seen in the light of TPLF's stand, for the TPLF does not have a single stand on socialism. It is comprised of people with divergent views. The issue should be seen in terms of MLLT's position. The MLLT views the previous East European governments as dead enemies. It had never considered them as

its friends, nor as advocates of commonly shared objectives. This has already been demonstrated by the extensive political work it carried out to expose these anti-people governments.

What the MLLT means by socialism, is a system in which all democratic rights, especially the right of voicing opposition, is respected without pre-condition; a system in which justice and equality reign; which is totally different from the systems established in Eastern Europe in the name of socialism. Systems like those of Eastern Europe are undemocratic and must be destroyed by the people. Basing itself on these foundations, the MLLT has, for a long time, been advocating a socialism that upholds the rights of the oppressed Ethiopian people, being qualitatively different from the "socialism" of the Derg and of Eastern Europe. A real socialist system, where there is justice and democracy, can be built only when the people are convinced that it is for their advantage, and when their conviction and interests are implemented through their democratic choice. To attempt to build socialism, other than in this way, is to turn the country into a prison; to perpetuate a system of exploitation and oppression in the name of socialism.

The system that can be built in Ethiopia has, anyway, to respect primarily the democratic rights of the people, without any pre-condition. Different alternatives should be presented to the people democratically, so that they can choose and build the system which they consider best for themselves. Failing this, socialism will exist only as a political view in the minds of those who advance it. In concrete terms, the MLLT conceive socialism as a system which is democratic and just, and is entirely different from the Derg's system and that of Eastern Europe.

Since this is the belief of MLLT, it has no reason to change its outlook because of the debacle in Eastern Europe. It has been struggling to destroy the Derg's system, which is a replica of the states that used to exist in Eastern Europe. Therefore, the destruction of these regimes, far from making MLLT change its ideas, instead, proves the correctness of its outlook all along, and the justness of its fight against the Derg.

By keeping a steady position over a long period of time, MLLT has been able to establish its view on solid foundations. It has forwarded its solution based on analysis of the objective conditions of our country, and has been engaged in a bitter struggle. Reactionary forces have now intensified their attack on the MLLT, because of its strong position. On one hand, the MLLT has gained wide acceptance by the people, and has rallied them around its objectives, which it believes will bring solutions to the problems in our country. On the other hand, the MLLT is able to defend itself from the machinations of its enemies. Its objectives, which have been recorded in its minimum programme, are in essence, not very much different from those of the EPRDF and TPLF. There is no reason why the MLLT should change its outlook; the system which it has always fought against is falling, and it is clear that its objectives, which provide solutions to the problems of our country, are becoming widely accepted, and it feels strengthened. Its objectives are not simply qualitatively different from those of the Derg, but are also directly opposed to them.

Lastly, the MLLT has the right to advance an outlook which it believes correct, since this is the right of any citizen. It is also the right of the Ethiopian people to choose from the alternatives which will be presented to them; it will be up to them to choose the system which they think is best. There is no reason to imagine it will be otherwise.

ON THE DERG'S MOBILISATION DECREE

Q. Comrade Meles, currently, the Derg has decreed an all out mobilisation and is making preparations for war. What does our organisation think will be the result of this decree?

A. It has been characteristic of the Derg, ever since it took power, that whenever it faces defeat, it resorts to enforcement of mobilisation. With every new mobilisation decree, the Derg proclaims that it will destroy the 'bandits' once and for all, and record a strategic victory. This is the usual boastful tone of its call for mobilisation. Nonetheless, the mobilisations have never brought it victory. I think past experience shows that they were followed by worse defeats. Leaving aside the earlier years, if we simply look at recent experience, we can see the truth of this observation clearly.

For example, when our organisation launched a major offensive in the middle of 1988, the Derg announced a mobilisation decree, declaring emergency laws in Tigray and Eritrea. It geared the country's resources towards the war effort, and massed hundreds of thousands of young people at the battle front. It is to be recalled also, that the Derg claimed that it had not, until then, fully mobilised its forces, but was at that instance deploying all its forces to conduct an unremitting war, and to achieve a strategic victory.

I think last year's activity clearly shows that the string of decrees and boastful propaganda did not save the Derg from suffering a thoroughly devastating defeat. The Derg's current mobilisation of forcibly deploying young people in the battle fields and issuing one statement after another, is similar in content to previous mobilisations, however the form may differ. And it can be assumed, on the basis of past experience, that the result will not be any different from that of previous mobilisations. As the saying goes, 'a cracked glass cannot be of any value'. The Derg's regime, which already has one foot in the grave, cannot be saved by mobilisations.

While the mobilisation decree that is in operation, and its related activities, will not save the Derg from defeat, it is clear that it will have serious consequences for the people and the country. Furthermore, it is clear that hundreds of thousands of Ethiopian youths will continue to be forcibly taken to the war front. Because most of the rural areas in northern Ethiopia have been freed from the control of the Derg by the EPRDF, it is therefore evident that forcible recruitment will be focussed on rural areas and towns in southern Ethiopia. Hence, it can be assumed that Ethiopian youths from those areas will suffer more than ever before. It is clear that, of the youths of that area, it is the children of the poor, the oppressed, who will suffer most. The people themselves express it by saying, "the child of the rich to Bole [the international airport], the child of the poor to Tole" [a training centre for soldiers]. Generally, it can be assumed that more hardship and suffering are awaiting the oppressed of southern Ethiopia in rural areas and main towns.

If we look at the economic side, it can be seen that the damage that the mobilisation decree causes is far more severe than at any other time in the past. In order to prolong its stay in power, and following the philosophy of 'après moi le déluge', the Derg has,

through decrees, suspended all development activities, increased the level of what it forcibly snatches from the people, and is using all resources to sustain the war. There is no doubt that the consequences of such economic damage will be a burden not only to the present generation, but also to future ones.

It is also clear from the current mobilisation decree, that the Derg is trying, as much as possible, to divide the oppressed people by nationality, fomenting hostility along tribalist lines, and inciting internecine killings. Although there have not yet been mass killings, because people are aware and are strongly opposing this attempt, there is no doubt that if the Derg continues in this vein, it will leave a scar on the society whose effects will not be easily removed from the history of our country.

Moreover, the present mobilisation decree and military activity has exposed our country, more than ever before, to humiliation. The extent to which the mobilisation decree has brought dishonour to our country's sovereignty can be seen in the exchange and sale of an estimated 20,000 Ethiopian Felashas [jews]. So, even though the present decree cannot, in any case, save the Derg from worse defeat, there is no doubt that the consequences for the people and country are going to be much worse than ever before.

Q. If the result of the mobilisation is going to be as you described, what should the people of Ethiopia and the Derg's army do, Comrade Meles?

A. It should be noted that the Derg is implementing its mobilisation decree at a time when the EPRDF is saying that we have to solve the problems of our country peacefully and democratically, by the decision of the people, through the formation of a transitional government consisting of all political forces, including the Worker's Party of Ethiopia (WPE). It is by undermining this peaceful and democratic resolution of the problems in our country, and by giving precedence to its own interests, that the Derg is escalating the war. The Derg's mobilisation cannot have any other objective or effect except to marginally prolong its rule. The fall of the Derg is inevitable, and it is making a callous effort to take the country down the drain with it.

Therefore, oppressed people and soldiers must strongly oppose the mobilisation. They must voice their opposition, by propounding that our problems should be resolved peacefully and democratically, that the campaign to divide the people along nationality lines and promote tribalism should discontinue. They should refuse to fight. The oppressed soldiers should rebel by making similar demands; they too should refuse to fight, and should train their guns on the regime which has forced them into a war intended to prolong the Derg's stay in power.

Those officials who serve the Derg must contemplate what will await them when the Derg is brought to trial after its downfall. They have to realise that it is not to their advantage to continue serving the crumbling regime, engaging in hostility with the people, right to the last minute. They have to abandon their destructive missions before they are made to face the public.

ON ETHIOPIAN HISTORY AND THE FLAG

Q. Comrade Meles, our organisation occasionally uses the term "fairy story" to describe what is referred to as three thousand years of Ethiopian history. What does our organisation mean by this?

A. It is true that, sometimes, we use the term fairy story to refer to what is presented as three thousand years of history. But the reason is not the one given by the Derg and its propagandists. One reason why we say this is because of the claim that the crown rule is descended through three thousand years of history, from the reign of King Solomon, and other such stories.

The second, and main reason arises from such questions as the following: What does Ethiopia mean? And when mention is made of Ethiopian history, which part of Ethiopian history are we referring to? If by Ethiopia, we mean the area extending from northern Shewa to the north, which foreign historians refer to as Abyssinia, then we agree on the point that it has an interrelated history of three thousand years. The people of Tigray have, together with the other peoples of the area, contributed their share to this proud history. It is unthinkable that any Ethiopian born and brought up in this area, or an organisation originating from here, would refer to this history as a fairy story. This history is not a fairy story. The people of Tigray and of the TPLF like everybody else, are proud of it.

However, when we mention Ethiopian history, we do not mean only that of northern Ethiopia. More than half of the population of Ethiopia is found south, west and east of this area. The people of these areas, had their own history, which was not directly connected with that of the north, until the conditions which connected them directly with the north were created, during the period of Emperor Menelik. These areas became part of Ethiopia one hundred years ago when Emperor Menelik conquered King Tona of Welaita, Jotte Tulu of Wellega and Abba Jiffar of Jimma etc, and annexed new areas to his empire. If by Ethiopia we mean only the northern part, the reference to a history of three thousand years is correct. If by Ethiopia we mean both the north and south, we should accept the history which is a 100 years old, which is common to both. The history before that period of over three thousand years is not common to them; the south and north had their own separate histories.

To say that the whole of Ethiopia has had the same history of three thousand years is either to substitute fairy stories for history, out of ignorance, or it is tantamount to committing the highest crime and discrimination against the people of the south, and considering them as second-class citizens, by claiming that the history of the north is the history of both parts, as if the southerners do not have their own history.

When we refer to Ethiopia, we do not divide it into first and second class citizens. We do not present the history of one part as noble and that of the other as useless. Just as the northern part, extending from northern Shewa to the north, has its own inter-related history of over three thousand years, the people of the south have, in a similar way, their own long history. We accept and respect this.

Ethiopians who live in the north and south have become,

through history, citizens of one country. It is proper that we should all live in unity and brotherhood, without discrimination and oppression. But this peoples' unity cannot be maintained by substituting fairy stories for history, or presenting the history of one section as truly representative, while undermining the history of the other, or even denying its existence. This kind of presentation creates disunity and contempt rather than unity. Genuine and reliable unity can be achieved when the true history of all the peoples of Ethiopia is presented and respected; when their cultures and languages are respected, when equality prevails.

Q. Let me add another question in this connection. One of the things the Derg charges us with currently is tearing down and desecrating the flag. What is our position in this regard?

A. Before I answer the question, I would first like to underline one point which should be made clear. Any political organisation chooses its emblem and flag for identity purposes. This is customary in any country. Even WPE, a so-called political organisation, has its own emblem and a red flag. This is the standard of the organisation, but is not presented as a substitute for the flag of the country, nor is it considered as such. Similarly, the TPLF has its own emblem and flag, which serve as its identity. This has nothing to do with replacing the flag of the country.

Let me return to the main issue. The reason for having a national flag lies in its being the symbol of national independence and honour. The respect that a political organisation has for the flag of its country, is not measured by ritualisation of flag ceremonies. True measure of the respect given by a political organisation to the national flag, is indicated by the role it plays in the protection of the country's independence and honour. Thus, the one who dishonours and desecrates the flag is the political entity which dishonours, desecrates and sells the honour and independence of the country.

From this, we can best understand who desecrates the flag of Ethiopia – whether it is the TPLF or the Derg. The TPLF is an organisation which has managed to grow without being subservient to the east or to the west, making huge sacrifices for the country's independence and the liberation of the people. It is an organisation which advances its own independent position without bowing down to foreign powers. The TPLF struggles against Ethiopia being made a satellite of western or eastern powers. It is an organisation which stands against our independence being compromised. While others kneel down and accept subservience, submitting that Ethiopia cannot develop unless it becomes dependent on one camp or another, the TPLF has made great sacrifices, and continues to struggle for our complete independence. In a word, it is an organisation which in fact respects, and inspires the respect of, the flag of our independence and national honour.

In this regard, we find the Derg to be a regime who, without comparison in our history, has desecrated our national honour; in effect our flag. The Derg is a regime which has become

subservient first to the west, and then to the east; always ready to sell the independence and honour of the country to these forces. Just recently, in a manner unprecedented in our history, the Derg exchanged 20,000 Ethiopian Felashas for Israeli bombs. Nothing can desecrate the independence and honour of the country more than this; in other words, nothing can desecrate the flag of the country more than this. No matter how much the Derg bows to the green, yellow and red flag, it will never change the fact that it has desecrated our national honour in a manner never seen before. Therefore, it is the Derg and not the TPLF that should be condemned for desecrating the flag.

Besides, it is up to the people, and not the TPLF or any other organisation, to decide what the colour of the flag should be. Until their democratic rights are genuinely respected, and the people can decide, and until they uphold the present flag, or change it, our organisation has no policy of taking action in this regard. This needs to be properly emphasised. The Derg is carrying out a concerted propaganda effort in order to hide its crime of selling the country. It knows that the Soviets, to whom it is subservient, burnt the former Tsarist flag and replaced it with a new one. Why does it not say that the Soviets desecrated the flag of their country? The Derg pretends to be concerned and spreads vile propaganda to appeal to the emotions of the people. If it had been genuinely concerned about our honour and independence, it would not have sold 20,000 Ethiopians before the eyes of the international community.

Q. Comrade Meles, is there a message you want to convey to the Ethiopian people?

A. I assume the points I have presented so far will convey a message to the Ethiopian people. But there is a final general message I would like to pass on. The Derg, panicked by its inevitable downfall, has reached a stage where there is nothing it can do to maintain itself in power. While we are proposing that a provisional government consisting of all forces, including WPE, should be formed; that people's democratic rights should

be respected; that all political forces should be able to democratically present their objectives to the people, and that the people should choose what they think best through peaceful and democratic means; that the existing problems be solved through this democratic process, the Derg prefers to let everything fall to pieces, rather than lose its dictatorship. Led by these shameful motives, it is inviting the destruction of the country.

The Derg is forcibly recruiting hundreds of thousands of young people who will face death at the battle fronts. It is destroying and burning numerous Ethiopian villages. Development programmes have been suspended by decree, and all resources are deployed to the war, which is being waged for the sole purpose of maintaining the Derg regime in power. The honour and independence of the country has been lost, and individual Ethiopians are being openly sold to foreign governments. The Derg is causing antagonism among the oppressed, by spreading cheap propaganda on tribalist lines. By propagating such shameless propaganda, it is severely endangering the lasting unity of the Ethiopian people.

The political and ideological differences between us can, and should, be resolved without causing damage to our country. The peace proposal previously put forward by the EPRDF and the TPLF would enable this to take place. But what the Derg is doing is completely different. Its objective is to maintain its dictatorship for ever, or to destroy everything; it is bent on bringing about the total destruction of our country. I cannot understand how anyone who knows this and serves this evil objective can dare say: "I am an Ethiopian. I am concerned about my country and my people". Hence, all oppressed people should strongly oppose and foil the conspiracy which causes the people to kill one another. We have to save our country from destruction by resolving our political differences, through the people's decision, through peaceful and democratic means. The oppressed people and soldiers should, wherever they are, cooperate with the struggling forces. They should echo their opposition, and rebel against the Derg in order to save our country from destruction. We believe this is something that cannot be postponed. □

EPRDF'S STATEMENT ON THE OCCASION OF MAY DAY 1990

The workers of Ethiopia have celebrated May Day for many years. The regime that hypocritically vows to protect the interests of the proletariat, but which mercilessly exploits them, has, for appearance's sake, allowed the celebration of May day to take place.

During the last fifteen years the proletariat's living standard has radically deteriorated. As the Derg's own statistics show, the proletariat's real income has decreased by 50% from what it was in 1974. Meanwhile, unemployment has soared, with about one quarter of the labour force being unemployed. The security apparatus suppresses the proletariat, preventing them from establishing their own unions to protect their interests. Just as the general public's democratic rights have been suppressed by the regime, so have the rights of the proletariat. Indeed, the

Ethiopian people who overwhelmingly rose up against the ancien régime in 1974 with the slogan: "The worker is not a slave", have ironically become more like slaves than ever before. Our country, Ethiopia, finds itself in the midst of a cruel war, instigated by the anti-people Derg; a war in which the proletariat have endured grievous suffering. Against their will, they find themselves falling in battlefields. Their hand-to-mouth existence is made worse by the war, not least as they have to directly contribute to the war through levies imposed on them.

The EPRDF, which fights for lasting peace and democracy has proposed a programme which envisages the end of the suffering of the proletariat and oppressed masses; a programme by which their rights can be respected and which will enable the bitter struggle to come to an end. Recently, it has also formulated a

programme for a smooth and peaceful transition of power in Ethiopia.

While the EPRDF is unflinchingly struggling to find a peaceful and democratic means of solving the problems in our country, the regime and its henchmen continue to hinder the efforts by escalating the war. The Derg did all it could to disrupt the Rome peace talks, especially during the third round of talks, and caused their breakdown, thus demonstrating its anti-peace and militaristic stand.

On the eve of today's May Day celebrations, the treacherous act of public demonstration that the Derg, in collusion with the remnants of the old ruling class who live in exile, have instigated, is a testimony of their anti-peace stand. In the name of Ethiopian unity they have called for the escalation of the war. They praise the Derg's army which is currently engaged in the anti-people war, and which is the mainstay of the anti-people regime.

While the demonstrators make no criticism of the interventionist forces – the Soviet Union, North Korea and Israel – they condemn neighbouring countries that have nothing to do with the current situations. In order to cover up Israel's intervention, they now find it imperative to blame these countries to which the Derg previously gave the red carpet treatment.

Whatever dirty tricks the Derg and its supporters try to play, and whatever knots they try to tie, it can only worsen the situation and not solve the problems of the country. The only sure solution to our problems is the peaceful and democratic transitional programme of the EPRDF, which has received the wholehearted

support of the oppressed peoples. On this occasion the EPRDF again reiterates its determination to struggle for the implementation of this programme.

At the time of the celebrations of this year's May Day, more than 4.5 million of our people in the northern part of the country are on the verge of starvation. The EPRDF is doing everything it can to ensure that these people receive externally-donated food aid quickly through Sudan in cross-border operations. In addition, the EPRDF has allowed different Ethiopian churches to deliver food from Assab through Dessie. It has also withheld military operations on this road.

However, the anti-people Derg has done everything to ensure that the Assab route does not function to maximum capacity, by creating diverse problems. In addition it bombards from the air, convoys that transport food from Sudan to the famine-stricken areas. In a word, on this day of celebrations, the true nature of the Derg, and of the remnants of the previous ruling classes, are exposed, proving that there is no alternative to EPRDF's peaceful and democratic transitional programme.

The Ethiopian proletariat and the oppressed peoples of Ethiopia in general are called upon, more than ever before, to redouble their struggle for the implementation of the EPRDF's programme for the peaceful and democratic transition of power in Ethiopia. Only in this way can the danger hovering over our country be averted.

**THE PROLETARIAT SHALL BE FREE FROM
CRUEL SLAVERY!
VICTORY TO THE MASSES**

THE DERG FEIGNS REFORM

On 3rd March 1990, following a meeting of the Central Committee of the Worker's Party of Ethiopia (WPE), Mengistu made a speech which, in some quarters, was billed as the Derg's return to democratic rule. If we were to go by the publicity given locally to these pronouncements of change by Colonel Mengistu, then they would indeed seem sweeping and fundamental. The reality, however, is far from what the Derg's pressmen tried to portray. In actual fact Mengistu's statement avoids the main issues.

Mengistu, with his rhetoric, acknowledged that the policies that he has tried to implement in Ethiopia, in the last 15 years, have failed. He also stated that the changing international political and socio-economic climate has a significant bearing on Ethiopia. Was he, in fact, trying to say that his pay-masters cannot pay the bills for military hardware any

more? The announced changes touch upon the economic, social and political life of the Ethiopian people. They relate to the question of agriculture, trade and investment, housing and the all important and pervasive question of political freedom. Let us briefly examine what has been conceded by the Derg's regime, and what has not in fact changed, and why Mengistu made the statement at this time.

Concerning agriculture, it states that the peasant at long last can be the beneficiary of his labour, and will be able to sell his produce on the free market. The Agricultural Marketing Corporation (AMC) will henceforth cease to demand the produce of the peasant and fix the price. It will have to buy in the free market and compete with private merchants. The cooperatives and the collective farms will be

disbanded if the peasant farmer does not want them.

There will be no limit to private investment. Ethiopians will be free to invest in any business or industry they want, and there will be no threshold limiting capital investment. Similarly, people are to be allowed to enter the real estate business, to build houses, and to buy and sell houses without restriction.

Derg champions reforms it once condemned

There is nothing new in these concessions. The Ethiopian people, and the democratic forces fighting the Derg, have been waging a struggle to achieve these rights, and more, for the last 15 years. The Derg and the WPE have, on the contrary, repressed, killed and maimed people who championed these very same concerns. It is not possible to dupe the people now; after 15 years of the most oppressive rule, the Derg states that it wants to help create a new Ethiopia by abolishing the AMC and the collective farms and by permitting private investment, and the building and selling of houses.

These are not the gifts of a benevolent dictator, but the achievement of 15 years of continued struggle and sacrifice on the part of the workers and the peasants of Ethiopia. These are the achievements of the people's struggle against the continued existence in power of the Derg and the WPE. Mengistu and his men have been cornered, and their very existence is precarious. The people will not be hoodwinked into believing that their own victory, and the fruit of their work, and the sacrifice of many gallant sons and daughters of the country, is a gift from WPE. Didn't the Derg, at first, and then later the WPE, label us reactionary? We who agitated for these very same things? The TPLF and the EPDM were labelled reactionary because they championed the cause of the peasant and his right to benefit from the fruits of his labour. Why now this change of heart? It is the Derg's mistaken policy that has led to one of the worst housing shortages in the towns and cities of Ethiopia. It is the WPE's insistence on fixing the price of agricultural commodities, and forcing people into joining cooperatives and collective farms that led to the decline in output, and to food prices soaring sky high and creating abject poverty.

Derg policies reversed in EPRDF liberated areas

In the liberated areas under the EPRDF, the Derg's policies have already been reversed. Peasants sell their produce in the free market. Private enterprise is guaranteed and people can build, buy and sell houses. There is no restriction on people's economic activity; on the contrary, private initiative is encouraged. Thus, the so-called reforms of 3rd March are the outcome of the resounding victory that the people and the democratic forces are scoring against the Derg and WPE. But this victory, for which the people have paid so much in sacrifices during the last 15 years, is only a partial victory. There is no guarantee that the Derg will not go back on its word, as long as political power is completely in the hands of the regime. The people need total and unequivocal all round victory. And to achieve this, they have to strengthen their struggle to completely destroy the anti-people regime.

Mengistu also tried to project an image of change on the fundamental issue of democracy and the future government. The WPE was renamed as the Ethiopian Democratic Unity Party (EDUP). All other parties will be allowed to operate under the umbrella of the EDUP. What Mengistu is trying to achieve is the bringing of all parties and political forces under his own tutelage. There is nothing new in this move. This is reminiscent of the early days of the Derg. Then, as now, when the people were calling for a popular government, Mengistu favoured bringing a number of groups and movements under his control to form the Union of Ethiopian Marxist-Leninist Organisation. What happened to those that joined this organisation is a matter of historical record. The question is why would organisations have a hope under the new renamed WPE? If free political expression is allowed, why can't they all be free and exercise their rights equally? In any case, who is giving and who is receiving? If the WPE, or its new successor EDUP, are to survive, it will have to be as a result of the support of the Ethiopian people. The people are not ready to accept a situation where fundamental democratic rights are not guaranteed. If the people are not able to exercise their democratic rights, free of any restriction, what sort of democracy will that be? Can there even be free elections short of full democracy? The people should be free to elect whichever party they prefer, and any party should be able

to campaign freely. Then, and only then, will we be entering a democratisation process.

For free democratic rights to be exercised it is essential that the Derg's apparatus of state security and intelligence should be abolished. These are the organs that have caused so much imprisonment, torture, maiming and the death of tens of thousands of Ethiopians. How can the people's democratic rights be respected as long as the very organs of oppression are still in existence?

As stated earlier, the WPE has come thus far because it finds itself cornered and on the verge of collapse. The military balance is irreversibly against the Derg and in favour of the democratic forces. Mengistu's so-called reforms are taken to prolong his life in power and nothing more. How can one interpret the situation otherwise, when the Derg is at the same time escalating the war, and openly preaching hatred between peoples.

Derg escalates war

Indeed, the so-called reforms have already been overtaken by subsequent events. Following the fourth regular session of the *shengo* [parliament], the Derg freshly enacted a general mobilisation decree of war in late June. This threatens to put the country on a war footing with forcible conscription, recall of retired military personnel, requisition of private transport vehicles, reduction of the government budget for social services and development and redeployment of resources as well as civilian personnel for war and mobilisation of funds through levies and other means. Thus, the Derg intends to redirect the economy and the people into war. Is it in such an environment that the Derg wishes to implement economic reform, or even political changes towards the realisation of democratic rights. On one hand, the Derg unilaterally terminates the Rome peace talks, and on the other it pretends to be interested in reforms. Having closed the door on a peaceful solution to the problems facing the country, it makes gestures of reform, fully aware that the necessary environment for the effectualisation of reforms – economic or political – is lacking, and will not be encouraged by it to emerge. This fresh call of mobilisation for war, clearly reveals the emptiness of the Derg's so-called reform. The oppressed people have, therefore, to intensify their struggle for genuine economic and political changes.

NEWS

SOCIO-ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES

SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION

In spite of the severe famine, from January to June this year, people in the liberated areas worked very hard and enthusiastically at soil and water conservation. Knowing that their future depended on the success of this work, and despite the continuing famine situation, they implemented the agricultural development soil and water conservation programmes in 64 different sub-districts of Tigray. When the work was completed, celebrations were held in many of the districts.

VACCINATION PROGRAMME

At the beginning of March, a Third World First visitor to Edaga Arbi in Tigray, witnessed the vaccination of 17,000 people, between the age of 2 and 45, against meningitis. Due to lack of supplies only one team of twelve was working, instead of the projected three. The vaccinations took three nights and a morning, and were car-



Terracing in Kiltebelesa district in March this year

ried out at night to avoid bombing raids. The medical team was trained by Médecins sans Frontières, France, in a one month on-the-job training scheme. This immunisation campaign was organised by the Health Department of the TPLF.



Young girl... one of the 17,000 vaccinated against meningitis in early March

SCHOOLS CELEBRATE END OF SCHOOL YEAR

As the rainy season approaches, all the schools in the main towns and rural districts of the liberated areas have been celebrating the successful completion of the school year activities. Ceremonies were held throughout June in which many people, including parents, took part.

Because of the government policy of bombing civilian targets, school activities take place under cover of darkness. Once it loses ground, the government devastates the economic and social activities with aerial bombardments, which make the people all the more determined to defeat it. Where the

Derg has destroyed, the people have rebuilt. They have fought hard for their schools which are evidence of their relative well-being, in the face of constant threat from the government.

ANNIVERSARY OF HAUSIEN MASSACRE

The second anniversary of the slaughter of more than 2,500 victims by the Derg's fighter planes, in an open market in Hausien, on 23rd June 1988, was solemnly observed throughout Tigray, in other areas liberated by the EPRDF and by Tigrayans abroad. Demonstrations were staged involving hundreds of thousands of people. They strongly condemned the Derg's atrocious acts and vowed to destroy it completely, so that, in future, the people of Ethiopia can lead peaceful and prosperous lives.



Last lessons before the start of the rainy season

ESTABLISHMENT OF PEOPLE'S COUNCILS IN LIBERATED AREAS

The establishment of People's Councils, in areas liberated by the EPRDF, is progressing with preliminary conventions being held in Wereilu, Wadla Delanta Awraja, Raya Kobo Awraja and in many other districts. The Wadla Delanta Awraja convention was held on 30th May, and elected 366 delegates to represent the *weredas* [districts] of Tsehai Mewcha, Wadla and Wegen Tena. The Raya Kobo Awraja convention elected 231 to 303 delegates, including 9 committee members, for each of the *weredas*: Robit, Gobiye, Kobo and Alamata. In addition a total of 1,000-1,200 delegates participated at the formation of administrative councils in four *weredas* in Gayint Awraja.

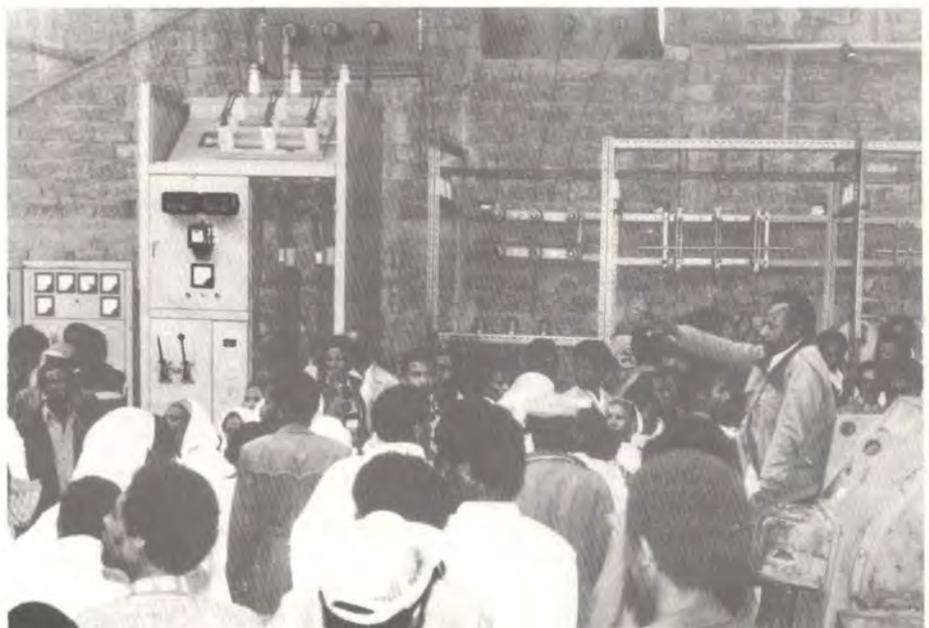
These councils, which were formed with the full participation of the people, through arduous struggle, form a strong foundation for the further democratic administration of the country, and guarantee the consolidation of liberated areas through the effective implementation of the democratic programme of the EPRDF. Now that the oppressive and exploitative system has been done away with, people are enjoying their democratic rights through these local administrative structures – one of the prerequisites of lasting peace in the country.

PEOPLE'S CONFERENCE HELD IN EPRDF LIBERATED AREAS

A total of 629 representatives from Tigray, Wello, Gondar and Shewa, took part in a conference which was convened between

24th May and 3rd June. Also present were people who recently rose up against the government in their part of Gojam province. Issues discussed included EPRDF's proposal for a smooth and peaceful transition of power, the consolidation of liberated areas, the Eritrean question and the right of nations and nationalities to self-determination.

A seven point resolution, centred on the implementation of the EPRDF proposal for peaceful transition in Ethiopia was passed, and participants expressed their support with slogans such as "We will fight to the end for the realisation of EPRDF's programme", "Resolve the Eritrean problem through peaceful and democratic means" etc.



Power is restored to Makele – the central generator (see over)

RADICAL LAND DISTRIBUTION CARRIED OUT

Equitable distribution of land has been one of the important tasks carried out in the previously liberated and newly-liberated areas this year; areas included Enderta Awraja, 6 sub-districts in Raya Azebo, Wolkait and many other places. From the end of May and throughout June huge demonstrations were organised by the people to show their support of the distribution, and to express their enthusiasm at being able to benefit from having their own land.

ELECTRIC POWER RESTORED

The electric generator, which was destroyed by the Derg during its evacuation from Makele in February 1989, has been repaired and is now in service. The cost of repairs was met by the people,

who contributed more than 60,000 Ethiopian birr. An inauguration ceremony was held to celebrate the restoration of light to many towns, to which 450 guests were invited. The towns of Adigrat, Adua and Axum have also had their power restored. The people have seen for themselves that there is no problem that they cannot solve if they struggle together.

POPULAR SUPPORT

While Ethiopians in the liberated areas have been fully participating, and supporting the EPRDF forces by supplying materials and manpower to the war front, those abroad in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Abu Dabi have contributed 72,759 Saudi Rheels, equivalent to nearly US \$20,000, towards strengthening EPRDF forces. In Europe and America their donations amounted to more than \$24,000, while people in Sudan continue to make generous donations amounting to hundreds of thousands of Sudanese pounds.

MILITARY NEWS

DERG REPEATEDLY FOILED IN DEBRE TABOR

Following the victories of last December, when more than 10,400 Derg troops were put out of action in the provinces of Gonder, Wello and Shewa, **between January and March this year** the government lost a total of 21,072 soldiers, including 18,918 dead and wounded, on the Debre Tabor front. The EPRDF recaptured Debre Tabor and, in addition, took control of the towns of Wereta and Hamusit. They then launched attacks on Derg troops at Addis Zemen and at Abay Bridge near Bahir-Dar, both in Gonder province. Huge amounts of armaments were captured including 23 tanks, 90 trucks, 25 RPG anti-tank guns and 1,396 light weapons.



BM21 multiple launcher captured at Debre Tabor

FURTHER MILITARY TRIUMPHS

Following its defeats in early March, the Derg also suffered further losses in Wello and Shewa. Towns such as Gugsu, Wereilu, Meragna and Alem Ketema were liberated by the EPRDF forces in battles lasting from **25th-30th March**. Ground gained amounted to at least 150 kilometres. Ten brigades of the Derg's army were destroyed – there were 3,050 dead, 150 wounded and 1,200 taken prisoner. Materials captured included 2 multiple launchers, 22 trucks and 4 tanks.

On **12th April**, the Korea-trained 21st and 103rd commando brigades were destroyed when EPRDF forces attacked the garrison towns of Karakore and Etaye (in Shewa). As a result of two battles in north-east Shewa, Yifat & Tumuga district was brought

under the control of the EPRDF. On **13th April**, the 91st brigade of the 8th division was destroyed at Degaga. In total, 872 Derg soldiers were killed, 533 wounded and 551 taken prisoner. A variety of medium and small sized weapons were captured, as well as 7 Moterela Israeli-made radio communicators, taken for the first time in the battle ground.

DERG'S 102ND DIVISION WIPED OUT

On **22nd May**, EPRDF forces attacked the Derg's 102nd division, stationed at Lemma, about 80 miles from Addis Ababa. Fierce

fighting put three brigades out of action. An additional unit, known as the Tiger battalion, and a tank platoon from the regime's special body-guard brigade, were also annihilated. The Derg's losses were 4,000, including 1,400 dead and 2,012 prisoners of war, including many officers. The 102nd division had previously been repulsed when it tried to penetrate Alem Ketema, in Merabete district on 29th April, losing 1,507 troops.

SPECTACULAR VICTORIES IN NORTHERN SHEWA

As a direct response to these previous defeats, the Derg planned a three-pronged offensive to recapture Alem Ketema. It deployed a total of 19 brigades, including the 3rd special Anbessaw ("lion") division and 5 special commando brigades, which initially took control of the towns of Wereilu and Meragna (15 miles north of Alem Ketema). Six of the brigades advanced from southern Juhur and Lemma and attacked Alem Ketema. EPRDF forces carried out lightning attacks on enemy forces garrisoned at Gimba, thereby intercepting the Derg troops, dividing and destroying them. On 7th June EPRDF forces attacked the Derg at Tebasit (about 16 miles south-west of Dessie). Finally, in a battle which took place on 15th-16th June, the EPRDF sur-

rounded and incapacitated 7 brigades of the 3rd division. Government casualties in this series of battles were huge - a total of 32,494 Derg troops were put out of action, including the following officers: the Commander of the 10th brigade Major Shiferaw, the Commander of the 43rd Special Commando Brigade Major Sultan and the 4th Special Brigade Commander Major Bogale who were all killed. Among officers taken prisoner were the 8th division political Commissar Captain Abebe Wondyifra, the Head of Military Intelligence Captain Abebe Kiflu, the whole command of the 3rd division ie. the Commander Colonel Sereke Berhan, the Political Commissar Major Tariku Bekele, Head of Military Intelligence Major Tamene Tirifie, Campaign Officer Major Anberbir and Deputy Commander Lieutenant Colonel Asfau Demek. The coordinator of the 4th division Major Melaku Kebede and many other officers were also taken prisoner. Enormous quantities of weapons were taken including 5 tanks, 46 trucks, 5 ZU23 anti-aircraft guns, 61 heavy, 496 medium and 10,638 light weapons.

In addition, the EPRDF inflicted heavy losses on Derg troops on 22nd June, again in northern Shewa. Two brigades of the 11th division were annihilated when EPRDF recaptured the towns of Mahal Meda and Molale in Menz & Gishe district. Casualties were: 595 dead and 870 wounded and there were 1,054 prisoners of war.



POWs captured at Debre Tabor - some were under 15 years old

ETHIOPIAN AIRFORCE DESERTIONS

It was reported that Lieutenant Abera, pilot of a MiG 21, and Captain Sintayehu, pilot of a MiG 23, dropped 2,000 kgs each of Israeli-made bombs into the Red Sea, on 14th and 17th April respectively, before deserting to the North Yemen capital of Senea. In the last week of April, co-pilot Lt. Daniel Bekele and master technician Getachew Hagos forced pilot Col. Hailemariam Ferede to stop bombing and land his Soviet-made Antonov 12 in North Yemen. Such desertions demonstrate the feelings of revulsion and futility in the airforce, at government bombardment of civilians.

DERG CALLS FOR ESCALATION OF WAR

At the 4th congress of its *shengo* [parliament] held on 12th-24th June, the Derg passed several irresponsible resolutions aimed at mobilising the people for an escalated all out war. Resolutions passed included the following: the need for continued military recruitment from all sectors of the population, all retired soldiers and officers, members of the police force and security guards of the finance department to return to active service, all citizens to make financial and material contributions to the war effort, all public transport services to be used exclusively for the war effort, mothers and retired civil servants to participate in the war effort etc. The Derg has realised it is in an impasse; the days of its fascist rule are numbered. But it obviously intends to continue wholesale destruction until its eventual demise.

SIXTEEN THOUSAND POWS JOIN EPRDF RANKS

Ten thousand of the 13,000 prisoners of war, captured following the fall of the 605th corp, have volunteered to join the ranks of the EPRDF. In addition, 6,000 joined EPRDF from the 604th corp, which was beaten in Shire in February 1989. This illustrates the EPRDF's democratic treatment of prisoners of war and, also, the inevitable alliance of oppressed soldiers with EPRDF.

FURTHER DERG ATROCITIES

Continuing its bombardments of liberated areas, the Derg bombed Alem Ketema on 2nd May with planes and mortars, killing four civilians and destroying two houses and other property. The village of Kicha in Merabete Awraja was bombed on 11th June and 23 people were killed and 13 wounded. Sixty houses were destroyed.

In addition, four of the Derg's fighter planes bombarded Adi Abun, a suburb of Adwa in Tigray for forty minutes on 23rd June this year. Ironically, the attack took place just as the people were observing the anniversary of the bombing of Hausien (described

above). In this recent bombing a girl (Zafu Mekonen) was wounded, several animals were killed and much property destroyed. The church of Abun Teklehaimanot was slightly damaged. But, the people of all these liberated areas are not cowed by the Derg's acts; instead, they reaffirm their determination to fight against the Derg, on the side of the EPRDF.

OROMO PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC ORGANISATION FOUNDED

In a move essential to the advancement of the democratic revolution in Ethiopia, the Oromo people founded their own organisation, on 25th March 1990. The Oromo People's Democratic Organisation is strongly committed to the struggle towards the democratic revolution and the realisation of the right to self-determination of the Oromo people, within the EPRDF. In the establishment of this and other democratic organisations, we can witness the rooting out of the evils of centuries old mistrust and suspicion between nations and nationalities.

DEMOCRATIC REVOLUTIONARY OFFICER MOVEMENT FOUNDED

Captured officers have united to form EDORM, the Ethiopian Democratic Officer's Revolutionary Movement. Its creation advances the democratic revolution in Ethiopia. It urges both oppressed soldiers, and officers of the lower echelons, to detach themselves from the evil machinations of the Derg, and to ally themselves with the forces of democracy. It is committed to establishing peace and democracy in Ethiopia, and saving the country from the menace of the Derg.

DMLE CONVENE 3RD CONGRESS

Between 31st May and 5th June 1990, in the liberated areas, the Democratic Movement for the Liberation of Eritrea (DMLE) convened its Third Congress. A total of 112 representatives participated, 80 with votes, 36 with non-voting status and 6 observers. Representatives from the TPLF, EPDM and OPDO read out solidarity messages, as did Eritrean organisations such as the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) Central Command and the ELF unified organisation. The Eritrean People's Democratic Movement (EPDM) sent a message which was read out during the congress.

Among the resolutions passed were the condemning of aggressive Soviet social imperialism in Eritrea and the condemning of the EPRP's and EDU's flawed stand on the Eritrean people's right to self-determination. Calls were made for the Eritrean organisations to join in a unified front, against the Derg. Those present vowed to struggle to ensure the people's democratic rights. They expressed their support of the Ethiopian democratic national and multi-national struggles, which fight to ensure the Eritrean people's right to self-determination.

THE TPLF 15TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS



TPLF 15th anniversary celebrations

In February and March this year, celebrations of the 15th anniversary of the TPLF took place throughout the liberated areas and in many countries abroad. In the Sudan, in Khartoum, Gedaref and other towns, it was celebrated by the TPLF's mass organisation and many thousands of people, including Eritreans and Sudanese, participated. Similar occasions took place in various European countries, in cities such as London, Frankfurt, Stockholm, Rome and Milan. A great number of people attended celebrations in more than ten states of the United States and in Toronto, Canada.

At nearly all the celebrations in Europe and America, a recent video entitled "We will never submit", was shown, which highlighted the current developments of the struggle. There were scenes from the liberation of Makele, including the devastation left by government Migs and army, interspersed with scenes of active fighting, interviews with captured soldiers, footage of debates within Tigray – at conferences and at the local *baitos* [people's councils] – and excerpts from Derg propaganda. Throughout the video it was clear that the TPLF enjoyed widespread popular support and that the struggle against the Derg's regime is truly democratic, supported, as it is, by the masses.

In London, solidarity messages were read out by party organisations and movements. Among others, there were the Communist party of Great Britain, the Communist Party of Spain, the

Turkish Communist Party (TDKP), the Eritrean People's Liberation Front, the Ugandan National Liberation Front (A-D), the Black Liberation Front and Third World First. In Germany, there were messages from the Iranian Labour Party, the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) Central Command, the Oromo Women's Association in Europe and six other organisations. At celebrations in other countries different organisations and communities expressed their support of the democratic revolution of the Tigrayan people and praised the massive victories achieved so far under the leadership of the TPLF. The parties and organisations fully commended the EPRDF's proposal for a peaceful transitional government in Ethiopia.

At European and American celebrations, representatives of TPLF in the respective areas read out the organisational statement, which highlights the current developments of the struggle, emphasising the need for a revolutionary democratic change in Ethiopia and the formation of a transitional government following the fall of the Derg, and the necessity of renewed commitment to completely destroy the anti-democratic regime.

Following the statements, questions were invited from those present and a wide range of subjects were covered. A great deal of interest centred around the formation and platforms of the EPRDF, and the nature of the provisional government to be formed, the famine situation, relief aid, women, the peace talks in Rome and so on. There were addresses on the achievements of REST and the TPLF in Tigray; many spoke of the tremendous determination of the Tigrayan people to solve their own problems by democratic means, and of their active support of the TPLF. But mention was also made of the drought still affecting Tigray and the damage wrought by Derg forces. Many stressed the urgent need to counteract these setbacks with more economic support from those outside Tigray. At all the celebrations, there was an overwhelming response to the call for donations which was a clear demonstration of the feelings of solidarity with the struggle of the Tigrayan people.

The enthusiasm at all the celebrations was a clear indication of people's awareness, around the world, of the triumphs of the TPLF, not only in Tigray but throughout the liberated areas of Ethiopia, which extend now through Wello, Gonder and Shewa to within eighty miles of the capital.

A VISIT TO TIGRAY & NORTHERN WELLO

On February 18th this year, I was awoken in Makele at dawn by a volley of gunfire which signified the beginning of the 15th anniversary celebrations of the TPLF. Later, as dusk fell, heralding the time when government MiG fighters return to their bases, the streets of Tigray's capital began to fill with people. By sunset, thousands were parading through the town, waving banners, chanting slogans, singing, dancing: creating a carnival atmosphere of a kind I have never before experienced.

I was visiting Tigray and northern Wello as a member of a two-person delegation from Third World First, the student-based campaign against international poverty and injustice. The purpose of the trip was to consolidate links with Tigrayans, through TPLF and REST, and to encourage Third World First groups in Britain to campaign for a change in attitudes towards northern Ethiopia.

For Tigrayans, the celebrations marked one year's liberation

from the Derg government. In Makele, many people speak of the suffering endured before the town was liberated. Under the government, the town was used as a garrison for the Derg army. The hospital was used almost exclusively for wounded soldiers, government officials and their families. Its prison held any Tigrayan suspected – often wrongly – of involvement with the TPLF, and stories abound of the routine torture sessions endured there and of inmates crammed, sometimes 60 to a cell, with barely enough room to lie down and sleep. When the government finally conceded defeat in Makele, the Derg soldiers and officials made sure they didn't leave the town without destroying the electricity generating plant, the only light industry factories in Tigray and the pumps for the town's water supply. Now, the water supply has been repaired; the hospital is running and open to all, with a small but dedicated and highly-motivated staff; and the people of the town have elected a provisional administration and are preparing to establish *baitos* (people's councils).



"Now we have our democratic rights" – women at dawn in Edaga Arbi

Throughout Tigray, people were quick to inform us of the achievements made under the TPLF. "Now we have our democratic rights!" is a common cry – and it is no empty slogan. The well-organised grassroots democratic structure ensures that baitos, elected by and from the people, determine policies which, as Aregash (the Central Committee member responsible for baitos) explained, "touch the people's lives".

On attending meetings or congresses, it is difficult not to be inspired by the degree of participation in the democratic process and the level of commitment of the elected administrators. Meetings are characterised by the thoroughness with which policies are debated and discussed. And, since policies can only be formally adopted at baito level – and any policy suggestion from TPLF can be rejected or amended after discussion – there is a strong feeling from the people that they are the ones who hold the power.

The strength and determination of the people came across most strongly on a visit to Sobaya, north of Adigrat, where people have been suffering greatly due to the drought. A woman and two children had died of malnutrition-related disease the night before we arrived. And yet, rather than finding people in their homes, waiting passively for grain to arrive (as the British media

seems keen to suggest), we discovered entire villages terracing the mountainsides in order to make the most of the next rains. This was part of a national soil and water conservation campaign, co-ordinated under the agricultural department of the TPLF. Such is the determination of the people to work towards building a future free of famine and injustice which encapsulates these Tigrayans' inspirational struggle.

In Sokota, in northern Wello, piles of stone lie where houses used to stand. Last September, large parts of the town were destroyed and 70 people were killed in two MiG attacks. And near Adua, in central Tigray, 52 camels were strafed by MiGs as they were travelling to grazing land. This is the Derg's response to the revolution in northern Ethiopia – terror and destruction. But each atrocity is responded to by the people with renewed commitment to the struggle and increased support for the forces of the EPRDF, which offers the people of Ethiopia the opportunity for total liberation from the Derg's tyrannical regime, and creates conditions for true democratic unity.

Will Campbell,
Third World First

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- **Location.** Tigray is situated in the northern part of Ethiopia. On the north and east, it is bounded by Eritrea; on the south by Wello and southwest by Gondor regions; and on the west by Sudan.

- **Natural resources.** Sulphur, salt, potash, iron, copper, gold, zinc, gum arabic, geothermal energy, etc.

- **Occupation.** 90 per cent of the population is engaged in agriculture

- **Population.** 4.5 - 5 million

- **Area.** About 102,000 sq kms.

- **TPLF.** The current popular democratic struggle began on 18 February 1975.