

has never been willing to accept that it is illegally occupying Namibia despite even the newest policy for transition which was agreed on by South Africa and SWAPO. This policy was to have United Nations supervised elections. SWAPO has acknowledged this from the very beginning and says it will continue its armed struggle to break free from the Apartheid policy of S. Africa and Western Intervention.

Moreover, Justin Ellis, a white South African, and a member of the Anglican Church of Namibia, was expelled from Namibia. Ellis documented several instances of brutal force and other irregularities in connection with the registration of voters; These atrocities were published in the Christian Centre newspaper on November 29 in Namibia.



## ERITREA—500 YEARS OF STRUGGLE

In its eighteenth year today, the Eritrean struggle is the longest ongoing armed struggle for national liberation in Africa. In the 17th year of the war, with the Eritrean people on the threshold of victory, a new situation has developed. The character of the war has changed. It is no longer a war between the Eritrean people and the expansionist regime of Ethiopia. Instead it has become a war

between Eritrea and the Soviet Union. I will try to explain how this has happened. However, before I discuss the current situation, I would like to give a brief overview of the history of the Eritrean struggle.

For the past 500 years, Eritrea has been the setting of almost continuous war. Our country has been the battleground of various contending armies, on the one hand, and the scene of war between our people and the forces of aggression, on the other. The first Europeans to set foot in Eritrea were the Portugese, but they were immediately followed and expelled by the Ottoman Turks. The Turks first landed at the strategically important port of Massawa. From Massawa they pushed to occupy all of Eritrea. The Turks plundered our country and exploited the people until 1865, when they were replaced by the Egyptians.

Egyptian occupation of Eritrea was shortlived because the partition of Africa by various European imperialist powers had begun and was nearing completion. By 1885, the year the imperialist invasion of Africa was officially sanctioned at the infamous Berlin Conference, Eritrea had become the victim of Italian colonial aggression. The Italians first invaded Eritrea in 1869, but did not crush the resistance until 1889, when Eritrea officially became an Italian colony. From 1889 to 1941, Eritrea remained an Italian colony, but in 1941 Italian colonialism was replaced by British control. A new era was about to begin.

The British developed a plan, the so-called Bevin-Sposa plan (named after the then-foreign ministers of Italy and Great Britain.) This plan attempted to divide Eritrea along religious and regional lines, annexing Western Eritrea to the British colony of the Sudan, and the Eritrean plateau in the Eastern lowlands to the then British neo-colony of Haille Selassie's Ethiopia. The Bevin-Sposa plan was foiled, however, by the resistance of the Eritreans, and the support that this resistance received in the United Nations. With the failure of the Bevin-Sposa plan, U.S. imperialism now took a hand in the Eritrean 'problem.' Using its dominant position at the United Nations, the U.S. introduced a federal resolution that called for an association between Eritrea and the Ethiopian Empire under Haille Selassie. This resolution was opposed by both the Eritrean people and the U.N. commission on

Eritrea (made up of Burma, Norway, Pakistan, South Africa, and Guatemala.) The commission attested to the desire of the Eritrean people for self-determination, and this testimony was supported by most of the Asian and Latin American countries, and ardently advocated by the socialist countries. However, U.S. imperialism would not be stopped. In the words of then Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, while from the point of view of justice the rights of the Eritrean people should have been considered, the strategic and economic interests of the U.S. dictated that Eritrea be federated with the U.S. ally, Ethiopia.

Thus, federation was planned and imposed on Eritrea in order to serve the overriding interests of U.S. imperialism. During the federal period the national, democratic, and human rights of the people were trampled upon, until in 1958 the Eritrean flag was torn down, the government was forced into a purely administrative role, and the Eritrean assembly was stripped of most of its authority. In response to this situation, Eritrean workers, students, and other patriots carried out a mass protest demonstration in March, 1958, and Eritrean workers began a general strike that paralyzed the neo-colonial economy in the major urban centers. The Ethiopian army of occupation responded with force, killing over 540 Eritreans. This bitter experience was a turning point in the national liberation struggle. After 1958, Eritrean patriots realized that peaceful political struggle could not hope to achieve the aim of national independence. The movement to liberate Eritrea began as a clandestine movement in 1958, with the goal of preparing the way for armed struggle. Due, however, to certain organizational weaknesses, and also to the backlash of repression from Ethiopia, the liberation movement advanced very slowly. In 1961, armed struggle was launched by the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF.) The ELF lacked, however, a concrete program behind which to mobilize the Eritrean people. As a result, the liberation movement suffered a number of setbacks. A bitter internal struggle began within the ELF, and after a time, the more progressive forces within the ELF split off from the ELF and established the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF.)

The EPLF was established in 1970, and was, at the time, greatly at odds with the

ELF. In 1971 a civil war broke out in Eritrea, in which the ELF attempted to destroy the EPLF. This was unsuccessful, however, and in 1974 the civil war came to an end. On October 20, 1977, the two groups came together and formed a United Front. In April of 1978, ELF and EPLF established three joint committees which had the function of coordination of the struggle against the common enemy, and at the same time carrying on a democratic struggle within the organization in order to resolve the remaining obstacles to unity. This, in a nutshell, is the process that led to the development of the EPLF, and resulted in the almost complete liberation of Eritrea, and the implementation of the programs upon which the future Eritrea would be based.

So, what is the present state of the Eritrean revolution? Eritrea is made up of various religious groupings, regions, and nine different nationalities. The colonial system, with its new social and economic structures, resulted in the emergence of an Eritrean working class. This development helped to break down the traditional barriers that separated the various communal groupings in Eritrea. In the process of common struggle against common foreign enemies, a national consciousness has developed and consolidated among the people. The Eritrean struggle has become a popular one.

Present-day Eritrean society is basically colonial and semi-feudal. The overwhelming majority of the people are peasants and nomads who live under abject conditions of poverty, ignorance, and backwardness. One result of the struggle underway is the transformation of these conditions. Side by side with the war of national liberation is the struggle for social transformation. In the liberated areas, villages, and cities, people's assemblies have been established as the basis of popular power. The process of economic and agricultural development are also important objectives. Over 300 schools have been built in the liberated areas, and modern medical services have been made available to the people (often for the first time ever.) Above all, the people are being organized, politicized, and armed to defend the gains of the revolution. So, in Eritrea today, a profound process of social change is underway. Both this process, and the just struggle of the Eritrean people for self-determination, deserves the support of all freedom-loving people.

After years of struggle against U.S. imperialist-backed Ethiopia, as the liberation forces were on the verge of success, the Soviet Union intervened on the side of the Ethiopian military dictatorship against our revolutionary movement. What led to this situation? In March of 1978, the Ethiopian military Junta began mobilising all its available resources with full political and military support from the Soviet Union. With the help of Soviet aid, Ethiopia prepared to launch a full-scale military offensive against Eritrea. In July, 120,000 Ethiopian troops launched its offensive against the liberated areas in Eritrea, and opened up nine different fronts. On all these fronts the Soviet-backed offensives were initially crushed, but, after long and bitter fighting the Ethiopian aggressors made some headway in the south-western corner of Eritrea. But, by the end of August the fighting had practically come to a standstill, and it was clear that the Ethiopian offensive was not going to succeed in crushing the liberation forces.

The Ethiopians were then forced to ask for more Soviet aid, and having done so they launched the second main offensive on Nov. 18th, 1978. Once again, the Eritrean people resisted on all fronts, but could make very little headway against Soviet-backed Ethiopia. So, the EPLF decided to make tactical retreats from some of the less important fronts and to strengthen the defences in the more strategic liberated areas. This proved a wise move, for once the most strategically important areas were strengthened, further Ethiopian offensives were halted.

The Soviet entrance into the war has drastically changed its nature. A Soviet general now directs ground operations, and another Soviet general is coordinating aerial bombardment (which includes napalm, defoliants, phosphorus, and plaster bombs similar to those used in Viet Nam.) There are also over 200 Soviet military experts and many Soviet and Cuban troops.

The result of this direct intervention by the Soviets has been suffering on a massive scale. In the last month alone 5000 Eritreans have been killed, nearly 10,000 wounded, and more than 100,000 made homeless. The new situation is bound to prolong the struggle and multiply our sufferings, yet, we will not be defeated. In the final analysis, our experience confirms that it is neither the size of the aggressor army,

nor the quantity and quality of its weaponry that carries the day; it is rather the conscious men and women who know what they are fighting for, and who will achieve victory, whatever the cost to themselves. The Eritrean people have tasted freedom, have known what it means to control their own lives, and will never return to bondage. For this reason, we are absolutely confident that, in the end, victory is ours.

The following was a transcript of a speech by And Berhane, a representative of the Eritrean People's Front (EPLF). It does not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Southern African Support Committee.

