

*Ethiopia*

**THE**  
**ETHIOPIAN REVOLUTION**  
  
**and**  
  
**THE**  
**PROBLEM IN ERITREA**

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## I. THE ETHIOPIAN REVOLUTION

History is replete with instances wherein oppressed classes wage a dogged fight against the ruling class thereby crushing the exploiting minority. The Ethiopian case is no exception to this rule even though the course treaded by it has a peculiar characteristic of its own, dictated by the objective conditions that have prevailed in the country. The oppressed masses of Ethiopia have conducted persistent and protracted struggle throughout the ages although the resultant effect has been simmering than explosive.

Since revolutions are manifestations of the class struggle within a society and more so of the exploitation weighing heavily on the oppressed, it will be fitting at this juncture to take a brief look at the nature of the feudal exploitation in yesterday's Ethiopia.

For several hundred years, the feudal lords have subjected the Ethiopian peasantry to destitution and the most abject poverty. Robbed of his land and the produce of his labour, the peasant was left to eke out a bare existence. In conditions that differed not much from slavery, the Ethiopian peasant was forced to offer his person and family to the service of the feudal lords. His existence was akin to that of a beast of burden. In times of war, particularly during the occasional power rivalry that flared up among the feuding lords, the peasant was duty-bound to fight for his oppressors. In the ensuing battles, he was compelled to become a cannon fodder leaving his family to utter misery. The hardships borne by the Ethiopian peasant and the sufferings he underwent in gruelling circumstances is a long saga of oppression. The emergence of the feudo-

capitalist system ushered in an even worse situation for the peasant and the working people in general.

Concessions given to capitalists who were bent on exploiting the natural resources of the country led to the eviction of peasants. The lot of the factory workers was no better.

Conscious and oppressed classes conducted a fierce struggle against the ruling class. Progressive Ethiopian students continued agitating the masses; workers rose up against the exploiting capitalists while the dispossessed peasants manifested their struggle through a series of uprisings. Despite the fascistic repression of the feudo-capitalist regime and its futile attempt to muffle the struggle of the masses, the class struggle consistently gathered momentum. For successive years the struggle had to simmer due to the lack of a revolutionary organization equipped with the requisite theory. The contradiction that had matured for long exploded in February 1974.

The immediate causes that led to the February revolution were mainly the spiralling of prices, the impasse reached in the educational system, the decay of the feudal system, the Wollo drought that claimed hundreds of thousands of lives and the discontent and unrest within the armed forces.

Since its eruption in February 1974, the revolution has mobilized the masses and consolidated the oppressed classes under the revolutionary banner of scientific socialism. The achievements scored are indeed remarkable. The rural and urban land nationalization proclamations, the nationalization of the major industries, the establishment of mass organisations, and the politicization campaign that has been launched to raise the political

consciousness of the masses are true indications that the revolution has a firm mass base. One of the landmarks attained by the revolution is the charting out of the National Democratic Revolution which, among other things, guarantees the rights of nationalities to self-determination within the framework of regional autonomy. In no unequivocal terms paragraph five of the programme states: "The right to self-determination of all nationalities will be recognized and fully respected. No nationality will dominate another one since the history, culture, language and religion of each nationality will have equal recognition in accordance with the spirit of Socialism. The unity of Ethiopia's nationalities will be based on their common struggle against feudalism, imperialism, bureaucratic capitalism and all reactionary forces. This united struggle is based on the desire to construct a new life and a new society based on equality, brotherhood and mutual respect." This revolutionary manifesto is an achievement that the numerous nationalities of Ethiopia have attained through their struggle.

## II. THE ERITREAN REGION

History attests that the northern part of Ethiopia, especially the region now called Eritrea, has been the cradle of Ethiopian civilization. Even before the historic ascendance of Axum to prominence, the region adjoining the Red Sea was flourishing with trade and maritime activity. When the Axumite civilization reached its apogee from the 4th to the 8th century A.D., the Eritrean region was an integral part of Ethiopia. In fact, as it was the centre of the socio-economic life of the country, it played a leading role in maintaining the

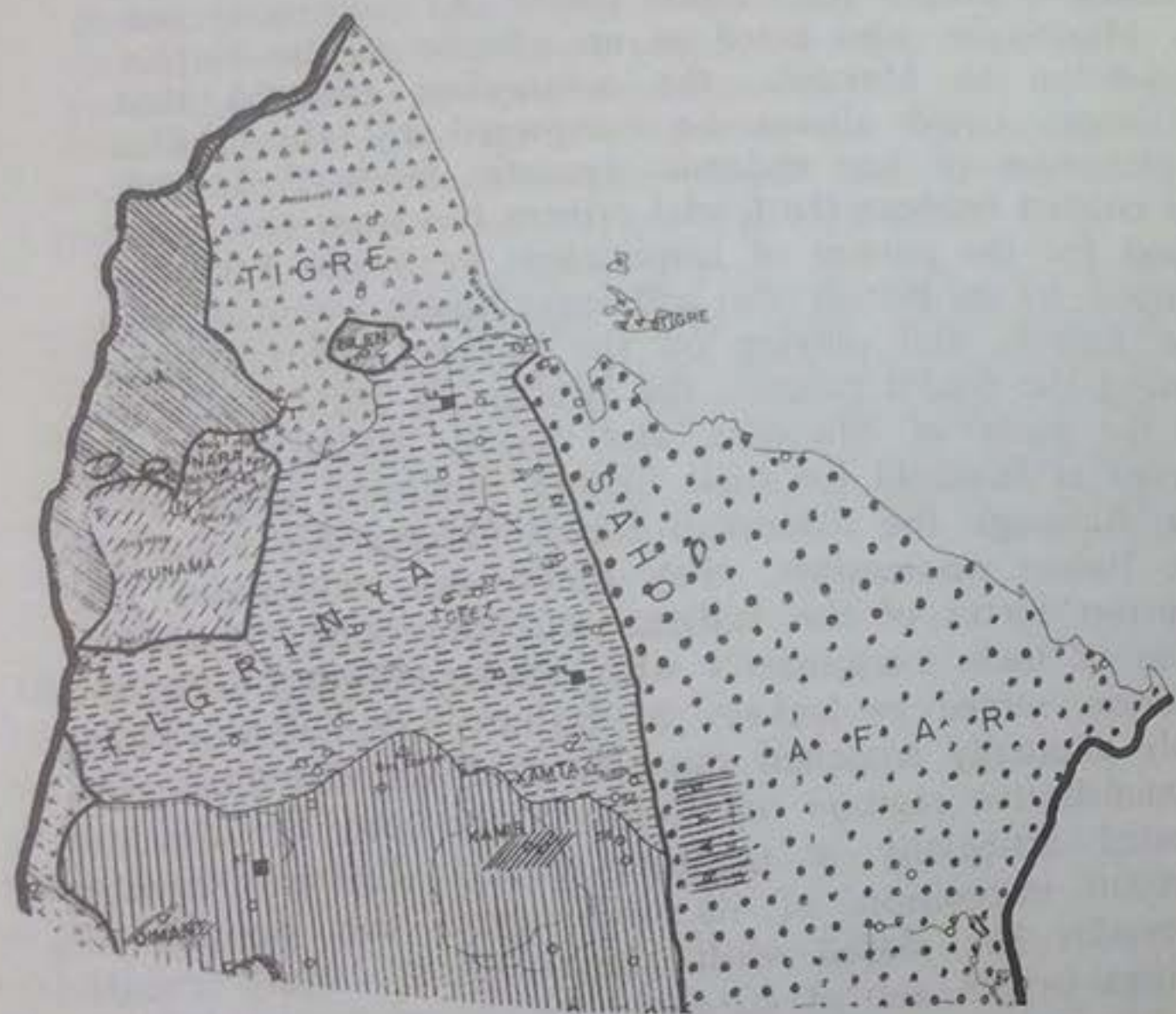
cohesiveness of the country. For administrative ease and in order to balance off the power rivalry between the local chieftains, the Eritrean region was occasionally ruled by the Bahr Negash who was always appointed and responsible to the central government. The contradictions that erupted between the central authorities and the Bahr Negash, particularly regarding the paying of taxes, were always resolved without leading to dismemberment. Hence, up and until the second half of the 19th century the strong link between the Eritrean region and the central government has never been severed. The region has been an integral part of Ethiopia.

As early as the 16th and 17th centuries, the maritime regions of Ethiopia have been threatened by Turkish and Egyptian forces who were bent on encroaching on Ethiopian territory through the seizure of the ports. Even though ports like Massawa fell under their control for short periods, they were driven out of the region.

The development of capitalism in Europe prompted the imperialists to look for new territories with untapped resources, and thus the colonialist rush, better known as the "scramble for Africa" was begun. The opening of the Suez Canal at the end of the 19th century furbished the hunt for colonies, and also highlighted the importance of the Red Sea zone. Since control of the sea-way was an assurance for the control of the area, the sea was a lure which the colonialists can hardly resist. Consequently, during the 19th century the Red Sea became a scene of great rivalry between the British, the Italian and the French colonialists. Each tried its best to subdue and outmanoeuvre the other. Egypt, which had earlier suffered defeat at the hands of Ethiopian

forces led by Emperor Yohannes, bowed out of the gamble with humiliation.

The conflict in the area was not only limited to the colonialists hovering in the region. An acute rivalry prevailed among the Ethiopian feudal princes thus creating a breach for outside forces. As succinctly put by Munzinger, who acted as an advisor to the Napier expedition to Mekdela, the colonialists believed that "Ethiopia could always be conquered by the skilful exploitation of her endemic dynastic feuds..." Indeed, the conflict between the feudal princes has been the magic wand for the pursuit of Imperialists to invade Ethiopia. Helped by the British who had antagonistic interests with the French, and playing on the internal contradictions among the feudal princes, the Italians in 1882 laid hold of the ports of Massawa and Assab, which later on served as foothold for their further incursion into Ethiopia. Although the Ethiopian forces successfully rebuffed the Italian onslaughts, they could not withstand the superior forces of the Italians and the crafty machinations of their missionaries who, under feigned religious mantles, served as lackeys of Italian colonialism. Thus, Italy gradually snatched more land from the Ethiopian administrative regions of Wollo, Tigre and Gondar and created artificially a territory called Eritrea through forceful imposition of its will upon the people. N. Trevaskis has stated with clarity that, "Italy created Eritrea by an act of surgery. By severing its different peoples from those whom their past had been linked and by grafting the amputated remnants to each other under the title of Eritrea." Consequently, the Eritrean Administrative Region became a habitat of diverse nationalities, each characterized by its own cultural and linguistic



*Photo Showing Distribution of Nationalities in Northern Ethiopian*

identity. There are no less than seven main nationalities in the region. They are, Tigre, Afar, Saho, Beneamir, Barya and Kunama, Bilen and the Jeberti. However, the habitat of some of these nationalities in particular, the Tigre, the Afars, the Sahos and the Baryas and Kunamas do extend to the other regions of Ethiopia besides the region of Eritrea. The Tigre nationality lives both in the region of Tigre and Eritrea, the Baryas and Kunamas in the region of Gondar, while the Afar nationality, covers a very wide expanse of land ranging from the northern tip of Eritrea down to central Shoa and extending eastwards to the outmost edges of the territory of the Afars and Issas. (Djibouti)

### III. THE PROBLEM IN ERITREA

The origin of the problem in Eritrea could be traced to the Italian colonial era (1882-1941). Italy "severed different peoples from those whose past had been linked" and created Eritrea in order to facilitate her exploitation. Furthermore, in order to lengthen her repressive rule, she began fomenting tribal and religious conflict among the peoples she artificially brought into the region of Eritrea. By sharpening the contradiction among the Eritrean nationalities, she sought to establish stability for her colonial rule. Likewise, in order to buttress her position and by way of nurturing her designs on the rest of Ethiopia, she implanted hatred for the other Ethiopian nationalities.

The British imperialists who took over the territory at the end of the Italo-Ethiopian war (1941) aggravated the situation through the use of their tactic of "divide and rule". They enflamed the religious and nationality

differences of the peoples. They encouraged and bolstered the anti-unity forces, namely the Fanatic Moslem League and the Pro-Italian Party.

Although the undaunted struggle waged by the Unity party had the most backing for the reunion of Eritrea with her motherland, it was forced by the U.S. imperialists to accept federation in 1952. Ten years later, Eritrea rejoined her motherland, Ethiopia, through the struggle of the Ethiopian people and especially of the masses of the region.

As soon as unity was effected, members of the Moslem League or "Rabita Islamiya" started working for the secession of Eritrea from her motherland, Ethiopia. One of the secessionist movements now known by the self-appointed name of "Eritrean Liberation Front" was formed in 1961 by a local bandit called Idris Awate. Given the Ethiopian feudo-bourgeois order which was oppressive and the powerful financial backing that the reactionary Arab ruling classes extended to the secessionist leadership to attain their objective of dominating the area, the secessionist movement expanded in the region. It wantonly destroyed life and property and worked in a spirit contrary to the genuine interests of the Ethiopian masses in general and those in the Eritrean administrative region in particular.

As a result of the nationality and religious differences that chronically affected the secessionist movement, the movement broke up into two wings in early 1971: the so-called Eritrean Peoples Liberation Forces (E.P.L.F.) organising the highland christian majority, and the Eritrean Liberation Front (E.L.F.) comprising mainly of the lowland moslem nomads.

Ethiopian progressives had supported the struggle in the hope that it will weaken the feudo-capitalist order of Haile Selassie and thereby contribute towards the coming Ethiopian revolution. However, as events were later to prove, the reactionary nature of the Eritrean secessionist movement was always there.

The secessionist movement, in order to sell this northern region of Ethiopia to the highest bidder, has been peddling around from one world capital to another with a number of preposterous ideas. One of these is their crude assertion that Eritrea is a nation. Contrary to such crude assertion and on the basis of Marxist principles or prerequisites, Eritrea does not constitute a nation. This is because, she does not satisfy the Marxist principles that characterize a nation: common territory, common language, integrated economic set-up, common culture and a common psychological make up. Even a cursory look at only two of these factors, namely language and an integrated economic setup will suffice to show that Eritrea does not constitute a nation. When one examines the types of economic structures that exist within the administrative region of Eritrea, one finds that they range from the purely primitive economic system to that of a capitalist economic system. Also in term of languages the various nationalities that inhabit the administrative region of Eritrea, speak different languages as opposed to a single national language. In short, while such are the realities of the Eritrean peoples, the secessionist movement parades from one world capital to another propagating

the false theory that the Eritrean peoples constitute a nation. This kind of false propaganda is nothing but cheap method of obtaining arms and money from international imperialism and the reactionary Arab ruling classes.

Further, in their attempt to evade this truth, the secessionists blindly wish to present the problem in Eritrea as a colonial question. But this is again a preposterous and untenable stand manufactured by them in the hope of getting Arab money and arms. Historical facts prove that the region of Eritrea has been the original nucleus of the Ethiopian polity and has been an integral part of Ethiopia throughout the ages.

Whether the secessionist forces like it or not, such a description of the relationship between the broad masses of Ethiopia and that of Eritrea has no similarity with the European colonialism in Africa, Asia etc.

"The modern colonial system of imperialism as is well known was inaugurated as a result of the territorial and economic division of the world by a handful of imperialist countries during the last third of the 19th century. In these cases, it presupposed the existence of well-developed capitalist economies in western Europe, North America and Japan and the economically underdeveloped countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America. European expansion in pre-19th century period was in the main limited to the possession of military out-posts, control of trading centers, for the capture of slaves, the plunder of silver and gold and the search for areas suitable for white settlement.

"The modern colonialism of imperialism came forth as a response to the developed countries need for

raw materials, export for commodities, and the need for cheap labor. In the sphere of politics, they made a distinction between the types of political regimes in the mother country and in the colony. The colonial subjects were denied basic rights and power was exclusively concentrated in the hands of colonial officials and settler minorities. The economy of the colony was subordinated to the needs of the metropolitan country. A consciously thoughtout plan of preventing industrialization of the colonies was one of the chief characteristics of colonial policy. The discouragement of the rise of native capitalists and the over all distortion of the agriculture of the colonies for the production of cash crops was another characteristics of colonial policy". (Eritrea: A Special Publication of the Ethiopian Students' Union, in Europe May 1976)

Ethiopia is an underdeveloped country, a victim of imperialist oppression and exploitation. And as such she is not in a position to fulfill the prerequisites to pursue a colonial policy in the style of the developed capitalist countries. Therefore the false chroniclers of the secessionists, who insist on the acceptance of the theory of Ethiopian colonialism over the region of Eritrea, is nothing but simply a cheap propaganda, manufactured by them to get money and arms from the reactionary Arab ruling classes.

At the background and at the core of the distortion of the real problem in Eritrea lies imperialist and reactionary Arab ruling classes machination centered in their lust for the control of the area. The golden fleece that acts as a pull to outside forces is undoubtedly the Red Sea. The Red Sea is the *sine qua non* of the problem. This water way, apart from its economic signi-



ficance, commands an enviable strategic position. Imperialist forces and the Arab stooges of imperialism do consistently expound the theory that the Red Sea is an Arab lake. The so called Eritrean Liberation Front (E.L.F.) unabashdely affirms that "Red Sea means an Arab Sea".

As stated earlier, religion was one of the causes that led to the formatoin of the ELF. In its formative stage this "front" used religious persecution as a pretext for obtaining support. Both the propaganda value and the material aid that their religious fanaticism has secured for them is considerable. Since the secessionists identify Islam with Arabism, and even pretend to be "Arabs" themselves, their reactionary Arab masters are happy to listen to them sympathetically. Salah Sabbe's assertion in 1971 that "Eritreans are Arabs, and we are determined to struggle for Arab Eritrea" is a clear indication of their motive. In another instance, Sabbe reassured his reactionary Arab masters in the following words. "Inorder to ensure that our children maintain the strong Arab ties in religion, culture and civilization, it is necessary that medical and educational aid be given to us" (Sabbe in Alfajire Al Jadid, Arabic Newspaper, 1973). It is very clear therefore that the Eritrean secessionist movement is Arab inspired, and Arab dominated.

Arab Baathists, especially the Syrian Baath Party, propagate Arab renaissance and have openly indicated their design of slicing away the Ethiopian administrative region of Eritrea.

As mentioned elsewhere in this pamphlet, the Eritrean secessionist movement is led by the right-wing petty bourgeoisie and the feudalists; and their motive is to sever the region from Ethiopia and put it under direct Arab control. The fact that the movement is not a

genuine mass movement, but a tool of Arab reactionaries and imperialist forces, is often indicated by close observers who affirm that "a careful and close study of the situation from 1970 onwards has revealed that the desire to partition Eritrea has been instigated by other forces who have high stake in the issue and it is therefore evident that those involved in the secessionist attempt are not fighting for themselves".

From what has been stated above, it is clear that the Eritrean problem revolves around the central theme of dominating the Red Sea and converting it into an Arab Lake. The movement is Imperialist-conceived and nurtured; it is fanned by Arab expansionist sentiments. Standing and acting in direct opposition to the expressed wishes of the Ethiopian masses, especially those of the region of Eritrea, the movement is nothing but an old assemblage of reactionary petty-bourgeois power mongers who are inimical to the prosperity, happiness and peace of the Eritrean masses.

As mentioned earlier, the feudo-capitalist system that had oppressed and exploited the Ethiopian masses had contributed its share in worsening the situation in Eritrea. It was therefore logical to anticipate that doing away with the feudo-capitalist system would cut the hard knot that had prevailed in Eritrea for over a decade.

The February mass uprising that took place in Ethiopia struck at the root of the feudo-capitalist system. The Revolution has been gradually removing the ills that had been inherited from the old system.

One of the major landmarks of the revolution, is the issuing of the National Democratic Revolution Programme which, among other things, clearly states the

rights of the Ethiopian nationalities to self-determination within the frame work of regional autonomy.

Pursuant to this revolutionary programme and showing its sincere desire to solve the Eritrean problem peacefully, the Provisional Military Government, has spared no effort to resolve the issue democratically since it assumed state power.

The peaceful overtures have been continuous and candid all through 1974 to the present.

Manifesting its revolutionary will, the PMAC made a call to the secessionists to lay down their arms and join the Ethiopian revolution in a spirit of brotherhood. In order to assure those who have fled to the bush, the government's call was done in good faith. All military initiatives were suspended and the security forces were recalled to their barracks. Within this period, the initiative for peace was gathering momentum and the government requested President Nimiery of the Sudan to avail his good offices for mediation. Unfortunately, since the Sudanese President was one of the prime architects of the secessionist movement, the effort bore no fruit except futile diplomatic shuttles.

The secessionists' adamant stand, notwithstanding, the Ethiopian revolutionary government successively sent high level government envoys to neighbouring Arab countries in order to clarify Ethiopia's stand on the situation and also brief these governments on the true nature of the Eritrean problem. Misguided by the illusion that the eruption of the Ethiopian Revolution has weakened the government and in a rashful display of contempt for the power of the masses, the secessionists opened the February 1975 skirmish in Asmara. Their



*The oppressed masses in the administrative region of Eritrea demonstrating in support of the 9 - point policy declaration aimed at resolving the problem in Eritrea democratically and peacefully.*

abortive attempt to capture Asmara led to a big loss in life and property.

In spite of the disruptions fomented by the secessionists, the Provisional Military Government intensified its search for peace. In speeches delivered on several occasions, the government made repeated calls to the secessionists to closely work with the Ethiopian peoples to find out peaceful solution to the problem in Eritrea. The declaration of the Ethiopian National Democratic Revolution Programme in May, 1976, ensures the rights of nationalities to self-determination within the framework of regional autonomy, freedom to practise and develop their culture, language etc. Continuing the search for a democratic solution and convinced that ultimately the Ethiopian masses are the ones who will solve the problem in Eritrea, the government mass media clearly informed the Ethiopian peoples about the origin and development of the problem. By so doing, the masses were made to keep abreast of the situation. Maintaining the drive for peace, on May 18, 1976 the Provisional Military Government of Socialist Ethiopia issued a nine-point peace policy declaration which was expected to open the way for solving the problem in Eritrea. The policy affirms that the people in the administrative region of Eritrea will have full participation in the revolutionary endeavour of the people of Ethiopia to found the Peoples' Democratic Republic of Ethiopia and stresses that the right of self-determination of nationalities will be guaranteed through regional autonomy. The policy also emphasized that the Provisional Military Government is prepared to discuss and exchange views with the progressive groups and organisations in Eritrea which are not in collusion with feudalists, reactionary forces in the neighbourhood and imperialists. Furthermore, the policy underscored the government's willingness to extend an all out support to Eritrean progressives



*Osman Saleh Sabe is the running dog of the Reactionary Arab ruling classes; Saleh Sabe, Mengesha Seyoum and El Nimeiry are one and the same;*

*The running dogs of Arab reaction do not represent the interests of the broad masses in the region of Eritrea.*

who will in collaboration with other Ethiopian progressives mobilise and agitate the working masses of the region under the anti-feudal, anti-imperialist and anti-bureaucratic-capitalist banner and thereby promote the unity of the Ethiopian masses.

The policy also emphasized that the government will give assistance to returning exiles and rehabilitate

those who have either lost their jobs, property or educational opportunity as a result of the adverse condition that had existed. Those imprisoned in connection with the existing problem would be released or their cases would be reviewed. Moreover, it was affirmed that a special commission will be formed to implement the policy decisions. Accordingly, on July 7, 1976 the Special Eritrean Commission was formed and has been entrusted with the responsibility of carrying out the policy-decision and exploring avenues that will eventually lead to the restoration of peace to the trouble torn region.

This democratic and revolutionary attempt to resolve the problem in Eritrea has not been in vain. The untiring efforts made by the Provisional Military Government has shown slow but steady results.

The various attempts made at mediation, have exposed the reactionary nature of the movement. It has been brought to light that the movement is not a genuine revolutionary movement that has a mass backing, but rather a terroristic faction which relies more on the power its guns can wield rather than a revolutionary support that a people's cause could generate.

The international socialist and democratic forces have openly expressed their stand in support of maintaining the territorial integrity of Ethiopia. Some revolutionary states have even taken bold measures by driving out all secessionist groups, thus expressing their firm solidarity with the Ethiopian Revolution. This has effectively isolated the secessionists from among the progressive camp to the extent that the secessionists are now fully supported and protected by the Ethiopian feudalists, reactionary Arab regimes and international



*The class struggle of the oppressed masses will win, There is no contradiction between and among the oppressed masses of Ethiopia we stand alongside with the peace-loving peoples of the world.*

imperialism. All these reactionary forces are joining their forces to subvert the Ethiopian peoples' revolution.

However, the Ethiopian masses in general and those in the administrative region of Eritrea in particular, have through public demonstrations expressed their determination to safeguard the National Democratic Revolution and the territorial integrity of their Motherland. They have also voiced that the secessionists do not represent the interest of the Eritrean masses but are rather puppets of Arab reactionaries. Currently, the reactionary Nimeiry clique is conniving with other reactionary Arab regimes and in flagrant violation of the charters of the U.N. and the O.A.U. that prohibits interference in the internal affairs of another sovereign states. It openly advocates for the secession of the Ethiopian region of Eritrea. The reactionary Arab ruling classes, on the pretext of safeguarding "peace in the Red Sea zone", are bent on containing the Ethiopian Revolution lest the Revolutionary effervescence cross into their territory and rock their oppressive rule. Hence, coached and armed by imperialism, the Sudanese ruling class is conducting a counter revolutionary campaign against revolutionary Ethiopia. The Sudanese ruling clique is coordinating and providing all logistic support to the Eritrean secessionists and Nimeiry has of late appointed himself as "the champion" of the Eritrean cause. But the Eritrean masses have put his presumptuous stand to ridicule, by openly condemning him and his clique for their brazen intrusion in the internal affairs of Ethiopia. The written message delivered by the citizens of Asmara to the Sudanese Consulate there, is a good testimony to their unwavering stand.

As stated earlier, the problem in Eritrea although inherited from the feudal past, will inevitably be resolved



*Residents of Asmara in Eritrean Administrative Region at a Rally condemning the Counter-revolutionary interference of El-Nimeiry in the internal Affairs of Ethiopia.*

by the Ethiopian revolution. The deepening of the revolution especially as regards organising, politicising and arming of the masses will eventually decide the Eritrean issue and all other problems the revolution faces from imperialist-reactionary Arab alliance. In the final analysis, the forces that will have to confront each other will be all progressives and the Ethiopian masses on one side, and the die-hard lackeys of imperialism and reactionary Arab ruling classes on the other. Since the Ethiopian revolution has now broken the fetters of isolation imposed on it by imperialists and won the firm support and solidarity of the international socialist forces, the revolution can certainly count on the socialist camp in its struggle to crush counter-revolutionaries and all those lurking to dismember the Ethiopian state. However, this does not rule out the peaceful struggle that must be conducted to resolve the problem democratically. Ethiopia is committed to the National Democratic Revolution Programme which, among other things, spells out the rights of her nationalities to self-determination within the framework of regional autonomy. Hence, the Provisional Military Government still upholds the call it made to Eritrean progressives to jointly work for a peaceful solution.

As recorded in the history of all revolutions, and expounded by revolutionaries, the masses are an invincible force, which no amount of reactionary collaboration or conspiracy can withstand. Undoubtedly, the Ethiopian masses, who for ages have successfully rebuffed imperialist incursions will smash the counter-revolutionary movements in the Eritrean region and stamp out for good any reactionary pretensions on Ethiopian territory in the Red Sea region.