



PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC PROGRAMME

OF THE

TIGRAY PEOPLE'S LIBERATION FRONT (TPLF)

**Adopted by the Second Organizational Congress
of the
TPLF
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HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION

1. Tigray is an oppressed nation in northern Ethiopia, with a land mass of more than 100,000 sq. kms. Apart from the Tigrayan, it includes the Afar, Agew, Saho and Kunama nationalities. The dominant religions are Christianity and Islam. Its geographical location, which is close to the southern end of the Red Sea, is of strategic importance. Tigray is bounded to the north and east by Eritrea, to the west by the Sudan, and to the south and south-west by the Ethiopian regions of Wollo and Gonder respectively. Due to national oppression and feudo-imperialist exploitation, Tigray is one of the poorest nations in the world.

The people of Tigray have a rich history of thousands of years. In the past, they were known by various names such as the Axumites, Habashas, etc. Before 1000 B.C., present-day Tigray was inhabited by Nilotic and Hametic peoples of African origin, who led a primitive communal life. Beginning at about 1000 B.C., tribes of South Arabian origin known as the Sabean, Agezeans, Habashats and Himeryats began to cross the Red Sea and settle in the areas which are today Tigray and Eritrea.

These tribes were at a more advanced stage of development than the indigenous people. Through assimilation and forced deportation of the indigenous people, they were able to take control of the areas. At about 600 B.C., some of these Semetic tribes settled at a place called Yeha and built a great civilization. In the course of time, the integration of the African and Arab tribes and their cultures gave birth to a new society and civilization.

At about 100 A.D., the new civilization moved its capital to Axum. Communication with the outside world was conducted through the port of Adulis, which is now in Eritrea. In the course of time, the Axumite civilization emerged to be one of the greatest civilizations of the time.

At its apex, the Axumite civilization controlled all of the present-day Tigray, parts of the present-day Eritrea, the western as well as some of the eastern coasts of the Red Sea. It had political and commercial relations with the then famous civilizations of Greece, the Roman Empire, Southern Arabia, Egypt and Persia.

The Axumite civilization flourished during the slave-owning society. In this period, works of silver and gold as well as trade and agriculture flourished. The remains of places of worship, palaces, stelaes, etc. clearly reflect the high level of art and architecture of the time.

At about the eighth century A.D., the west coast of the Red Sea came under foreign occupation, thus, reducing the income generated from trade and taxation. Furthermore, the class contradictions within the slave-owning society intensified. These factors brought about the downfall of the

Axumite civilization around the tenth century A.D., and the eventual emergence of feudalism in Tigray. From the tenth up to the thirteenth century, Tigray was independent. From the thirteenth up to the middle of the nineteenth century, Tigrayans, under feudalism, paid tribute to the kings of Gonder and Shoa, although there were occasional exceptions.

There were a number of revolts by the people of Tigray against Amhara national domination and oppression. The Amhara ruling classes, in their desire to suppress the resistances and perpetuate their rule, carried out repeated raids and committed untold atrocities against the people, thus, laying the historical basis for the current sharp national contradictions.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, Tigrayan feudal rulers gained the upper hand over their rivals, the Amhara feudal rulers. They then set themselves as overlords of the Amhara and other nationalities and perpetrated many crimes. Tigrayan feudal supremacy, which was led by Yohannes IV lasted for 17 years.

During this period, Tigrayans led by men like Raisi Alula – one of the greatest African generals and a man famous for his military strategies and skills were able to repulse repeated overtures and incursions by Britain, Italy and Egypt. These victories had a marked effect in enhancing the patriotic feelings and unity of the people of Tigray. However, these repeated battles against foreign invaders weakened the Tigrayan feudals. At the same time, Amhara feudals, led by Menelik II expanded and consolidated their power by conducting predatory campaigns against the peoples of southern, western and eastern parts of present-day Ethiopia.

By 1889 Tigray again came under the clutches and domination of the Amhara ruling classes. Menelik, applying “divide and rule” tactics, installed rival feudal rulers in Tigray. Constant battles amongst the feudalists gravely affected the socio-economic conditions of the Tigrayan masses. Heavy taxation was levied on the people and hundreds of thousands of Menelik’s army, deliberately sent without food provisions, plundered the villages of Tigray. Within a short period, the economic and social conditions of the Tigrayan people deteriorated sharply. Furthermore, deliberate measures were taken in order to suppress the language, culture and history of the Tigrayans. These acts of oppression fueled national feelings of the Tigrayans and brought about acute national contradictions. Despite this, however, the people of Tigray continued to repulse on their own Italian incursions and later they played a very significant role in defeating the Italians at the famous battle of Adua, in Tigray.

Haile Selassie, who came after Menelik pursued the same discriminatory and oppressive policies. He made it his government’s policy that no economic or social development of any sort should take place in Tigray. The policy to undermine and to destroy the language, history and culture of the Tigrayans was reinforced and the denial of political rights of the people continued unabated.

Such was the situation when the second Italian invasion took place. The people of Tigray, like the rest of the Ethiopian people, played their role in the fight against fascism. In fact, since all the major battles were fought in Tigray, the people of Tigray suffered the brunt of the war and paid heavy sacrifices.

The rapid urban expansion and development of communications, set in motion by the second Italian invasion, gave further impetus to the development of a dependent capitalist economy which had begun as a result of close cooperation between Menelik and the imperialists.

The development of dependent capitalism had the effect of unifying the hitherto fragmented Tigrayan economy, thus transforming Tigray into a nation. Furthermore, it concentrated and enhanced the national feelings of the people.

After the heroic resistance of the people had defeated Italy, Haile Selassie, with the help of British imperialism, was installed in power and Tigray was once again subjected to Amhara national domination.

However, the people did not readily submit to the new cruel national domination and class exploitation. In 1943 a spontaneous peasant uprising popularly known as the *Woyane* took place. The *Woyane* was essentially a democratic movement equally opposed to Amhara national domination and Tigrayan feudal exploitation. However, it was finally defeated because it lacked correct leadership and as a result of the joint action of the Amhara ruling classes, the Tigrayan feudal lords and British imperialism.

Following the defeat of the *Woyane*, the Amhara ruling classes, to avenge themselves and to safeguard their interests, carried out barbaric raids and committed untold atrocities against the people of Tigray. In order to break the spirit of resistance, they confiscated large plots of land and divided them among themselves and their stooges. They confiscated almost all the property and wealth of the people. They imposed new and harsh taxes, including ridiculous levies for washing the hands of the rulers. These acts of suppression further intensified the national contradiction, which had been developing over the years.

After the suppression of the *Woyane* revolt, the people of Tigray continued their resistance clandestinely. They never resigned or submitted themselves to their rulers. In fact, they came to see even more clearly that their national oppressors and class exploiters were basically one and the same and recognised the necessity to continue the resistance against them. Thus, a number of clandestine groups were formed in order to give leadership to the resistance.

2. While Tigray was under such conditions, the 1974 popular revolt broke out throughout Ethiopia. The popular uprisings and protests were a culmination of the various contradictions that had deepened through the years. Ethiopia was subjected to the exploitation and oppression of feudalism,

imperialism and dependent capitalism. The Amhara ruling classes ruled Ethiopia in league with and the support of their imperialist masters. The exploitation and oppression of the masses, which emanated from feudalism, bureaucratic capitalism and imperialism undermined basic democratic rights of the people. Thus, class contradiction as well as national contradiction, which evolved from it, existed in Ethiopia.

The national oppression, which had developed throughout history was severe and wide-spread affecting more than 75% of the people of Ethiopia and therefore deserves special attention.

Another major contradiction which predates the February 1974 popular revolt was the just struggle of the Eritrean people for independence and human dignity. Besides setting an example, the struggle of the Eritrean people has contributed to the sharpening of the internal contradictions within Ethiopia.

The February popular upsurge is thus a result of the intensification of the different contradictions that prevailed in Ethiopia. The acuteness of these contradictions differed from place to place and there was not a multi-national organisation which could coordinate the activities of the people. People rose up according to the nature and acuteness of the contradictions prevalent in their localities. They were largely spontaneous.

Because of the popular uprising, the leading officials of the state bureaucracy and the feudalists could not rule in the old way. There was not a vanguard organisation which could give leadership to the popular protests and take political power. There appeared to be a power vacuum. The armed forces were the most organised and armed body. Taking advantage of this the officer corps assumed power. They represent the upper echelon of the petty bourgeoisie, who by their class nature, were in contradiction with the previous rulers. They did not, however, represent the interests of the masses at any stage. On the contrary, they strove to exploit the masses.

The top stratum of the petty bourgeoisie, which assumed power following the people's February uprising, was in conflict with the former ruling classes, on the one hand, and with the masses, on the other.

In response to popular pressure, the group that came to power effected certain reforms, the most notable of which were the nationalisation of factories, land reform and the confiscation of extra houses. Since these reforms were not linked to the seizure of power by the masses and since they were aimed at suppressing the expressions of popular power, these moves could neither satisfy nor defend the interests of the masses. In fact, they were used as a means to strengthen the position of the regime.

Feudalism had been weakened by the distribution and democratisation of land in areas under the control of democratic organisations like the TPLF as well as by the Dergue's half-hearted land reform, which was conducted under popular pressure. Despite this, however, the exploiting tentacles of feudalism are still evident in many parts of Ethiopia.

The nationalization of the different instruments of production was not carried out under a popular government. It only enlarged the bureaucratic machinery of the state, elevated the upper section of the petty bourgeoisie to that of the state bourgeoisie and created an imperialist-dependent state capitalism.

One of the main objectives of the regime in implementing the reforms was to portray itself as a progressive force. However, such moves could not deceive the people. The junta, by its very nature, could not satisfy the demand for power to be given to the people nor could it address the demand for exercising basic democratic rights. It unleashed, instead, terror and indiscriminate killings in order to remain in power. Thus, the Junta which is serving imperialism to destroy the revolution and which has created a system based on terror and intimidation is fascist by its nature.

In summary, feudalism has been greatly weakened in Ethiopia. A state dependent on imperialism and especially on Soviet imperialism has been established under the fascist dictatorship of the state bourgeoisie.

Such being the nature of the regime, members of the former ruling classes fought on the one hand against the new ruling class and on the other hand against the masses. To this end they formed anti-people movements such as the EDU and attacked both the Dergue and the popular movements such as the TPLF. However, with the participation of broad sections of the people, they were defeated and routed by the TPLF.

The uprising of the people in different parts of Ethiopia was directed against the common enemies of the masses. There were, however, differences in the intensity and nature of the contradictions prevalent in different parts of Ethiopia. This gave rise to different slogans being adopted to mobilize the people. Despite this, however, the national contradiction was the most widespread and acute contradiction and the national movements, thus, became the decisive forces of the revolution in Ethiopia.

Most of the multi-national organizations in Ethiopia had in-correct political lines. Thus, they were weakened in the course of the heated struggle. By contrast, the TPLF, which has waged the national and class struggles inseparably, and which has advocated the co-operation of the forces of the Ethiopian revolution, has emerged as an inspiration to the Ethiopian revolution.

3. The prime enemies of the Ethiopian people are feudalism, imperialism and bureaucratic capitalism which has now evolved to the stage of state capitalism. Among these, the fascist state of the state bourgeoisie and its sustainer, Soviet imperialism, are the foremost enemies of the people.

There are, at the present time, various uncoordinated struggles which are the direct result of the different contradictions that exist in Ethiopia. Out of these, however, the national struggle plays the decisive role in Ethiopia.

Currently, the formation of a United Democratic Front of all democratic forces in Ethiopia is necessary. The formation of such a Front will safeguard the democratic rights of the oppressed nations as well as the class liberation of all exploited peoples in Ethiopia. The creation of another broad-based United Front, which does not contradict the United Democratic Front, is now a timely issue. This broad-based United Front will be, necessarily, composed of forces which are against the fascist Dergue and against the imperialist intervention of the Soviet Union in Ethiopia. The TPLF will do all it can towards the formation of such Front.

Scientifically analyzing the reality, the TPLF has been striving to put its programme into practice, and with added vigor it will continue to do so in the future.

PART I

OBJECTIVES

Based on the concrete situation outlined above, the objectives of the TPLF are as follows:

1. — Realizing that the peoples of Ethiopia in general and the people of Tigray in particular are suffering from severe national oppression;
— Recognizing that national oppression is detrimental to the lives of oppressed nations, undermines the class solidarity of the Ethiopian peoples and hampers confidence and unity on a voluntary basis;
— Being aware that national oppression will be solved when there is unity based on free will and equality or when the oppressed nations and nationalities form their own independent states;

The TPLF's aim is the elimination of national oppression.

2. — Realizing that there cannot be unity based on a voluntary basis without a democratic order; recognizing that nations and nationalities cannot establish independent states which satisfy the basic necessities of the people without a popularly accepted order and taking note that the national and class liberation of the oppressed nations are inseparable.

The TPLF struggles against imperialism, feudalism and bureaucratic capitalism, which is now evolving to the stage of state capitalism. These are the sources of oppression and exploitation of the Tigrayan people.

3. — Believing that the demands of the oppressed peoples of the world cannot be satisfied until the downfall of their main enemies — imperialism in general and US and Soviet imperialism in particular;
— Recognizing that the extension of justice and progress in any part of the world is a victory to the justice of each and every country;
— Realizing that the oppressed and exploited peoples of the world can be victorious in struggles if there is close cooperation and coordination among themselves,

The TPLF struggles for the enhancement of peace and progress in the world.

PART II

PROGRAMMES

Based on the above-mentioned objectives, the TPLF aims to implement the following programmes in a democratic Ethiopia if the national oppression of the people of Tigray is resolved by unity based on equality. However, if the national oppression is resolved by independence, then it aims to actualize these programmes in a free and democratic Tigray.

POLITICAL PROGRAMME

1. The establishment of a people's democratic state:
 - a) All state power shall be in the hands of the masses and in the different levels of the people's councils, which are established by free and democratic elections.
 - b) The state, under the leadership of the proletariat, shall maintain the interests of the workers and peasants who constitute the largest section of the society.

2. To safeguard the democratic rights of the people:
 - a) The democratic rights of the people to speak, write, strike, organize, hold demonstration, etc. shall be fully guaranteed.
 - b) Nationalities shall have the right to self-determination including and up to secession. If they voluntarily decide to live together, then they shall have the right to conduct their internal affairs by themselves and they shall have all opportunity to develop their language and culture.
 - c) There shall be no discrimination based on sex. Women shall enjoy equal rights with men in political, economic, social and cultural affairs.
 - d) There shall be no discrimination based on religion. Every person has the right to adhere to the faith of his own choice. Religion shall be separated from the state.

3. The formation of a people's army which defends the interests of the masses:

- a) A truly people's army which consciously serves the people, keeps the interests of the masses and participates in production shall be formed.**
- b) In order to further defend and consolidate the interests of the masses, a people's militia, with the participation of all able-bodied people, shall be established.**

ECONOMIC PROGRAMME

4. To foster a free and developed economy based on self-reliance:
 - a) To develop an economy free from imperialist domination and based on the principles of self-reliance.
 - b) The means of production of imperialists and bureaucratic capitalists will be nationalized and land will be distributed among the tillers.
 - c) Banks, insurance companies and other financial institutions as well as heavy industry, major means of transport and communication, natural resources, mines, electric power services, etc. shall be under state control.
 - d) Import-export trade shall be under state control.

5. The economy shall be structured in such a way as to give maximum benefit to the masses:
 - a) There will be a planned economy where state ownership shall have dominance over private ownership.
 - b) The masses shall have active and overall participation in the economy.
 - c) All economic activities shall be directed towards the improvement of the standard of living of the masses.
 - d) Private capital can participate in the economy as long as it does not contradict the aforementioned aims.

SOCIAL PROGRAMME

6. Retrogressive feudal culture and degenerated imperialist culture shall be wiped out and replaced by popular culture.

7. Education and science shall be expanded:

- a) No effort shall be spared in spreading free education based on the needs of the people and associated with production.
- b) Education shall be free from religion.
- c) Science and technology shall be developed in order to benefit the masses.

8. The health and welfare of the people shall receive full attention.

- a) No effort shall be spared in expanding and providing free medical services to every community.
- b) Traditional medicine shall be scientifically studied and developed for public health service.

9. The people have the right to work:

- a) Every citizen's right to work shall be guaranteed by the state.
- b) No effort shall be spared in abolishing such social problems as unemployment and prostitution.
- c) The wage scale and the number of working hours will be determined by taking the interest and health of the workers into consideration.
- d) Working women shall receive equal pay to men for equal work. They shall be paid during maternity leave and they shall not work in fields that are harmful to their health.
- e) There shall be enough pension for the old and the handicap.
- f) All possible attention shall be given towards the proper upbringing of children, so that they would grow to be responsible citizens.

FOREIGN POLICY

10. There shall be a foreign policy free from all imperialist pressures.
 - a) There shall be no military pact with the imperialists, nor shall they be granted military base.
 - b) Relations with all countries will be based on the principles of equality and mutual benefit, non-interference in internal affairs, and peaceful co-existence.

11. The TPLF supports all democratic and progressive movements:
 - a) It supports the struggle of the Eritrean people for self-determination and national independence.
 - b) It supports the Namibian, Azanian and the Saharawi people's struggle against colonialism and racism as well as the struggle of the people of Afghanistan against Soviet aggression.
 - c) It hails the just struggle of the Palestinian people for self-determination and against zionism.
 - d) It extends its solidarity to the African, Asian and Latin American peoples' struggles against imperialism and reaction.
 - e) It supports the struggle of the peoples of the world for justice, democracy and social progress.

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(TPLF)

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