

ERITREAN PEOPLE'S LIBERATION FRONT

POLITICAL REPORT
&
NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC PROGRAMME

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PREFACE

This report covers a decade, a fairly long period of time full of important and outstanding events. It is, therefore, much condensed and far from exhaustive. This overall report has been supplemented by department reports that detail the tasks accomplished in the different spheres. Together the two can provide a fairly complete picture. But only fairly, as the events of the last decade, their origins and outcome, as well as the experience acquired all require profound research.

Emphasis has been made in this concise, overall report to elaborate the nature of the struggle of the Eritrean people, to show that the struggle was fundamentally between national independence and national reconstruction, on the one hand, and colonial empire-building dreams supported by international colonial forces, on the other. Furthermore, the national composition of Eritrean society has been presented in conjunction with the question of the unity of the Eritrean people and the development of the political organization of their struggle. These obvious facts have been restated in this report so events and developments can be seen and understood within the context of these central issues.

Overall, the report treats some topics fairly extensively and with emphasis while in others it is very brief. This flows from the choice of a general and concise report as opposed to an extensive and detailed expose.

INTRODUCTION

PART I

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Eritrean question is a national question; the Eritrean people's struggle against Ethiopian colonialism, a struggle between two antagonistic objectives. Although this has been explained and discussed on various occasions, and is therefore well-known, it is important that it serve as the introduction to this report. The intention here is not to restate well-known historical facts or prove the justness of our struggle. But the nature of the Eritrean case is closely linked to the question of the unity of the Eritrean people, the forging of Eritrea as a nation, the unfolding of the liberation struggle and the shape of future Eritrea. It also serves as a point-of-departure in assessing the experiences of our struggle.

The Concept of a Nation

A nation is a geographical entity with defined and recognized boundaries. These boundaries are drawn or take shape in the process of history by the internal developments of a society or by external factors or forces. With time, the people who live within the boundaries of a nation come to possess an administrative system or government established either through a gradual and peaceful process or one set up by war or force. In the former case, the administrative order probably results from the common characteristics and interests of the peoples within its boundaries-their ethnic unity, linguistic and cultural similarities, or common economic and security interests. If, on the other hand, the administrative system was set up through war and force, it may have taken one of two courses. Either it was set up by a party that emerged dominant at the end of a process of war among

the peoples within its boundaries or by peoples within a particular territory (nation) who united their forces to ward off external threats and invasions. In such historical processes, the people inhabiting a nation come to have an inter-related and commercially integrated economic system and attain similar, close or identical levels of economic development. The people in such a nation may have a common language, culture and religion or different languages, divergent cultures and various religions or faiths. Irrespective of whether there is commonness or diversity of language, culture or religion, however, the people of a nation create and develop in the historical process feelings of oneness, brotherhood and solidarity. Impelled only by internal factors, this process of formation of a nation, is slow and may take centuries. When external factors or forces come to play, it may take even less than a century.

Emergence of Nations in Developing Societies (The Third World)

The general concepts of a nation, mentioned above, should not be understood simplistically. The historical process is very complicated and the emergence of each society as a nation requires detailed scrutiny.

In societies with extremely backward agricultural and pastoral economic systems, nationalism doesn't exist or exists only marginally and ephemerally. It was capitalism which brought about the emergence of nations and drew their boundaries. The spread of capitalism also led to interaction among nations and their recognition of each other. These were the conditions under which the boundaries of the developed nations took shape.

What interests us and other Third World peoples more is the process of the emergence of nations in developing societies. The social and administrative structure of people living in backward agricultural and pastoral societies can only have an ethnic/tribal or nationality

basis, since their economic, and especially commercial ties are weak and limited. Consequently, until the 19th century, there were only fragmented and unstable feudal polities, and no nations in Africa, including the Horn of Africa. Such feudal set-ups were not only torn by strife and invasions, but they also lacked continuity.

In the Horn of Africa, as in the rest of the continent, nations did not emerge from the gradual, internal development of these fragmented, feudal entities. The process was forced by the advent of European colonialism. Had there been no European colonization of Africa, the formation of nations would have taken centuries and the political map of Africa would have been radically different from what it presently is.

To exploit the natural resources and manpower of the African peoples, European colonialism introduced advanced industrial know-how and machinery, dismantled traditional, social, administrative and economic systems, and spurred the process of nation building. The colonizers carved out territories, not in accordance with the wishes of the colonized people, but on the basis of their power and the competition and disputes among them, disputes which were settled either by agreement or force. Thus were drawn internationally recognized colonial boundaries and the geographical and political entities so demarcated began to take shape under colonialism.

Initially, the colonial power organizes each entity under one administration and sets-up a central colonial government. It alters fundamentally or preserves with desired modifications the traditional administrative system but in either case places it under an imposed paramount authority. It builds cities and ports; constructs roads, railway lines, airports and other installations; and introduces land, air and sea transport. It installs telephones and other communications networks. In order to exploit agricultural, animal and mineral resources, it develops vast expanses of land, introduces new means of production and seeds, and sets up mines. It establishes power stations, small factories and large-scale industries. It sets up health and educational

facilities for the colonial officials, troops and settlers.

On another vein, the colonial power creates a group of “assimilados” whom it trains and employs. It recruits troops from the colonized people for the realization of its expansionist and repressive aims. It imposes racialist restrictions on movement and living conditions. And so on.

Thus, the colonial power introduces new relations of production, gradually dismantles the social structure and creates new social forces. The infrastructure it sets up brings closer the population which until then had no means of efficient communication. Its racist treatment and, its repressive and exploitative policies give rise to joint struggles by the colonized people and foster a common psychological make-up. These politico-administrative, economic, social, cultural and psychological processes combine to forge a nation.

The changes brought about by colonialism do not, however, affect the peoples of the evolving nations equally nor do they give rise to equal levels of development. For two reasons Firstly, the colonial power concentrates its effort on regions it considers strategically and economically important. Secondly, the colonized peoples were at different stages of social, economic, cultural and religious development to begin with.

Empire-Building Dreams and the Emergence of Nations in the Horn

There is no doubt that the concept of the nation and the process of the emergence of nations in developing countries discussed above constitute the basis of the modern history of African nations. This is not to overlook the history of peoples. But the question here pertains to the history of nations and this can only be understood within the framework presented.

The cause of the conflict between the Eritrean people and the kings of

“Ethiopia” as well as the continuous strife in the entire Horn of Africa has been the ambition of the “Ethiopian” kings to set up an empire. The struggle has been between those who want to dominate and those who refuse to be dominated, between the “history” fabricated by the former and the history which the latter know to be true. It becomes necessary, therefore, to examine the antiquated empire-building designs of “Ethiopian rulers in the light of the history of the emergence of nations in the African Horn.

To maintain that for centuries -leave alone thousands of years- there has been an independent political entity in this region where, until the advent of the colonial era in mid 19th century, there had only been fragmented kingdoms, is to be ignorant of the dynamics of history and to mistake myths for history. But to go beyond this and claim a nation on the basis of myths is a crime. And the “Ethiopian” empire-builders and the pseudo-historians who peddle their tales are both guilty of it.

It should be pointed out here that the historical name “Ethiopia” does not pertain to present-day Ethiopia. There is no historically-documented proof whatsoever to that effect. In fact, the name “Ethiopia” was used in holy books to refer to unspecified “burnt”-skinned people” inhabiting an unspecified area.

The kings of “Ethiopia” called the empire they dreamt of building “Ethiopia” as a way of ascertaining their Israeli origins (the myth of Solomon and Sheba) and to endow themselves- and here they are no different from others who fabricate similar histories- with divine rights. No serious student of history can be deceived, however, by the appropriation of a name, by the fact that myths have become accepted history.

Historical fantasy aside, the engineer of “Ethiopian” empire-building was Theodros. Theodros started out as a rebel (Shifta), built up his forces and once his dream of ascending to the throne was realized, appointed himself “King of Kings” and set out to expand his kingdom.

He engaged in continuous wars to subjugate other kings and feudal lords and to bring their fiefdoms under his empire. When these failed, he sought external aid to beef up his fire-power. But in the process he entered into conflict with Britain and committed suicide. For all his ambitions, Theodros never administered territory beyond that roughly known as Begemeder, let alone the “Ethiopia” he dreamt of or present-day Ethiopia.

The dream of an “Ethiopian Empire” did not, however, disappear with the death of Theodros. Feudal kings invariably strive to expand the territories they control and subjugate other kingdoms and in the “Ethiopian” case, it was Yohannes who emerged the strongest from his rivals and who pursued Theodros’s aborted mission of empire-building. But he too was killed before realizing his objective, in an invasion he launched in conspiracy with external forces.

The designs of Theodros and Yohannes to build an empire crumbled in the beginning because every king-be he Amhara, Tigraian or Oromo opposed it and favoured preserving his independent entity. Each king sought to maintain his own external relations, enlarge his armed forces and on the strength of external military aid to expand his kingdom. As a result of invasions and counter invasions among “Ethiopian” kings, each king’s domain expanded or shrank from time to time and alliances were continually formed and broken-up -especially among weakened kings. Although this is the natural process in the formation of nations, it did not, in this particular case, lead to the emergence of a nation, let alone an empire. Hence the failure of the architects of the “Ethiopian” empire.

These briefly dwelt upon historical facts prove that in the 19th century there was no nation called “Ethiopia” with defined boundaries, a central administration, a single economic system and inhabited by a people with common national sentiments. Before the dreams of empire could be laid to rest, however, European colonial powers set foot on the Horn of Africa at the end of the 19th century and history began to take a different course.

Colonialism in the Horn

Following the Berlin conference of 1884-1885, European colonial powers divided up Africa among themselves and throughout the continent, the process of nation formation began within the colonial boundaries. In the Horn of Africa, France occupied French Somali-land now known as Djibouti; Britain took over British Somali-land, now part of the Republic of Somalia, and Italy took possession of Eritrea as well as Italian Somali-land which is now part of the Republic of Somalia; “Ethiopia”, however, did not fall under the colonial yoke, partly because of the resistance in the north and partly due to the agreement of competing colonial powers on future goals.

Italian Colonialism in Eritrea

The Italian colonialists had special aims in Eritrea. Their objectives were not confined to exploiting Eritrean’s natural and human resources but extended to occupying a large territory in the Horn of Africa -including “Ethiopia”. Towards this end, they gave primacy to turning Somalia and especially strategically -located Eritrea into spring boards for their invasion of Ethiopia. They invested large amounts of capital in Eritrea and speeded up the dismantling of the traditional economic, social and cultural structures as well as the process of nation-building.

The Italians built ports, roads, railways, and rope ways. They opened airports and introduced sea, land and air transportation. They installed telephone and telegraph networks, established power-stations, consumer goods factories and large scale industries. They set up repair and maintenance facilities. They began prospecting for minerals, opened up mines and expanded salt-mining and fishing. They set up large plantations as well as service industries. In short, they introduced a new, advanced, but exploitative, economic system and created new social forces.

The Italians inducted thousands of Eritrean peasants and herdsmen into their colonial army. To meet their administrative needs, they launched a limited educational program confined to teaching the Italian language, the four arithmetic operations and hygiene and began spreading their cultural influence. They made the traditional clan and tribal administration comply with colonial laws. Furthermore, they divided Eritrea into districts and sub-districts, appointed loyal Eritreans to administer them and brought these under the colonial office. They also specified the areas Eritreans could inhabit and freely move in and enacted racially discriminatory laws.

In this manner, Italian colonialism unified Eritrea geographically and set in motion economic, social and cultural changes which in turn fostered common national feelings among Eritreans. Although Italian colonialism proscribed political and trade union rights, this did not prevent the Eritrean people from mounting strong opposition to Italian policies of exploitation, oppression, racial discrimination and forcible conscription. Many Eritreans fled to “Ethiopia”. It was then that Nacura became a notorious prison.

“Ethiopia” Until World War II

“Ethiopia”, as explained before, was saved from colonial domination during the scramble for Africa mainly because of rivalry among the colonial powers. Spurred by her advantageous position and expansionist designs, however, Italy invaded.” Ethiopia”. But in this - its first attempt- Italy was defeated by the British-backed “Ethiopians” at Adowa on March 1, 1896. “Ethiopia” was thus able to avoid falling in colonial hands until the beginning of the Second World War.

In the meantime, the Shoa king Menelik launched successive military campaigns in all directions to expand his empire. Up to 1890, he gained control of Harrar to the east, and also western and southern Shoa and southern Gojjam. In the period 1890-95, Menelik occupied Arusi, northern Bale and northwestern Sidamo. In 1933 Jimma was

subjugated and annexed and, by 1935, the Ogaden and the remaining southern and western parts of present-day Ethiopia, bordering formerly British ruled Kenya and the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan had been occupied. But the eastern campaign -aimed at annexing the territories bordering Italian Somali-land- never reached the boundaries that present Ethiopian rulers claim, because with the Italian invasion of 1935 and the start of the Second World War, Ethiopia fell under Italian colonial rule and the expansionist campaigns of the successors of Menelik -- the triumvirate Tsehaitu, Teferi and Habtegiorgis -- came to a stop.

Did Ethiopia evolve into a nation during this period -that is from the scramble for Africa until the beginning of World War II? Irrespective of the whims of “Ethiopia’s” ambitious rulers) the core of their domain had a backward economy and could not therefore, enable them to dismantle the socioeconomic structures of the territories and peoples they subjugated and replace them with new and advanced ones. Moreover, their administrative presence in the occupied areas consisted merely of isolated military camps and armed Amhara settlers, the “neftegnas”. Their tax-levying schemes and their barbaric and sub-human treatment of their subjects fueled the resistance of the subject peoples making their presence insecure. Thus, although “Ethiopia” did not fall under Ethiopian colonial rule until the Second World War, it did not internally evolve into a nation. And it is this that comprises the historical basis of the existing nationality movements in Ethiopia.

Before embarking on their 1935 invasion of Ethiopia, the Italians, who had not forgotten their defeat at Adowa, went all out to make adequate preparations. They invested billions of liras in Eritrea to upgrade the economy, particularly the infrastructure, thus highly accelerating the transformation of the Eritrean economy. As part of their overall preparations for the World War, the Italians also made significant effort to exploit Eritrea’s mineral resources.

It did not take long for militarily superior Italy to put Ethiopia under

its control. Italy was thus able to seize a vast territory in the Horn of Africa, encompassing Eritrea, Ethiopia and the former Italian Somali-land. But the World War was not fought only in the African Horn. Fascist Italy and its allies were defeated by the Allied Forces and Italian colonialism in the Horn Grumbled.

During the five years it occupied Ethiopia, Italy-unhampered by the War- made extensive effort to strengthen its colonial rule and expand Ethiopia's infrastructure. This, however, could not lead to the formation of a nation because the period was too short for, and there was continuous resistance to, the necessary economic, social and cultural changes. Hence during the five years of the "East African Italian Empire" a nation encompassing Italian Somali-land, Eritrea and Ethiopia was not forged.

From the End of the World War to the Federation Period

The United States, which emerged as the strongest capitalist nation after the Second World War, began to play a major role in the handling of international problems. It was the US which played a decisive role in the disposition of Italian colonies in the Horn. On the other hand, Britain whose army was the main force in defeating the Italians in the Horn of Africa and which colonized Eritrea for a decade, played a subservient role.

The decade of British colonization in Eritrea was a period of crises in all sectors of the economy, as the British were more intent on destroying what was built by the Italians than in developing it. The British also left the racist Italian colonial administrative system intact. But they introduced changes in two areas. The first, in the field of education, scrapped the Italian policy restricting Eritreans to four years of schooling and provided Eritreans with opportunities for higher levels of education, thus raising the cultural level of the society. With their second major reform, the British introduced legislation protecting political rights and permitting political activity. Political parties and

trade unions were soon established. This, coupled with discussions of the question of self-determination -which came to prominence at that time- gave new breath to Eritrean political life.

Although this was a positive development, British motives were by no means altruistic. Aside from the fact that the backward social structure and the low political level of Eritrean political organizations prevented the Eritrean people from fully benefitting from their new rights, the British -who were serving U.S. strategic interests- deliberately whipped up religious and tribal divisions and clashes and promoted the banditry of non Eritreans -- all in the name of political liberties. It was in this decade of turmoil, which followed 60 dark years of Italian colonial rule, that the Eritrean people were faced with the challenge of deciding their own destiny.

And did the Eritrean people decide their fate? Was Federation a compromise solution based on the wishes of the Eritrean people? Despite the much-touted and written about political clamour of those years, the splitting of parties along religious lines, meetings of the United Nations and the arrival in Eritrea of a UN commission, the Eritrean people were not given the opportunity to exercise their rights to self-determination. The political commotion had merely been a show.

It was the U.S. that plunged the Eritrean people -who had already suffered for 70 years from colonial rule- into another form of subjugation by denying their right to self-determination and depriving them of their political and human rights. Although these facts have been generally known, recently declassified State Department documents have corroborated that the U.S. decided right after the Second World War that Eritrea should not become independent. And not without cause. Intent on ascertaining its global dominance, gaining control of the strategic Red Sea route and exploiting oil and other resources in the Middle East, the U.S. sought to gain a foot-hold in an area that could easily link it with its bases in the Indian Ocean and the Far East. Soon after the World War, the U.S. began to set up

naval, air and communications facilities in Eritrea. To protect these interests, the U.S. initially came up with a plan of retaining control of the coastal areas and the highlands, while ceding the western lowlands, which it deemed of no strategic importance, to the Sudan which was then a British colony. Later, when it realized that the Eritrean people were opposed to the partition of their country and the British were not enthusiastic about the plan, the U.S. decided to preserve the colonial status of united Eritrea under the guardianship of its ally, Haile Selassie. Though the matter had been so decided, the UN federal Resolution was passed -after ten years of procrastination- to lend it international legitimacy. This decision did not satisfy the wishes and aspirations of the Eritrean people and became the cause for their struggle for self-determination.

How did Eritrean nationalism develop from 1941-52, the decade of British colonial rule? Taking into account the fact that there had been no organized Eritrean political activity during the Italian colonial period, that the outcome of the Second World War was totally unexpected by the Italians, that the Eritrean people's movement for self-determination had to start from scratch after Italy's defeat, that despite growing nationalism, political activity was marred by manifestations of the old socioeconomic formation, that Ethiopian bandits with the active collusion of the British were active in the country, that ten years was too short a span of time, the Eritrean people did not succeed in establishing a unified organization to lead their struggle for independence. Nevertheless, Eritrean nationalism emerged stronger from those ten years.

Resurgence of Empire-Building Dreams from 1941 - 1952

Although Menelik had mollified his rivalry with Yohannes through marriage, he (Menelik) had began to ally himself with the Italians to realize his ambition of becoming "King of Kings" after the death of Yohannes. And upon succeeding Yohannes to the throne,

he concluded the Treaty of Wuchale with the Italians to expand his empire. The battle of Adowa was fought when Menelik refused to accept a clause in the Italian version of the treaty. Yet, while Menelik was launching expeditions to the east, the south and west, he laid no claim on Eritrea.

After the Italian defeat in the Second World War and the restoration to the throne -by the help of Allied Forces- of Haile Selassie, the friend of the British and the Americans, Ethiopia's rulers relapsed into their imperial dreams. Haile Selassie claimed both Eritrea and Somalia. Although the bases for these claims were obviously the desire to acquire new territories and secure access to the sea, the King could not prevail with such blatant arguments. He had to come up with a more palatable justification. In the event, he claimed that Eritrea had been part of Ethiopia for thousands of years and that both the Eritrean and Somali peoples were "Ethiopians", although the claim on Somalia was practically a bargaining gambit.

But this alone was not enough. If Haile Selassie was to make his claim credible, he had to garner support among Eritreans. Thus in the tumultuous ten years of 1941-52 the king resorted to the Orthodox Church's influence as an instrument for gaining support, lavished money on community elders to buy them out, recruited and infiltrated bandits who harassed and attacked those who advocated independence. All these measures had the support of the British. On another level, Haile Selassie took it upon himself to prove his loyalty to the Americans and promised to serve their strategic interests.

In light of the growth of the Eritrean people's national consciousness, Ethiopia's efforts to win their support could not bring the desired results. Nor were Haile Selassie's pledges of loyalty the basis for the US stance. The US contrived on its own to join Eritrea with Ethiopia and played decisive role in the realization of Ethiopia's ambitions because this coincided with its strategic interests. To justify its decision, the United States along with Britain argued that Eritrea was not economically viable and that "Ethiopia" needed access to the sea.

These, together with Ethiopia's baseless claims led to the federation of Eritrea with Ethiopia against the wishes of the Eritrean people. The way was opened for the complete realization of the ambitions of Ethiopia's rulers. All that remained, was to consume what was laid on the table.

The Eritrean People's Struggle for Self-Determination

The historical and legal bases for the Eritrean people's struggle for self-determination have been stated briefly in the previous pages. The Eritrean people fought single-handedly for justice during the turbulent 10 years from 1941-52. "But the big powers unjustly denied them their rights and this phase of their struggle ended in failure. Yet the flame of the struggle for self-determination was not snuffed out.

The second stage of the Eritrean struggle, which started after 1952, was much influenced by the first stage. To complete the annexation of Eritrea, Haile Selassie's regime did not hesitate from taking measures that would erode and finally abolish the federation. It sent troops to Eritrea, proscribed the rights of assembly, movement and expression, abolished the official languages of Eritrea and imposed its colonial language, filled the Eritrean parliament with its stooges, undermined the powers of the Chief Executive, brought under its control the administration of justice, misappropriated the budget, dismantled economic institutions and lowered the Eritrean flag.

Faced with these injustices, the Eritrean people repeatedly submitted petitions and appealed to the UN, which had ratified the federation and was legally responsible, as well as to the United States and other member countries. Inside Eritrea, a peaceful national resistance movement led by workers and students emerged and thrived. To curb Eritrean resistance, Haile Selassie's regime intensified its repressive measures. It hunted, imprisoned, tortured and murdered hundreds of patriots. Under U.S. pressure the U.N. routinely ignored the Eritrean people's appeals. Moreover, the resistance movement, despite its rapid

growth, was not strong enough to frustrate Haile Selassie's measures. Hence Haile Selassie was able in 1962 to proclaim to the world the total annexation of Eritrea. The dream of Ethiopian kings which had failed to materialize in over a century had finally come true.

Due to US dominance, the UN which was solely responsible for the Eritrean case did not budge while its resolution was trampled underfoot. Thus ended the second stage of the peaceful struggle of the Eritrean people. Eritrea fell under the total colonial rule of the US-supported Haile Selassie regime, but this only strengthened the Eritrean people's desire for justice and their determination to win it.

Faced with injustice, denial of the basic right of self-determination, repression and international conspiracy, the Eritrean people waged democratic peaceful struggles during the first stage of their organized political movement (1941-52), but to no avail. In the second stage (1952-62) as well, their legal and peaceful struggle for their legitimate right to self-determination and against the violation of a federation imposed in the name of the United Nations only encountered further repression and injustice. The Eritrean people were therefore left with no alternative but to resort to force to win justice, human dignity and the right to self-determination. Already at the end of the second period of national struggle, spontaneous calls for armed resistance had gained momentum, and in September 1961, a year before the annexation was declared, the armed struggle was launched.

In spite of the subsequent internal negative development of the Eritrean revolution (which will be dealt with in another section) the beginning of armed struggle in 1961 after 20 years of peaceful, political resistance, was in consonance with the sentiments and aspirations of the Eritrean people. This development constituted a threat and embarrassment to the colonial regime of Haile Selassie and its American supporters. To crush the Eritrean struggle, the regime adopted the policy of "retaining control of the land by exterminating the population" and, aided by US arms and military advice, committed mass massacres and plundered the property of peaceful Eritreans. As a

result, tens of thousands of Eritreans sought refuge in the Sudan while a greater number of internally displaced people suffered from starvation and deprivation. Furthermore, to make its atrocities effective and to use Eritreans to kill Eritreans, the Haile Selassie regime launched a special “commando” force with the help of Israeli arms and advisors and intensified its scorched-earth policy.

Meanwhile the Eritrean armed struggle kept on growing, although it could not play an effective role because of its internal weakness. There were serious shortcomings in the external activities of the ELF leadership as well, but the Eritrean people kept appealing for justice and support to the United Nations, other international forums and individual states.

Ethiopian colonial policy under Haile Selassie aimed at crushing the armed resistance internally and isolating the Eritrean cause externally. In the internal front, its brutal measures inflicted heavy damage on the lives and property of the Eritrean people but it could not break their determination and will. Neither could it crush the liberation army. On the contrary, Eritrean nationalism grew and solidified. Abroad, Ethiopia with full US diplomatic support, was able to block Eritrean access to international forums, but the Eritrean people did not despair in their appeals for justice.

The Haile Selassie regime’s oppression and exploitation were not limited to Eritrea but also affected the Ethiopian peoples. Most members of each nationality and most nationalities in Ethiopia were deprived of basic human liberties and were relegated to second class citizenship. Rural lands and produce were appropriated by “neftegnas” (armed settlers) and Haile Selassie loyalists. Ethiopia’s mineral and other natural resources became the property of the Royal family and its underlings. The same with factories commercial institutions and transportation facilities. The “Ethiopian” people’s culture and history became the history of a single individual -Haile Selassie. In addition, natural disaster, especially drought, worsened the misery of the “Ethiopian” people. Hundreds of thousands of “Ethiopians”

died of hunger and diseases while the king's pet dogs were lavishly fed and provided with medical treatment unavailable to the public. The colonial war raging in Eritrea claimed the lives of thousands of soldiers and left a horrifying scar on Haile Selassie's army, resulting in resentment.

All these, combined to ignite a spontaneous popular uprising which led to the downfall of Haile Selassie's colonial and autocratic regime in 1974. The US which strove for 33 years to secure and expand its strategic interests at the expense of the Eritrean people's rights and the suffering of the "Ethiopian" peoples ended up the loser. So, too, flopped the dreams of empire. Relatively speaking, the Eritrean revolution, despite its internal weaknesses, emerged stronger from the first 13 years of the war. The third stage of the Eritrean people's struggle for self-determination came to an end.

But did imperial ambitions vanish?

When the colonial, autocratic regime fell under the combined blows of the stormy uprising of the "Ethiopian" peoples and the unflinching struggle of the Eritrean people, questions demanding fundamental solutions were raised. First and foremost was the Eritrean people's legitimate right to self-determination, already denied for over 30 years. Similarly, the peoples of "Ethiopia" demanded an end to national oppression and the exercise of the right of self-determination of nationalities; the dismantling of autocratic rule, the establishment of democratic popular power and the protection of fundamental human rights, an end to feudal ("neftegna") and foreign exploitation, the implementation of land reform as well as the equitable re-distribution of wealth.

In the Haile Selassie era, there had been no opposition parties in "Ethiopia" as the autocratic regime did not allow basic human rights, let alone organized opposition. Consequently, a power vacuum was created after the Monarch's downfall. The army which was the only relatively organized force and one whose lower echelons, had also

suffered from the prevailing misery, gradually filled the vacuum and consolidated its power.

The low-ranking officers who seized power, the Dergue, could not immediately thwart the popular uprising. Their initial tactic, therefore was to join the bandwagon with the aim of slowing it down and eventually changing its course. Towards this end, the Dergue at first echoed the popular demands of “land to the tiller”, “expropriation of capital”, “rights of nationalities” and “democracy”. It also brought to the fore the Eritrean question, which the autocratic regime had never raised, and announced its desire for a peaceful settlement. These high-sounding slogans and declarations bought it time to pacify and weaken internal oppositions to its rule. In Eritrea, it used its “peace” manoeuvre to cover its scheme to liquidate by force the Eritrean struggle. Gradually, it intensified its military campaigns and in the 12 years of its rule inflicted unprecedented suffering and destruction. In “Ethiopia”, it consolidated its dictatorial rule, by liquidating factional elements and groups and by setting up alliances with, or crushing, potential opponents.

An external force, the Soviet Union, played a crucial role in the Dergue’s consolidation of power. Until the downfall of Haile Selassie, the U.S. had been “Ethiopia’s” major collaborator in the suppression of the Eritrean people and the repression of the “Ethiopian” people. But with the demise of the autocratic regime, the Americans were expelled and, in the Ethiopian configuration of things, had to be replaced by another power. The Soviet Union, as the rival of the US, seized the opportunity to advance its global strategic interests. It was with Soviet collaboration and encouragement that the Dergue persisted in denying the Eritrean people’s right to self-determination, chose force as the means of resolving the Eritrean problem, launched large scale offensives and trampled underfoot the “Ethiopian” people’s basic democratic liberties and the rights of nationalities.

The Dergue, which with Soviet support replaced Haile Selassie’s colonial autocratic rule with its colonial dictatorial rule was driven in

its vainglorious military adventures by the old imperial ambition of “Ethiopian” kings. But over the past 12 years, both the Eritrean people’s struggle for self determination as well as Ethiopia’s nationality and democratic movements have gained strength and momentum.

Today, 45 years after the attempt to subjugate Eritrea stated in earnest, wither the imperial ambitions of “Ethiopian” kings? The historical events of the past half-a century, we feel, are good indicators.

PART II

INTERNAL POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS OF THE ERITREAN STRUGGLE FOR SELF- DETERMINATION

The Eritrean struggle for national independence and liberation is directed against the antiquated empire-building ambitions of an “Ethiopia” supported by big powers. The stage-by-stage developments of this struggle over the past 45 years have been examined briefly. It is the steadfast efforts of the Eritrean people in their pursuit of justice and peace that plays the decisive role in the struggle. To serve these aspirations and propel the struggle, the policy guidelines of the revolution have to be correct. And correct policies can only emanate from knowledge, consciousness and experience. Therefore, the EPLF’s role over the past decade can only be assessed in light of past experience and it is thus important to discuss the genesis of the national democratic movement in Eritrea.

First Stage (1941-52)

Sixty years of Italian colonial rule in Eritrea, played a major role in changing the economic, social and cultural structures and forging a nation. But they did not do away with backward agricultural and animal husbandry methods or transform Eritrea into a developed industrial nation. (In fact, such a rapid transformation has never taken place, even in the developed countries.) At the end of the Italian period, Eritrean society did not become one of labourers, service workers and modern farmers. Neither did Italian colonialism affect all sectors of the society equally. Hence clan, tribal, regional and religious ties endured. This, along with the severe restriction of educational opportunities and the prescription of political liberties, precluded the emergence of an educated, politicized and experienced stratum capable of leading the political struggle. No wonder a united

nationalist organization could not be formed immediately, when organized political activity commenced after Italy's defeat.

The first political grouping, established in 1941 as "The Love of Nation Association", could not be taken as a serious movement, since it lacked clear political orientation, until it was later transformed into the Unionist Party. The movement was infiltrated by Haile Selassie's agents and several highland (Christian) leaders motivated by religious considerations and personal conflicts and ambitions opposed their Moslem brothers within the organization. These leaders used the church which had ties with the Ethiopian Orthodox Church as a political instrument, conducted sectarian agitation and threatened opponents with excommunication. Their actions constituted the first negative experience in the Eritrean people's struggle for self-determination. As a reaction, most of the Moslem leaders who had been denied a say and who felt threatened by the domination of the highlanders and the church-led conspiracy of some Christian leaders to collaborate with "Ethiopia" were forced to set up the "Moslem League". The appearance of these two parties split the national struggle along religious lines and created favourable grounds for Ethiopian ambitions.

The political line-up, however, was not strictly on a religious basis. Many Christian leaders allied themselves with their brothers in the Moslem League. On the other side, many Moslem chiefs (Diglals) and other Moslem leaders cast their die with the "Unionists". Moreover, there were disputes based on land among various tribes and clans.

The Haile Selassie regime worked to widen the gulf it had itself created. With the complicity of the British Administration, it infiltrated armed bandits from Ethiopia who in coordination with Unionist agents sowed terrorism in Eritrea. Under its bidding, the church, which had long been in the service of Ethiopian kings, forgot its spiritual duties and became a center of political agitation.

Political developments, however, did not turn out to be favourable

to “Ethiopian” interests. In the second half of the forties, all political parties aside from the Unionist Party, joined forces to form the Independence Bloc, which also attracted many members of the Unionist Party. By the end of the decade when UN delegations were visiting Eritrea to ascertain the wishes of the Eritrean people, up to 70% of the population were for independence. The rest were divided among those who wanted a compromise solution and those who favoured unity with Ethiopia.

However, the true findings of the effort to ascertain the wishes of the Eritrean people were in the final analysis meaningless as the matter had already been decided by the United States. If the decision had been deferred for another ten years as had been proposed by some wise leaders of the Independence Bloc, the outcome would have been different. Leaving aside the question of who decided Eritrea’s fate, however, it can be said that in the years between 1941-52, the Eritrean people showed marked improvement in the level of their political organization and unity but were not able to form a solid and mature national organization.

Second Stage (1952-61)

The content of the Eritrean people’s struggle in this second stage was the same as in the previous one, but it took different forms of organization. Although members of the Independence Bloc constituted the majority in the first Eritrean parliament, this did not translate into party influence and strength, since there was no mass political activity organized along party lines. But this was not the basic problem.

Partial control, which the “Federation” implied, did not satisfy the imperial ambitions of Haile Selassie, who therefore, solved to dismantle the “Federation”. Towards this end, the autocratic regime violated the freedoms of political assembly, the press and speech, proceeded to threaten and dissolve parliament, undermined the powers

of the Chief Executive, illegally seized the administration of justice and finally abrogated the Federation abolishing all its institutions.

The Eritrean people responded by intensifying their peaceful political protests. Initially, the mass resistance -mainly centered in the cities-was spontaneous as there was no organization to lead it. Later increased repression made it impossible to stage peaceful demonstrations, organized by open political organizations. This reality and the growth of political awareness led to the formation of clandestine groups. Parallel with this, nationalists who had been forced to flee because of the regime's repression and persecution started to organize opposition groups abroad. And around 1958, the grouping known abroad as the "Eritrean Liberation Movement" (Haraka) and internally as "Mahber Showate" (Association of Seven") the name indicating that the group was organized in secret cells of seven members each- assumed the leadership of the national resistance movement. This new forms of organization, the intensified repression mounted by Haile Selassie's police apparatus and the growing realization that open peaceful resistance alone was ineffective led to the decision to also use force to challenge the Haile Selassie regime and attempts were made on the lives of "Ethiopia's" agents. The concept of armed struggle also began to gain acceptance. In short, during the second stage, the Eritrean struggle developed from one relying on the institutions of the Federation (parliament, the courts, etc.), to spontaneous peaceful opposition, to clandestine political activity and finally to armed resistance. The forms of organization, too, became more sophisticated.

But the more marked change of this stage, was in the political maturity of the movements rather than in the forms of struggle. The religious divisions which haunted the previous stage and which to a certain extent had improved towards the end with the founding of the Independence Bloc were no more. The movement enjoyed the wide participation of all Eritreans, especially of workers and students. This was certainly a big stride in the Eritrean people's national struggle.

The political struggles of the second stage (1952-61) not only created favourable conditions for the formation of a single national struggle but trained what could be the core of a liberation movement. The questions facing the Eritrean people then were when, where and how to begin armed struggle.

Third Stage (1961-70)

The pressing task of the first two stages of the Eritrean struggle was the establishment of a national organization. With the advent of the Eritrean Liberation Movement (ELM) at the end of the second stage, 20 years after the beginning of the political movement that task was close to fulfillment. But why was it that it was the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) and not the ELM that launched the armed struggle in 1961? Was it because that ELM lacked the preparedness or the will? Or was it because a line more progressive than that of the ELM was required and the ELF supplied it? In other words, was there a historical necessity for the ELF?

The inception of the armed struggle in 1961 was undeniably the expression of the aspiration of the Eritrean people for independence. Hence its historic importance. The advent of the ELF as the leader of the armed struggle, however, was purely a historical accident. The leaders of the ELF were people from whose memories the narrowly divisive sectarian politics of the forties had not faded. They had played no active role in the political movement that emerged during the Federation period and were not influenced by the strong national consciousness that developed at that stage. In addition, the formation of the ELF abroad, far from the political realities of Eritrea and influenced by politically conservative forces in the Middle East, contributed to their narrow outlook. Be that as it may; the launching of ELF activities in the remote western lowlands bordering the Sudan where armed struggle could thrive was positive.

From the outset, the ELF's political campaign took a religious bent.

Although this was a reaction to the sectarian agitation of the Unionist Party and the Orthodox Church, and reflected the sentiments of a large section of Eritrean society, it was not conducive to national unity. Indeed it was very retrograde, especially in light of the national awareness that gripped the urban population during the second stage. Moreover, sectarian sentiments resulting from backward socioeconomic structures and the intrigues of enemies may be excusable in ordinary people but not so for a leadership that presumes to guide a national movement. For this reason, even though the ELF was able in the first few years of the armed struggle to arouse the people, it was plagued by narrow tribal conflicts.

In contrast, the ELM enjoyed wide popular support -especially in the Sudan- and was more advanced in its outlook, organizational structure and working methods. It could have played a corrective role. But the ELF leaders exacerbated their differences with that movement and when the ELM in 1965 sent armed units into Eritrea to participate in the armed struggle, the ELF leaders liquidated the patriots thereby initiating the ELF tradition of settling secondary contradictions by violence. Fortunately the conflict between the ELF and ELM did not adversely affect the Eritrean people's enthusiasm for the armed struggle. From all corners of the country as well as from abroad, Eritreans flocked to the ELF, swelling its ranks. This influx from the cities and abroad, particularly of students, introduced a qualitative change in the composition of the ELF.

The ELF leadership divided Eritrea into regions and divided the Liberation Army -command as well as rank and file- along tribal and provincial lines, thus fomenting provincial; tribal and religious sentiments instead of building a single army and through it fostering national unity. This also affected the prosecution of the liberation war. Instead of leading a nation-wide effort, the ELF could only carry out isolated, small-scale operations. Moreover, since its conception of politicizing the people could not transcend traditional and narrow circles, the wide participation and active collaboration of the people

merely reflected their political sentiments. The people did not play a conscious role but only followed traditional leaders.

The Revolutionary Command, the group established to liaise the decentralized commands in the field with the Supreme Council, suffered from incompetence and backward composition and outlook and resided outside the field, in Kessela. It was incapable of coordinating the work of the commands inside Eritrea and providing leadership. It served more as a center for concocting conspiracies to perpetuate divisions.

The Supreme Council, the highest body, was not responsible to any authority. It was not only based far from the field but also disunited. Each Supreme Council member attempted to build his own power base exacerbating the divisions within the growing Eritrean Liberation Army (ELA). The art of manipulating the feelings of clans, tribes, religious and regional groupings and of sowing discord among them developed. While it was understandable that the drawing up of an organizational structure -which would define the legal powers, duties and inter-relationships of the various organs- could be overlooked while the ELF was small, the Supreme Council regarded its traditional ways of division, intrigue and manipulation as the norm and saw no need for democratic and institutional administration. Therefore for almost three-quarters of the period of the third stage (1961-70); programs, policies as well as policy-making and executive bodies were non-existent in the ELF. Its foreign relations were extremely narrow and, confined to the Middle East. Moreover, in their pronouncements abroad, members of the Supreme Council wallowed in contradictions thus adversely affecting the Eritrean cause both at the regional and international levels. The Supreme Council also misused ELF funds in the pursuit of its political games. It could get away with this because the ELF had no organs or procedure for auditing its finances and property.

With the growth of the ELF and the expansion of its operational areas, conflict and change were inevitable. Internally, the clan, tribal,

provincial and religious divisions, the fragmentation of the forces of the ELA, the absence of the main and decisive leadership bodies from the field, the lack of a national program and policies, the neglect of the task of fostering the democratic participation of the people and the lack of democratic organizations and institutions caused grave concern. The damages inflicted upon life and property by the enemy's scorched-earth campaigns and the displacement and dispersion they entailed revealed the ineffectiveness of the divided army and the people's confidence began to wane. Acts of banditry and vengeance perpetrated by the ELF on the civilian population worsened the situation. These developments inevitably generated opposition and a rectification movement with popular support broke out in the ranks of the ELF. The view that regarded the ELF lightly as a mere nationalist organization changed and attempts were made to turn it into a genuine national democratic organization.

The rectification movement was at first spontaneous, with no clearly-defined political aims, but it gradually took shape. The Supreme Council -which with no limitations on its power engaged in wanton divisiveness, intrigue and manipulation- and its accomplices felt threatened by the movement. As the rectification movement grew, so did the fears of the Supreme Council. But, alas, the movement lacked a solid base and was not deep-going. It could not even achieve its preliminary goal of uniting the five divided commands of the ELA. Only three came together, while the remaining two, goaded by the Supreme Council refused to join. But the struggle between the rectification movement and the Supreme Council did not end there.

The union of the three commands which was bound to be short-lived due to its internal weaknesses, was further undermined by the intrigues of the Supreme Council and the sabotage of its accomplices and instead of 'playing a decisive role for change, ultimately entered into compromises and participated in the Adoboha Conference. A conference of all commands had been a key demand of all groups in the ELF including the three united commands. But the Adoboha

Conference was a unity conference in form only. Moreover the union of the three commands failed to participate in the conference as a cohesive and decisive force. For this reasons the outcome of the Adoboha Conference served the divisive line of the Supreme Council and further retarded the march of the revolution.

Nonetheless, the Adoboha Conference passed a number of important resolutions: the unification of the ELA as a preliminary step, the convening of an ELF congress within a year and the settling up of a preparatory committee, the establishment of an investigatory committee -accountable to the congress- to look into past malpractices so as to correct them. These steps were intended to initiate the transformation of the ELF into a national, democratic organization. Although in the wake of the Adoboha Conference the growth in the influence of the Supreme Council and its accomplices was apparent, the force striving for genuine change decided to struggle on the basis of the guarantees offered by the Adoboha resolutions.

The Supreme Council and its collaborators, used the Adoboha Conference and the formation in the Conference of the General Command -- pending the ELF congress- to advance their putschist line. In the event, the General Command which was dominated by supporters of the Supreme Council and its divisive policies had no problem in staging a coup. It arrested five members of the General Command as well as cadres and fighters it considered adherents of the rectification movement. Furthermore, it launched a campaign of indiscriminate assassinations, creating an atmosphere of terror. It also disbanded the preparatory and investigatory committees elected by the Adoboha Conference This atmosphere of repression and persecution triggered an exodus of fighters to the Sudan and wide-spread straggling. The hopes of rectifying the ELF through democratic internal struggle foundered Finally, in 1970, opposition elements joined together to form the Eritrean People's Liberation Forces.

The third stage of the Eritrean movement -which can also be taken

as the first stage of the armed struggle- was thus characterized by the vigorous struggle to establish a competent national, democratic organization. The contest was between the unfettered Supreme Council and its accomplices whose forte was divisiveness, intrigue and manipulation and the force that worked for democratic changes and the formation of a united national front. After liquidating the ELM in 1965, the ELF leadership had temporarily secured a favourable atmosphere to stabilize itself. But the failure of its line and practices to advance the Eritrean cause and its decision to crush by force a popular rectification movement, precipitated the inception of a second organization.

The process of establishing a broad national democratic front did not, however, come to a stop. Since the formation of an opposition force did not necessarily imply the emergence of a single line and a homogeneous force, it was imperative to continue the struggle to clarify the line and establish a genuine national democratic front.

Fourth Stage (1970-81)

The past part of this stage, from the first EPLF Congress in 1977 until 1981, falls within the purview of an evaluation of the EPLF's experiences. But this does not preclude its treatment here as it is inseparable from an overall assessment of the Eritrean political movement and developments within the ELF.

This stage abounds with impressive achievements. It was also one of civil war, dialogue, resumption of civil war, the factionalization of groups and finally the emergence of a single decisive Front.

It was not at all surprising that civil war ensued, as the ELF was still dominated by those who continued the line of the Supreme Council, those that had failed and found to be incapable of uniting all national forces, those who thrived on divisiveness and were unwilling to solve any democratic opposition by peaceful means. With the birth

of the EPLF, the liquidationist urge reared its head again and grew in magnitude. The civil war had its prelude in the decimation of the fledgling ELM, the liquidationist campaign within ELF ranks and the atrocities perpetrated on the people. The only thing that set it apart from the earlier campaigns was its scale.

After the Adoboha Conference, the failure of the General Command to suppress all democratic opposition served to strengthen the challenge to its policies. This increased the isolation of the General Command and fed its fears. In common with all putschist forces, who ride on the crest of mass protests in order to change their orientation and liquidate genuine democratic forces, the General Command feigning observance of the Adoboha resolutions set up its own congress-preparatory committee and invited the force that had split from the ELF (i.e. the EPLF) to participate. The scheme was to ensnare and liquidate the EPLF and if that failed to use the rejection of the offer to participate in what was evidently -by virtue of the composition of the participants and the way it was convened- an undemocratic congress whose outcome was known before-hand as an excuse for launching a liquidationist campaign.

In the event, the General Command convened what it called the First National Congress, coopted opportunistic and subservient elements to the leadership and declared its political program. It also presented the EPLF with an ultimatum, either return to ELF ranks or face a liquidationist military campaign. This was only an attempt to justify an already decided upon civil war and when the foredoomed reunity failed to materialize, the leadership which had emerged from the congress, the Revolutionary Council, promptly ignited the civil war.

But the result of the civil war that was sparked off over-zealously and with expectations of a quick victory did not satisfy the Revolutionary Council. The EPLF was not liquidated. And although the civil war was accompanied by an intensive smear campaign, the people were unconvinced and gradually popular opposition to the civil war mounted. within ELF ranks and especially the army, the propaganda

campaign was also ineffective. Internal opposition to the civil war gained momentum. Abroad, except for one or two countries that fanned the fratricidal war, all friends of the Eritrean revolution opposed it. On the ground, the ELF despite its superiority in manpower and arms, failed to crush or weaken the EPLF. On the contrary, the strength of the EPLF grew quantitatively as well as qualitatively in the process of its defensive war. The EPLF's condemnation of the civil war, its calls for democratic dialogue and for directing all arms against the enemy received popular support. After four years (1971-75) of bloodshed and heavy human and material losses, the liquidation scheme of the Revolutionary Council fizzled out.

At that time, the EPLF was neither a homogeneous or entirely democratic opposition force. It included in its ranks -at all levels- members of the Supreme Council who had lost out in the power struggle as well as elements that had split from the ELF because of narrow and vindictive outlooks. The opposition was aware of these shortcomings and concluded an agreement from the outset clearly defining its composition, inter-relations and working methods. The contradictory lines and interests were apparent in the internal working of the EPLF, but did not erupt into open confrontation as long as the civil war continued. The broadly democratic force worked to strengthen its unity and consolidate its organization in the process of an internal political dialogue as well as joint struggles, while the force abroad which represented the line of the Supreme Council- and its internal accomplices strove to dominate the EPLF which they saw as a temporary regrouping ground or a bargaining chip. In the end, most elements of what was known as the Foreign Mission and their narrow-minded adherents in the field chose to leave the EPLF. Which, on that account, emerged stronger politically and organizationally.

The ELF leadership -the Revolutionary Council- was faced with a strong challenge when its attempts to manipulate the 1975 popular movement against the civil war were exposed and aborted, and the opposition of its rank and file fighters to the liquidationist scheme

grew out of control, leading to the formation of fighters dialogue committees (to discuss with the EPLF). As usual, the RC concealing its liquidationist schemes staged the “Second National Congress” to enable it to mount the popular tide and divert it towards its own ends. It endorsed the policy of democratic dialogue initiated by the EPLF, passing a resolution to that effect. But instead of entering into serious discussions with the basic force of the EPLF, the Revolutionary Council proceeded to conclude a unity agreement with the Foreign Mission, in an effort at exploiting the splittist trend of the Foreign Mission and its accomplices in the field. The RC also launched fresh anti- EPLF campaigns to find a pretext for liquidation. But these schemes too failed to yield results. And finally, following the first organizational congress of the Eritrean People’s Liberation Forces, internal and external pressure forced the RC to sign the October 1977 Agreement.

Realizing that the implementation of the Agreement would not serve its interests, the RC started searching for loopholes to nullify the agreement and foment internecine clashes, at a time when raging battles were being fought against the colonial Dergue regime and the Eritrean revolution was scoring big military victories. Failing to consider EPLF victories as those of the Eritrean revolution as a whole, the RC incited clashes to place obstruction in the EPLF’s advance. And later when the balance of forces tipped in the enemy’s favour and the Eritrean revolution, particularly the EPLF, became engaged in an extensive defensive war, the RC stepped up its attacks in the hope of exploiting the situation to weaken the EPLF.

But things did not stop there. In violation of the provisions of the October 1977 Agreement on the minimum program for co-operation and the participation of ELF units in the defence of the Revolution’s base area, the RC withdrew its units and attempted to stab in the back the EPLF which was fully occupied by the defensive war. Finally, it mustered its forces and unleashed a largescale civil war but was defeated and pushed off into the Sudan in 1981. This defeat sharpened

the internal conflicts that had been smouldering under patched-up alliances. Opposition to the dominant liquidationist leadership mounted and when this leadership attempted to solve the conflict by staging a coup, the ELF became fragmented and disintegrated.

The struggle in this, the fourth stage in the development of the Eritrean movement, should not be viewed narrowly as a conflict between the ELF and EPLF, but as a continuation of the efforts of the Eritrean movement to forge a broad national democratic front.

The ELF has to be viewed within the context of the Eritrean revolution, not as a grouping of those who claimed the name and pushed a narrow, sectarian and liquidationist line. Hence in the broadest sense it was not the ELF that disintegrated but the anti-national force and line represented at first by the Supreme Council and its accomplices, subsequently by the General Command and finally by the dominant and reactionary faction of the Revolutionary Council.

To sum up, in the forty years between 1941-81, the Eritrean struggle for self determination and independence passed roughly through the following stages: an initial stage of struggle between independence and anti-independence parties characterized by the domination of the forces of colonialism and empire builders and plagued by political chaos and disintegration; followed by a more advanced, politically sophisticated and unified national struggle and the beginning of a national organization, a return to divisiveness and the start of a rectification movement aimed at building a national organization, the recurrence of the mushrooming of organizations and the clarification of the national democratic line; and finally, the emergence of a broad and decisive national democratic front.

Assesment of EPLF's Experiences in the Period Between Its 1st and 2nd Congresses

The EPLF's mission is the realization of the Eritrean peoples right

to self-determination and independence. This was reaffirmed in clear terms in its national democratic program adopted at its first congress. But the struggle to emancipate the Eritrean people from the colonial yoke of oppression, requires not only waging a war of liberation against the colonial army but entails a comprehensive political struggle and all-round nation building tasks. Shouldering this responsibility and recognizing its importance, the EPLF, has during the past few years, accomplished many tasks in various fields, gaining in the process a rich experience and bringing about tangible changes. In the following pages, these achievements will be discussed in accordance with their importance.

Political Work Among the Masses

Ever since Eritrea emerged as a nation and especially over the past 40 years, the task of raising the national consciousness of the Eritrean people so it would be on a par with the process of nation building has remained fundamental. This task includes the fostering of a common national consciousness by eliminating sectarian sentiments emanating from the backward social and economic structure of the Eritrean society; the development of a nationwide political organization by discarding the narrow and backward organizational forms thrown up by the backward social formation, and the guaranteeing of the broad and democratic participation of the masses in the liberation struggle and national re-construction.

In order to realise these political objectives stage by stage, the EPLF strove to raise the political consciousness of the Eritrean people so that a common nationalism would subsume religious, provincial, tribal and ethnic sentiments. It also worked to enable the people to organize themselves in national associations based on social standing, set up popular institutions on a democratic basis to replace those serving traditional leaders and arm themselves to protect their democratic gains.

To raise the political consciousness of the people, regular political education was introduced. Topics such as the history of the Eritrean people and their struggle, the correct national line and methods of struggle, basic political concepts, forms of colonialism, its collaborators and their tactics, developments in the international political scene, rights and obligations of the masses, democratic organizational principles, perseverance, etc., were discussed. The discussions were not limited to EPLF members, but public meetings and seminars were organized so the population at large could participate and help in broadening and deepening understanding of the issues. Towards the same end, books were translated, journals and other publications widely disseminated. A radio station -The Voice of the Masses- was also set up to assist in the politicization of the masses, particularly those who live in inaccessible areas. Research was carried out in the economic, social and cultural life and the folklore of the Eritrean people so political work would be based on Eritrean reality.

The second aspect of EPLF's political work pertains to mass organizations. Here its fundamental policy was to organize the Eritrean masses on the basis of their social status into associations of workers, peasants, women, students as well as professionals. The political work was effective and the associations held their founding congresses, declared their programs, elected their leaderships and have been actively broadening and consolidating their ranks. Parallel with this and on the basis of the Front's policy of setting up democratic political and administrative bodies inside the country, people's assemblies were formed at village and district levels in the liberated and sem-liberated areas and are functioning properly. To simplify their administrative work, committees responsible for cooperatives, economic life, justice etc, were elected and as a result the people's role in self-administration improved.

The third policy objective was arming the people. In many regions, village and district people's militia units were formed. These have not only been defending their institutions and revolutionary gains, but

they have also valintly confronted the enemy's military offensives and campaigns in conjunction with regional and regular units of the People's Army.

The tasks of politicizing, organizing and arming the population was not carried out without obstacles and shortcomings. Naturally, the major obstacle was the colonial Dergue regime and its political designs. Although today there is no strata of Eritrean society collaborating with the colonial regime, the Dergue has not stopped its attempts at deception. Failing in this, it has resorted to preventing our people from listening to "Voice of the Masses" broadcasts and reading EPLF publications, further revealing its political bankruptcy. The obstruction caused by the colonialist regime is due to its facist repressive measures more than its political campaigns. It has deprived the Eritrean people of the basic rights of assembly and speech, employed the Kebele institutions which serve as a security and police apparatus to restrict their freedom of movement and obstruct their efforts at organization, and imprisoned and executed active EPLF members. To prevent the youth from joining the national struggle it exposes them to corruptive influences and conscripts them into its colonial army. In the rural areas, it carries out military incursions, acts of sabotage and aerial bombardment to destroy popular institutions, disrupt the peace and displace the population. During the past years of drought, the Dergue took deliberate measures to ruin the already fragile economy and utilized food aid as a means of political control. Lastly, in an attempt at legitimacy, it forced our people to vote at gun point in a constitutional referendum which has no relevance to their case. Although these measures did not and could not dampen the Eritrean people's aspiration for independence, they obstructed the EPLF's task of establishing and strengthening popular democratic institutions. Nevertheless our people have been able to persevere, adopt new forms of organization, set up clandestine institutions and even work from within the Dergue's police-like institutions, such as the Kebeles.

The second obstacle was that created by the internal forces of reaction. As the Eritrean people's struggle matured and the old ideas and sectarianism flagged the elements who had an interest in fanning ethnic religions and regional differences and who felt threatened by EPLF's policy of politicizing, organizing and arming the people dished out what they felt were the most appealing arguments and employed all the means at their disposal to sow distrust and mutual resentment so as to maintain the factional groupings they could freely manipulate. The weaker they got the more desperate they became in their efforts -especially abroad- to confuse the masses and prevent them from actively supporting the EPLF. These groups which cannot survive on their own, are trying vainly to prolong their existence with the support of foreign powers and by exploiting the economic and social problems of Eritrean refugees. The problem of internal reaction is a long term problem that can only disappear in the process of nation -building and the growth of the active political participation of the masses. Seen in this light and taking into consideration the developments of the past ten years which saw active mass participation and a rapid growth of the people's confidence in the EPLF, the harm caused by the irresponsible campaigns of the internal reactionaries, is while undeniable, extremely limited.

The massive displacement of the Eritrean people was another factor that affected our political and organizational activities in the last ten years. In the 1977-1978 period, when large areas of Eritrea were liberated and an open and democratic atmosphere prevailed popular institutions flourished in the rural areas as well as in the towns. This aroused the hope of Eritrean refugees to return home and participate in national reconstruction and popular participation recieved a tremendous boost. With the strategic withdrawal the active elements were forced to flee and emigrate. This adversely affected life and living conditions in the areas retaken by the enemy, particularly the towns. Unemployment and the lack of a secure life became unbearable. Drought and instability wrought havoc on agricultural and livestock

production and became additional burdens on an already untenable situation.

Because it takes an extended period to change the military balance of forces, and since inside Eritrea, the question of survival became the primary concern while abroad ensuring sanctuary and social security, securing the means to support oneself and dependents was a necessity, the high level of participation in the struggle flagged though national aspirations and sentiments remained intact. Popular participation was also negatively affected by the Dergue's suppression and destruction and the reactionary forces's defeatist propaganda.

In the setting up and consolidation of mass organizations and popular institutions, the training of competent cadres and the devising of effective working methods are basic. This task, however, is not the responsibility only of the Department of Mass Administration, but also falls on other EPLF institutions. Although the Department of Mass Administration had taken the training of cadres and the continuous improvement of organizational forms and working methods as its main tasks, there were shortcomings in the capacity of its cadres. Another drawback was the failure of other EPLF departments and sections to always coordinate their specific tasks with the ongoing activities among the people.

Though not isolated from the EPLF's overall political work among the masses, the efforts made to promote the role of women are of special interest. Since the participation of all nationals in the process of liberating and developing Eritrea is an imperative task, the participation of women, who make up half of our society, must be given great attention. It is easy to accept this in principle and grasp its theoretical importance, but it is difficult to turn it into a reality. It is hard to persuade a backward male dominated society, fettered by chauvinist and superstitious beliefs that consider women as weak and ignorant, and relegates them to second class citizenship to accept that women are equal to men. But the EPLF incorporated women's rights and their participation in its political program and

worked seriously to implement it. The advances made by women over the past ten years, their politicization, education, and training. the setting up of their own association, their substantial role in the armed struggle and the exemplary heroism they demonstrated, their important representation in the peoples' assemblies, their participation in agriculture and other productive activities, their active role in the fields of education and health, the upgrading of their administrative and leadership capabilities, in short their participation in all aspects of the Eritrean revolution are tangible and practical proofs of the correctness of the EPLF policy and the seriousness with which it was implemented. Eventhough many shortcomings which can be traced to the backwardness of our society, shortage of time and limited experiences have yet to be corrected, the participation of women, which the Eritrean people are proud of, has solved many problems and has simplified future tasks.

Finally, since the tasks of politicizing and organizing the masses and expanding their democratic participation are formidable and require great efforts, the EPLF's political work must be broadened and refined by correcting existing defects and removing obstacles.

National Unity and Formation of a Broad National Democratic Front

The national unity of a people should be viewed in the context of the historical development of its socio-economic formation. As stated in the introduction of this report in developing societies the process of the emergence of nations took place under colonial rule. Though colonialism played a catalytic role in the formation of nations, it did not smash the backward socio-economic fabric and transform them into developed industrial economies. Moreover the structural changes brought about by colonialism did not affect all sections of the societies equally. This reflected in the different levels of nationalism of the people of the nation. Thus, the task of nation building which

was left uncompleted by colonialism becomes the primary task of the political forces or organizations that lead the anti-colonial struggles or the post-colonial movements. In the final analysis, the nationalism of a political organization is judged by its competence, in assuming this responsibility.

Generally speaking, the Eritrean people comprise nine nationalities. Since these nationalities do not to the same extent fulfill the criteria of geographical unity, an integrated and developed economy and a common psychological make up, they cannot in the conventional sense be called nationalities. And the religious factor which affects the spiritual and psychological make up complicates the issue. Similarly, since the common sentiments and structures of the nationalities are not properly developed, narrow tribal, clan, ethnic and religious sentiments prevail. Moreover, the influence of these narrow sentiments in the rural peripheries, where it is strong, differs from that in the urban areas where it is weak. In discussing the question of nationalities, their rights and their equality, we should take these facts into consideration.

The Tigrigna speaking nationality inhabiting the highlands of Eritrea is in comparison to other nationalities a cohesive section of Eritrean society. Besides one language, it shares a sedentary agricultural economic order, similar administrative laws and traditions and a similar psychological make up. Moreover, aside from a minority of Moslems, and despite differences of minor significance between the Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant Churches members of this nationality are followers of one religious faith. The religious factor therefore, favours cohesion rather than division. Provincial and district differences exist, but, their influence is secondary. The highlands were also an area where colonialism had greater interest (mainly economic) and in which it built towns and expanded infrastructure, there by dismantling the traditional socioeconomic structure and exerting a relatively greater cultural influence. However, colonial influence did not affect all Tigrigna speakers to the same degree.

The Tigre speaking nationality spreads over the provinces of Semhar., Sahel, parts of Senhit and Barka. In addition to their wide dispersal, some are sedentary, others nomadic; some farmers, the rest pastoralists, some are coastal people others not; most live in the lowlands, a few in the highlands. With the exception of a small minority of Christians, the Tigre are adherents of Islam. They are also closely tied together by common spiritual and cultural sentiments, even though their administrative laws, affected by their economic formations differ slightly. The cultural level of the Tigre speaking people varies according to the degree of Italian colonial influence. Consequently, provincial sentiment predominates in the towns and adjacent areas, while tribal and clan ties and sentiments are stronger in the outlying areas.

The Bilen speaking nationality, which inhabits parts of Senhit is bilingual because it is surrounded by the Tigre speaking people. Some of the Bilen also speak Tigrigna as a third language, influenced by their religion and location. The Bilen are sedentary and their means of livelihood is primarily agriculture. The Bilen are partly Moslem and partly Christian. This difference is however, overshadowed by their strong economic, ethnic and cultural ties. Since the moderate climate, fertility and strategic location of the areas they inhabit attracted Italian interest, the socio-economic structure as well as the culture of the Bilen was greatly influenced by Italian colonialism. Among the Bilen, regional sentiments prevail over tribal and clan attachments.

The Afar speaking people that inhabit the Dankalia region constitute a nationality with geographic unity. Except for those practicing agriculture in restricted localities, most of the Afar are nomadic pastoralists, while those inhabiting the Red Sea coast depend on fishing and commerce. Among the Afar, who are all Moslems and have common administrative laws and practices, nationality sentiments are strong. But so too are tribal and clan attachments. Thus, both sentiments are found overlapping in many of their traits.

Eventhough the Italian colonialists were attracted by the economic potential of Dankalia and its strategic importance along the sea, they found its climate inhospitable, and their influence was restricted to the vicinity of Assab. Aside from those inhabiting Assab and its environs, they only other section of the Afar nationality influenced by modern “civilization” were the inhabitants of Northern Dankalia who maintained commercial and cultural ties with Massawa.

The Saho speaking people inhabit Eastern Akeleguzai, an area bounded by Tigrigna speaking people on the west, and the Tigre speakers of Semhar on the East and North. Some of the Saho are settled agriculturists while others are semi-settled and engage in both farming and pastoralism. Except for very few Christians, the Saho are Moslems. And although clan and tribal formations and sentiments have visible traces, nationality ties and sentiments predominate. ‘The Saho that lived in towns and adjacent areas were influenced by Italian colonialism while the reamining were only minimally affected.

The Nara (Baria) speaking nationality is found in the central regions of Sarka. The Nara are mostly surrounded by the Tigre and many speak Tigre as a second language, while those sharing a common boundary with the Baza also speak Kunama. In the main, the Nara are settled farmers and are all followers of Islam. Inspite of tribal and clan differentiation, their sense of nationality is strong. They are also one of the nationalities that were minimally influenced by Italian colonialism.

The Kunama speaking people inhabit the areas in and around Barentu and the parts of the Gash region which spread Southwest from the town. Inspite of a settled agricultural economy, primitive communal characteristics are clearly visible. Although most Kunama are adherents of either Christianity or Islam, many are animists and animist beliefs have substantial influence on all Kunama. Therefore the two most important religious faiths in Eritrea do not have much influence on the Kunama. The Italians had some effect on the nationality. They employed some Kunama in the plantations they set

up in the fertile areas of the nationality and missionaries were active in the area. The Kunama are a cohesive nationality.

The Bedaweit speaking Hedareb nationality inhabit the Northern frontier areas of Sahel and spread North West along the border, insome areas penetrating the interlands of Barka. In some localities they merge with the Tigre speaking peoples and the intermixed communities are bilingual. The interaction among the Hedareb is very minimal as they are very thinly spread. They are Moslems and solely depend on stock raising fortheir livelihood. The Hedareb do not have strong nationality sentiments as they are dispersed over a large area and are one of the Eritrean nationalities least affected by colonialism.

The Rashaida speak Arabic and inhabit the coastal areas in Semhar and up to the tip of the northern border. Primitive cultivation is practiced in some localities, but the Rashaida economy is based on nomadic stock raising and trade. The Rashaida are Moslems and they alone have not intermixed with their neighbours. Neither were they influenced by Italian colonialism.

Besides the nationality structures and sentiments discussed above, a combination of other factors, including disputes on agricultural and pasture lands came into play. Feelings of domination and mistrust were also prevalent among majority nahonalities. In evaluating the influences of colonialism, the influence exerted by the Turks, Egyptians and feudal lords of Tigray must also be taken into consideration.

Within each nationality, the social and class divisions namely those between Tigre and Shimagile, serf and landlord, herder and livestock owner, merchant and artisan, etc. are important factors in the dynamics of the nationality. Besides these, the new social forces that emerged with the advent of Italian colonialism also play an important role in the dynamics of nation building. Sex and social status too are significant considerations. And all these factors have affected the Eritrean people's participation in the various stages of the Eritrean

struggle.

Therefore unity of the people and the nation means fostering, on the basis of a clear program and an understanding of the characteristics of various sectors of the society, the participation of all Eritreans whose interest lies in national liberation. Similarly, the struggle for equality demands the elimination from both the majority and minority nationalities of feelings of dominance and chauvinism as well as the apprehension and suspicion that give rise to narrow nationalism. It also calls for intense efforts to narrow the gap in the level of economic and cultural development that prevail among the nationalities.

The EPLF strives to promote the unity of the Eritrean people on the basis of this understanding of Eritrean society. It strongly opposes sub-national sentiments and working methods as these are antagonistic to national unity and harmful to the struggle for national liberation and reconstruction. It has worked seriously to raise the consciousness of the people and to foster longterm economic and cultural changes as these are the most important and complementary requirements for strengthening national unity and accelerating nation-building. Guided by this perspective of national unity, the EPLF has been handling the question of unity of organizations and groupings separately.

The difference between the EPLF and other organizations or groupings has centered on the question of a broad national democratic front. The proponents of the antiquated and bankrupt lines set up organizations' based on the alliance of leaders of clans, tribes and regional and religious groups, maintain the existence of these organizations or groups by compromises among the participating tribes and clans, create other new groupings based on similar narrow alliances and conspiracies whenever the narrow conflicts erupt and break up the former alliances, then more fragmentation, followed by the formation of new alliances... and so on.

These groups have continued to exist not because their propaganda was accepted by our people, but because of foreign interference in

Eritrean affairs and especially because of the misery of our people in exile. The prime movers of these groupings and their main followers are not interested in national liberation, nor in national unity or the establishment of a national democratic front. They realize the bankruptcy of their policies. For them the groupings they form are only means of securing a comfortable life, as they cannot gainfully be employed otherwise. Today they find themselves in a sorry state, exposed by the EPLF and spurned by the masses who have become aware of their scandalous activities.

As has already been made clear, the inception of the EPLF was the result of the liquidationist measures of the dominant faction of the ELF, the faction that followed the line of the Supreme Council. The attempts to stop the fighting between the two fronts (the ELF and EPLF), create a favourable environment for negotiations and restore unity through joint activities which continued up to 1977, failed. In its first congress, the EPLF after assessing previous efforts made for unity with the ELF, adopted a policy on unity. The proposal for a united front worked out an action program and began to struggle for their implementation.

Immediately after the congress, at the Zager meeting of April 1977, and in May at Hawshait, the EPLF confirmed its desire for and clarified its stand on the unity of both organizations and the rallying of their democratic elements. However, the ELF leadership, and especially its dominant anti-unity faction, was only waiting for an opportunity to weaken and destroy the EPLF. It, therefore, rejected the EPLF's practical and realistic stand as anti-unity and posing as the true champion of unity, it called for a precipitate merger to be realized through a scheduled congress. In order to create further obstacles, it also raised the case of the ex-foreign mission condemned by the EPLF. Worse still, it attacked the EPLF from behind and started armed clashes in many parts of the country, while the EPLF was engaged in the campaign to liberate Semhar. Unperturbed, the EPLF persevered in the liberation war to which it accorded priority,

refrained from activities that would give the ELF the pretext to attack, strove to stop the internecine fighting by encouraging the mediation of the masses. As a result, serious unity negotiations continued and in October 1977, a mutual agreement was reached under Sudanese auspices.

On the basis of the October Agreement, a Joint Supreme political Leadership, as well as joint political and military committees were set up. It was agreed that committees on the economy, information, social and foreign affairs were to be established, and joint work programs in various fields were drawn up. The agreement reached under the pressure of the masses and the Revolution's friends, was a bitter pill to swallow for the dominant faction in the ELF Revolutionary Council, which tried every thing possible to thwart it. The faction created obstacles in the setting up of the joint committees, and the drawing up of work programs and when agreements were reached, it procrastinated in their implementation and obviated their provisions, finally paralysing the joint work. Similarly it blocked implementation of the jointly drafted political agitation program. In regards to the joint military strategy, first it delayed its implementation by raising non essential questions on the pretext of clarifying issues, and when specific operations were agreed upon, it resorted to lies and excuses to avoid shouldering its responsibility or abandoned its positions exposing the EPLA to danger. As usual it launched sporadic attacks to abort all meetings and agreements. In a period of three years, seven meetings of the Joint Political Supreme Council and nearly 20 meetings of various joint committees were held, but the goodwill and seriousness of the EPLF alone could not bring the desired results. And so in the beginning of July 1980, the Revolutionary Council secretly withdraw the ELF brigade garrisoned at North Eastern Sahel Front on the basis of the joint agreement, declaring, in effect, that the agreement was hence null and void.

The Revolutionary Council's move was a calculated one. Since Soviet interference had changed the balance of forces and the EPLF,

shifting from an offensive into a defensive position, had assembled almost all its forces in the north, the RC presumed that this situation provided it with ample opportunity to further weaken and liquidate the EPLF. In the event, the RC not only attacked the EPLF's guerrilla and mobile units operating in extensive rural areas, but after amassing its forces, launched a large scale attack at Halhal reigniting the civil war. Numerous clashes ensued. But, the ELF leadership's plans were foiled and after the Revolutionary Councils' accusatory pleas and Sudanese intervention, a cease-fire agreement was signed on 22 November 1980.

But this only provided a respite. After taking time to mobilize its forces, the HC launched an attack on the EPLF in violation of the cease-fire agreement and was forced to retreat across the border into the Sudan by the EPLF counter offensive. The abrogation of the October Agreement, thus failed to yield the desired results. And so to undermine the EPLF and to attain dominance, the RC started to consort with the two factions of the Peoples Liberation Forces the PLF -Central Council(PLF-C.C.) and the PLF -Revolutionary Committee) (PLF-R.C.) formed after the 1979 split in the People's Liberation Forces(PLF). Coincidentally, there was an Arab League initiative to unite the Eritrean Fronts. The HC pushed for a tripartite agreement that excludes the EPLF. Aware of the dangers, the EPLF reassessed its position of not negotiating with the PLF factions, and accepted the League's invitation to participate. The HC's attempts to incite the other parties into excluding the EPLF and aborting the meeting failed. The RC made one last attempt to torpedo the meeting by raising the diversionary issue of the EPLF's alliance with the Tigray People's Liberation Front(TPLF). But this too was rejected, and an understanding was reached for the talks to continue.

The basic understanding reached at Tunis was rejected by the dominant faction of the Revolutionary Council. Meanwhile, the contradictions inside the ELF which had been glossed over by the setting up of alliances sharpened. Opposition from the disarmed

rank and file fighters in the Sudan intensified and the position of the dominant faction became untenable. The external forces which had pinned their hopes on the RC, primarily Saudi Arabia, increased their involvement, and when a situation favourable for a putsch arose, in a meeting, convened as usual, as a result of numerous compromises, a relapse of liquidations and fragmentation occurred in the ELF R.C. Some elements were murdered and many others imprisoned. This brought the conflicts to their climax and led to the demise of the ELF.

Even after this, the EPLF maintained its contact with various elements and groups and continued its efforts for the unity of the organizations, i.e. the formation of a broad national front. That was the time when the enemy was preparing for the sixth offensive which started in February and continued for three months without let-up. As soon as the situation eased off, in June 1982, the EPLF issued a statement outlining the general lines of its new unity proposal. A little later, after evaluating the efforts made for unity with the ELF and the situation of the Eritrean revolution, the EPLF, on 25 October 1982 made public its coalition proposal. Although the basic contents of the coalition proposal did not depart from the fundamental principles of a broad national front, it differed from the October 1977 agreement. The coalition proposal called for the formation of a broad national council to serve as an umbrella for all nationalist forces and elements first. The council would serve as a democratic forum and assist in the gradual formation of a broad front. On the basis of its proposal the EPLF set out to contact all organizations, groupings, and individuals and establish relationships with them.

Contacts were made with the strongest ELF opposition force then based at Koroken and Tahdai in the Sudan, as well as with the PLF C.C. and PLF R.C. But, alas, the fundamental political content of the proposal, the establishment of a national council was disregarded. A smear campaign started against the military section of the proposal which called for a single military strategy and the fusion of the

armed units of various groups with the EPLA which had shouldered the burden of the armed struggle, misrepresenting it as a scheme to swallow the other parties. Had these fragmented groups been in the EPLF's position, had they been the strongest and decisive force, they would undoubtedly have followed a policy of liquidation and suppression. But the EPLF took a responsible approach. In spite of its strength and decisive role it did not belittle any Eritrean group but approached them with its proposal. The elements that rejected the proposal did so not because they opposed its military provisions, but because they felt threatened by its political content. Indeed, a free and broad national coalition would deny them the opportunity to exploit sectarian sentiments and misuse the people's property. Moreover, the external forces who felt threatened by the weakening of the putschist clique, and Saudi Arabia in particular, egged on the opponents of the proposal, because a free Eritrean platform would deny foreign intervention in Eritrean affairs.

Undaunted by the initial rejection and interference, the EPLF continued to clarify the contents of its proposal and to maintain contacts. At the meeting of 15 November 1982, the PLF-CC leadership endorsed the EPLF proposal. But, since the group was not interested in genuine unity, it lost no time to send a message contradicting its acceptance of the proposal and starting a campaign against it. By then it had already entered into an agreement with the third faction of the split ELF- "Teyar". It also joined the alliance -later known as the Jeddah agreement- which was formed under Saudi auspices and pressure. While the PLF-CC was in the midst of its campaign to isolate the EPLF, a meeting between the two organizations was held in Mogadisho at the behest of the Somali government. There, the EPLF explained that the PLF-CC, in addition to its anti EPLF crusade, did not abide by any agreements it had signed, and that, therefore, there was no basis for any agreement. But the EPLF also expressed its desire to maintain contact and enter into an agreement if future developments warranted it. At Mogadisho, the PLF-CC hypocritically condemned the Jeddah

agreement and expressed its desire for closer relations with the EPLF. Later, on 21, December 1983, at the Kuwait meeting, the PLF-CC proposed meeting of all Eritrean organizations to which Arab League representatives would be invited, and it even suggested that both the EPLF and itself take action on their opposition to Saudi interference and send the Saudi government a protest memorandum. hardly had a week elapsed before PLF-CC leaders went to Saudi Arabia, renounced the agreements they signed with the EPLF in Kuwait as well as their pledges and resumed their former stance and anti EPLF campaigns. Consequently, the EPLF stopped its dialogue with this group.

On another front, EPLF contacts with the largest ELF group, the ELF(Central Command), commonly known as “Sagim” continued. In their analysis of prevailing conditions, both organizations concluded that the “Jeddah agreement” was an externally manipulated, anti national and anti-unity pact that also had the support of the Sudanese Security Department. They agreed to jointly oppose the “Jeddah agreement” and strengthen their cooperation. When the ELF-CC which had been confined in Sudanese garrisons returned to the liberated areas, mutual cooperation began in earnest. After the ELF-CC’s conference which was held at the beginning of December 1984, dialogue and implementation of joint tasks continued, systematically. At successive meetings the EPLF and the ELF-CC agreed to make a comparative study of their programs and other policy issues, begin joint political campaigns, execute joint military tasks, and to cooperate in the economic, social and other fields. In the process, common views developed, differences were thrashed out, suspicions eliminated and mutual confidence grew and was steeled by mutual sacrifices paid in joint military activities. This relationship, entered on the basis of free will and a sense of responsibility, succeeded in two years in creating common ground for joint struggle and thus the question of the merger of the two organizations emerged as a timely demand. Various proposals were put forward and it was finally agreed that unity be finalized in a congress. As the EPLF was preparing for its second

congress, it was agreed that its new program and constitution, on which both organizations shared a common view, be studied by both organizations. Finally, final drafts of the documents were prepared after thorough discussions by the rank and file. When all outstanding issues (of outlook and joint tasks) were settled, the ELF-CC proposed a merger as there was no more justification for the continuation of the status quo. And as a first step in the historic process of establishing a broad national democratic front, the integration of fighters of both organizations was completed in the field, to be followed by the unity of the mass organizations.

The EPLF and ELF Central Command's relationship and the very high level it attained prove that if those Eritrean forces with the will and interest to persevere in the national struggle work in unison without any foreign interference, conduct thorough-going discussions on all political issues, and participate in joint tasks that require a high level of dedication and sacrifice, they could eliminate suspicion and enmity and work for the liberty and reconstruction of Eritrea united in a single front. Viewed against the background of previous efforts made for unity as well as the flopped attempts by intervening foreign powers to bring a merger of opportunistic and bankrupt anti-national forces, the EPLF Sagim unity is a great victory in the struggle to establish a united national front.

Another group that deserves mention is the ELF-RC (Teyar), an organization that first appeared after the 1982 putsch in the ELF. Initially its members agreed to work in cooperation with the PLF-CC, but, before long, most of them abandoned the idea and begun to operate on their own. The EPLF tried to foster relations with this organization as well. At the initial contacts, the EPLF's previous reservations as implied in the 1983 declaration on "fifth columnists" were raised and agreement was reached to clarify them in future meetings. Later, formal meetings were held in Khartoum, the field and finally Port Sudan and international, regional and national issues as well as the question of unity were discussed. A program

for preliminary joint tasks was also drawn up. Although the overall orientation of the talks is positive, it is evident that the relationship has not progressed as was hoped for. Be that as it may, the EPLF has been patiently and earnestly working to improve its relationship with “Teyar”.

Another organization is called the ELF-PLF United Organization. This organization was part of the alliance that was formed after the ELF putsch by a faction of the ELF (Teyar) and the PLF-CC. Just after Teyar’s split and while the Jeddah agreement was being cooked, the ELF-PLF United Organization came out against the agreement and dissociated itself from it. As a result, it has been harassed by Sudanese security. The EPLF continued previously existing contacts with the group and provided assistance to alleviate its temporary difficulties. More recently, leaders of both organizations met to formalize the relationship and joint committees were set up to continue the process.

The disruptive interference of foreign forces -chiefly Saudi Arabia- should be viewed in contrast with these measures that lead towards genuine national unity. In order to frustrate the EPLF’s coalition proposal and its call for the formation of a national council, Saudi Arabia brought the three anti-nationalist factions -the ELF putschist clique, PLF-CC and PLF-RC under the banner of a united organization. The three set up what they called a “National Council”. After the fall of the Numeiri regime, whose security apparatus was instrumental in propping up this anti-nationalist alliance, its internal unity waned, its “fifth columnist” nature was exposed and it finally disintegrated. But, Saudi Arabia, whose desire to interfere in Eritrean affairs has not slackened, is at present, trying to re-organize opportunist and antinationalist elements.

This does not exhaust the developments that took place in the struggle for a single national front as it only discusses EPLF contacts and relationships with organizations. Another significant development has been the step taken by many nationalist elements who were

previously active members of, or associated with, various organizations individually or in groups join to the EPLF after exposing the nature and lines of the ant-nationalist leaders. The increase in the flow of such elements into the ranks of the EPLF is an additional indication of the trend that the struggle between efforts to build unity based on a correct national line and the interest groups of the anti-nationalists has taken.

There is no doubt that in this long process the unity of the Eritrean people has become more consolidated and that it will grow stronger with future political, economic, social and cultural advances. At the present stage, the Eritrean people's armed liberation struggle is enhancing unit. The responsibility that the EPLF has shouldered and the role it is playing in promoting national unity us a strategic goal of the Eritrean people is solely based on this understanding. Viewed in contrast to the unity of the Eritrean people, the unity of grouping and organizations is not a strategic goal. Although the setting up of a national democratic front and buttres sing it undeniably make an important and positive contribution towards unity, it too is a process of history and struggle, and cannot be placed above the unity of the people or the armed liberation struggle. Indeed the EPLF's struggle for the formation of a broad national democratic front is geared towards facilitating the tasks of the comprehensive liberation struggle. If any individual or group of people declares the formation of a political organization, or that particular group or organization refuses to participate in or impedes the national struggle it cannot on that account be claimed that national unity is lacking. In socio-economically and culturally backward societies like ours as long as external enmity and intervention and opportunists who want to live off the blood and sweat of the masses exist, it is naive to expect that factions and declarations announcing their formation shall cease sprouting. In the course of our bitter armed struggle, it is our historical task to confront those elements who take advantage of our society's weakness in order to further divide it, those who conspire

with external powers and engage in sabotage as well as those who want to parasitize on our toil and sacrifices and expose them so our people do not become their victims. It is in fulfillment of this task that the FPLF has striven to reach the uninformed, to encourage the misguided to return back to the fold without any vindictiveness, to confront the malingerers and notorious instigators.

The unity in outlook and struggle of the Eritrean people that developed over the past 40 years as well as the fortunes of different political tendencies, organizations and movements have proven that the process of the forging of unity of the Eritrean people and the formation and strengthening of a broad national democratic front is irreversible.

Economic, Social and Cultural Transformation

Eventhough the EPLF's primary task has been to wage armed struggle to free the Eritrean people from the colonial yoke, it has not shelved the objective of economic, social and cultural transformation, as this is an integral part of the revolution. Thus, it has been making steadfast efforts to implement the policies and objectives outlined in its political program.

The improvement of the livelihood of the masses through economic transformation was a task the EPLF had begun to tackle before its First Congress and to which it accorded greater importance after the Congress. Since over 80% of the Eritrean people depend on farming and livestock raising, the improvement of their lives takes priority. When large rural areas and most towns were liberated, much needed changes in the tenure of land were made and land redistributed in a manner that benefitted the majority. The aim of these measures which were taken parallel with the formation of popular institutions was the improvement and expansion of agricultural and livestock production. Land disputes between villages and nationalities were also solved by mediation. Modern farms formerly owned by the

Ethiopian government and its foreign collaborators were brought under the control of the EPLF and popular institutions in order to save them from disuse and to improve their productivity. Steps were taken to ensure the right of landless poor farmers and women to own land, so as to enable them to improve their economic lot and become free and self-supporting citizens. The EPLF worked to rehabilitate large disused farms and to open up cultivable land for production. It encouraged the people to pool their manpower and material resources, form cooperatives, solve their common problems and increase their produce. To protect animal resources it provided veterinary services. It also began to provide agricultural training programs as well as production and technical assistance to alleviate the shortage of agricultural implements and improve the farmers' capacity to produce farm equipment. Efforts were also made to improve irrigation canals and other water control systems. In order to ease the problems of the masses, the EPLF participated in many productive activities, Studies and research were also started to help improve the implementation and results of agricultural plans and projects.

When in mid 1978 the military situation changed infavour of the colonialist Dergue regime due to the intervention of the Soviet Union and its allies and the EPLF withdrew entering a defensive stage, many of its agricultural development projects had to be suspended. Compared with the possibilities, our achievements until, then were small because of shortage of time, the very low state of agriculture, shortage of skilled and other personnel, and the EPLF's scarce financial and material resources. But, the message that was passed and the awakening of the people's interest were biggains. Though the enemy offensive halted or slowed down most of the agricultural development programs, the projects in the areas outside enemy control, which was limited to the towns and areas along the main roads, continued at various levels.

After the strategic withdrawal, the new situation dictated the mobilization of resources to ensure the existence and continuity of the

revolution. But even then, the EPLF did not abandon its agricultural development programs. And after smashing successive enemy offensives guaranteeing the security of its base area and passing into the stage of large-scale offensives, it reactivated the programs. In the past four years, apart from the effects of the Dergue's barbaric and destructive offensives aimed at crushing and dispersing our people, drought devastated farm production causing widespread hunger. The EPLF, therefore, had to pay greater attention to agricultural development. Hence, longterm projects including provision of seed and farm implements, resettlement programs, rehabilitation of disused farms and opening up new areas for cultivation expansion of veterinary services, implementation of land use, extension and afforestation projects, construction of dams, ponds, irrigation channels, and exploration and drilling of deep wells to provide drinking water and for irrigation, and introduction of vegetable growing and poultry production to improve the nutritional and cultural level of the people were carried out and expanded. To alleviate the pressure of the EPLF on the national resources, serious efforts were made so the EPLF would not only support itself but also assist the people through intensified participation in agricultural production, as well as by raising the Agricultural Department's capacity to utilize modern technology and machinery, produce farm implements and conduct research.

In this very large undertaking, not all projects met their targets. The main causes were the Dergue's incessant acts of destruction, followed by the lack or scarcity of machinery and material and financial resources. Eventhough many non governmental aid agencies played an important role in alleviating the shortages, their contribution fell far short of the needs. Moreover, the international community, and especially governments, which should have Seen the issue in humanitarian and not in political terms, failed to give it the barest attention. The Eritrean people and the EPLF were, therefore, forced to bear the burdern almost on their own. Let alone in times of war, but

even in times of peace, agricultural development projects are long-term and require vast inputs. This is all the more so as the cultural level of our people is low, particularly in the areas where pastoralism predominates and cultivation has not been developed. In fact, one of the reasons why EPLF agricultural development projects have not induced substantial changes is primarily because they are carried out in nomadic areas where it is difficult to change the life-style of the people. Moreover, agricultural development projects have been affected by limitations in the related sectors of construction, transport...etc.

Extensive infra-structure, which plays a key role in the construction of a national economy and improvement of people's livelihood has been one of the objectives of the EPLF's economic program. Before the strategic withdrawal, though in a limited way, the EPLF began to reactivate agricultural and industrial development services, including the construction of roads, dams and irrigation structures; operation of electricity generating plants, telephone, water and transport services; and the construction and rehabilitation of schools, hospitals and stores. The growth of the enemy's destructive capacity after the withdrawal, did not stop our construction works but made their expansion all the more necessary. The base area, as the centre of our economic activities, was given priority for road construction and within a short period extraordinary roads were constructed through the rugged, mountainous terrain of Sahel. Roads linking the expanding liberated and semi-liberated areas were also built. Construction work was very difficult since it was carried out on rocky terrain and depended on manual labour and rudimentary tools. In the past few years, however, the demand for machinery and other tools was met by equipment captured from the enemy, bought or obtained from donors. This has enabled us to undertake bigger construction projects and implement them efficiently.

Much progress was also made in the construction of buildings (for schools, hospitals, garages, workshops, stores, residences,etc.) as

well as dams, wells and irrigation canals. The introduction -albeit slowly- of construction, drilling and brick-making machinery as well as necessary materials has pushed construction work forward. Training programs were also designed and put into effect to meet the demand of professional and skilled personnel.

Production of basic consumer goods and work tools is an important part of the EPLF economic program. Over the past few years a plastic-shoes factory, a plant for producing sanitary towels, wood, spare parts, and metal goods workshops, electric generating plants and distribution lines, as well as workshops for sewing clothes and hides materials were set up and their production and services expanded. Due to financial and other limitations, only a few of the factories and workshops that were planned have been set up.

The EPLF gives high priority to developing transport facilities, as transportation is the life blood of the economic life of any nation and greatly influences its economic development. Curiously, the war despite its destructiveness, has contributed much to the EPLF experience in this sector. The transport equipment captured from the enemy before, during and after the strategic with-drawal served as a basis for the EPLF's transport services. But it did not come anywhere near satisfying our needs. Repair and maintenance of vehicles, supplies of spareparts, fuel, tires, batteries were essential demands. To effectively utilise what was available, it was necessary to set up garages and workshops, properly use transportation materials, ensure constant supply of spare parts, as well as retread tyres and manufacture car batteries in the field. Several of these projects were successfully completed. The delivery of emergency relief supplies to drought affected areas was an additional burden on our transport services. The cooperation shown by non governmental agencies and humanitarian organizations in this regard was substantial. Yet our transportation service has not been able to meet even basic needs. The EPLF has also given due attention to the use of pack-animals since transportation demands in densely populated areas even where

roads exist could not at all times be met by vehicles. Veterinary services were expanded and pack-animal rearing projects planned. But our effort to improve our transport capability in this area was not successful, primarily due to the drought but also because pack-animals remained prime targets of the Ethiopian regime.

Other factors have also restricted the growth of our transport services. Driving by night, which is a must, hastens vehicle deterioration and reduces efficiency. As goods are generally hauled in one direction, fuel and other items used up on the return trip are virtually wasted. Limited financial resources, the unavailability or difficulty of obtaining spare-parts are additional constraints. Although great emphasis was given to the training of skilled personnel and considerable success registered, the Department of Transportation was affected by efforts to entice (through promises of jobs and good pay) its skilled personnel to desert. Finally, very little was accomplished in the EPLF plan to improve sea transport due to financial and human resources limitations and security problems.

The growth of markets and commercial operations to facilitate economic activity and as a source of revenue constituted a part of the EPLF's economic program. This included the organization and distribution of goods produced internally for local consumption and export, as well as running profitable import-export operations. Primacy was given to supplying basic consumer goods to the population, as the war, the Dergue's embargo on our liberated and semi-liberated areas and the sky-rocketing of prices caused by the devastation of the economy due to drought had created much adversity. Public institutions on their part tried to supply basic consumer items at cost utilizing EPLF provided loans and transport facilities, as well as public contributions. But as these efforts were not enough to cover all requirements due to the lack of capital, the EPLF's Commerce Commission opened shops selling goods at cost and encouraged traders to supply essential goods at reasonable prices. The policy of setting up and controlling prices -which went hand in hand with the

incentives provided to traders to engage in profitable commercial activity did not succeed due to the greed and manipulation of the traders. It was also not possible to properly administer the levying of taxes and duties due to the difficult conditions of war, the extent of area that had to be covered, the sophistication of contrabandists as well as the EPLF's concentration on other tasks. The EPLF has also embarked on various commercial enterprises both inside the country and abroad. Their income has solved many problems, but the enterprises have not grown because management techniques have not yet been mastered and profits made were consumed restricting capital accumulation. In general the EPLF's main financial source has remained the dues paid by members and contributions from our people both inside the country and abroad. But, this important source has been seriously affected by the weakening of the economy and the lack of employment.

The EPLF relies on its policy of self-reliance to prosecute the liberation struggle and build the national economy. The implementation of this policy has involved raising the consciousness of the people, upgrading their know-how, skills and participation in production, laying down an infra-structural foundation; fostering creativity and innovation to increase what can be locally produced, independence from market forces; protecting the wealth of the people and the nation; developing a just system of distribution of wealth and produce, instituting just and cooperative relations based on common interests; and developing a well-organized and streamlined planning and implementation system. The experience gained constitutes a precious national wealth and the tangible results achieved attest to the correctness of the policy of self-reliance and the EPLF's serious commitment to that policy.

Education is a decisive weapon in national reconstruction and economic development. The Eritrean people's cultural level has lagged behind as a result of successive colonialism, particularly in the era of Ethiopian colonialism, and continuous war. In the past 25 years -a period of an entire generation- educational and cultural

development came to a stop. This has been exploited by colonialist and internal opportunist forces to promote their political schemes. It is virtually impossible for an uneducated population to be active in politics, properly administer its affairs, improve its economic conditions and achieve development.

The EPLF's educational policy is based on a recognition of these facts. It has broad aims, with eradication of illiteracy as its primary and fundamental objective. Literacy and the raising of educational levels are an integral part of the campaign to politicize, organize and arm the people. Before the strategic withdrawal, the program was implemented over a broad area and an intensive literacy campaign had begun to bear fruit. Although the program was impeded, for a time, by the strategic withdrawal, it was resumed and developed as a regular mass-activity complementing production and other aspects of social life. Schools were also opened in various parts of the country. The colonial regime has actively pursued the policy of destroying these schools and hunting down teachers, while in the areas under its control and especially in the cities, it has diffused a colonialist culture, lowered the quality of education and attempted to corrupt the youth, in order to prevent the new generation from gaining a proper education. The negative impact of this policy has grown with time.

The war and the attendant disruption of life, the existence of many areas in the country where schooling had never been introduced and the consequent cultural gap among different sectors of the population have been obstacles to the balanced development of the society and participation in the liberation struggle. As a result, the creation of a wide educational opportunity for Eritrean children and youth was given high priority in the educational program. To this end, schools, up to middle school level, were opened in all liberated and semi-liberated areas, and especially in those areas that had previously been denied this opportunity. The effort made to expand and upgrade the "Revolution School" is one example. Steps were also taken to establish and expand the Technical School in order to train personnel

in different trades for the purposes of national development and nation-building.

The mere formulation of an education policy and program, or possessing the will to implement such a plan is inadequate by itself. Curriculae have to be prepared, qualified teachers have to be made available, teaching and training aids made available, schools constructed in safe areas and provided with the necessary equipment. The EPLF and its Department of Education have set up a national education system, which did not previously exist. Taking into consideration the limited professional competence, and paucity of educated personnel, and the complex national characteristics, the number of books which have been produced, while not small, is far from adequate. The requirements of the war and other revolutionary tasks are further reducing the already inadequate number of teachers with pedagogical training. The problem is further aggravated by the drain of educated man-power due to emigration. To surmount this problem, steps were taken to recruit and train teachers and, at the same time, the participation of students of the “Revolution School” and those who could teach from within the masses was actively promoted. But the number and competence of teachers remains inadequate even for the requirements of the initial period. The shortage of printing equipment, paper, ink, and therefore, of textbooks also militates against the full implementation of the curriculum, while the non-availability of exercise books, pens, and pencils, blackboards, desks, chairs as well as laboratory and workshop equipment is critical. The vigorous efforts of the printing press, and the Department of Construction and Manufacturing to solve these problems by allocating man power and equipment and utilizing domestic inputs has produced tangible results. Nevertheless, the remaining tasks are formidable.

The education of Eritrean refugees is another task which can not be neglected. Nearly half a million Eritreans live as refugees, most of them in the Sudan. Among them are many literates and intellectuals. For the rest educational opportunities are practically non-existent,

though, they have limited opportunities in some countries. As, sooner or later, these refugees will play a big role in national reconstruction, the EPLF has, always been interested in providing them with education, particularly those in the Sudan. But the policy of the Sudanese government, and the role of the UNHCR have hampered this endeavour. In general, the problems posed by the second class status of Eritrean refugees as well as political, economic and social pressures have been compounded by obvious disinterest on the part of the youth.

Aware of the limitations of its resources and the constraints of the prevailing conditions, the EPLF has over the past few years, worked to involve friendly and interested parties in the contribution of educational material and equipment. Many of these have shown interest and provided support.

What type of education should we have? The Eritrean people speak different languages and have different cultural levels. In the context of a people with such a diverse composition, it is essential that educational policy should be clearly articulated, especially with respect to languages, and promote voluntary national unity and nation-building.

Taking this as its central point, the educational policy of the EPLF has emphasized the following fundamental principles. Each nationality has the right to develop its spoken and written language and to use it in its internal administration. The educational and cultural gap between Eritrean nationalities and regions should be narrowed and levelled by giving greater educational opportunities to the regions that have lagged behind. The language of the majority or more developed nationality or segment of the society should not be imposed on others. The educational policy should foster national development and nation building and should not become an instrument for dividing and disintegrating the people.

On the basis of these principles the EPLF has adopted the following

educational policy. Each citizen should be instructed at the elementary school level in his/her language. This is done not out of desire to foster many languages but because it is easier and more efficient. English should be taught as a language in all elementary schools to enable all Eritreans entering middle school to acquire proficiency in the language which will be used as a medium of instruction at that stage. The content of the education given at the elementary grade should be uniform in all languages. In addition, at the elementary level, students should study Arabic, Tigrigna or other languages of their choice. At the middle school stage, English is the medium of instruction for all and Arabic, Tigrigna or any other Eritrean language will be taught as optional subjects. At the higher levels English will remain the medium of instruction while language training in Arabic, Tigrigna and others will continue on an elective basis.

The language question is one which bankrupt forces persistently strive to exploit. These elements claim that EPLF's educational policy is anti-Arabie-and seeks to make Tigrigna paramount. Their obvious intention is to fan religious sentiments in order to isolate the EPLF. Although those who know and speak Arabic are not all adherents of Islam, and Arabic as a language is of concern not only to Moslems, it is true that Moslems have spiritual ties with Arabic. Besides there are fears of Tigrigna language domination on the part of the other nationalities, as Tigrigna -which has its own script- is the language of a predominantly Christian nationality, which is not only the largest Eritrean nationality, but for reasons already explained, has a relatively more developed culture. The EPLF's education policy, however, treats Tigrigna on a par with the other languages, to be employed as a medium of instruction at the elementary school level only for those who speak it. With respect to Arabic, the EPLF believes that it is a language which all Eritreans should learn and has consistently promoted its use and Arabic language instruction. It does this not because Arabic is the national language or the language of the Rashaida nationality, but because it serves as the language of

interaction both among Eritreans and between Eritreans and the Arab people of our region. Despite EPLF efforts, however, the use of Arabic has not spread as desired due to obvious technical constraints. The EPLF rejects the efforts of opportunists and elements with narrow political objectives who exploit religious and linguistic differences to establish for themselves a social base which they can freely manipulate and strive to create, in the Eritrea of today and that of the future, a sectarian political atmosphere which engenders conflict by promoting a system of education which segregates schools on the basis of languages.

A related question raised by the same elements and for similar goals is the role of religion in education. The EPLF program unequivocally states that each citizen has the right of religious belief. Religious instruction is allowed and religious institutions will not be prevented from carrying out their spiritual functions. However, all attempts to use religion as a political tool and to infuse religion in the educational system in order to divide the people is contrary to the interests of national unity and nation-building and is therefore unacceptable .

Although literacy and academic education are basic in the task of upgrading the cultural level of the Eritrean people, the EPLF has also engaged in a successful program of training the masses in agriculture, construction and other technical fields. In music, fine arts, handicrafts, literature and sports, serious effort has been made to encourage a cultural awakening that would give prominence to the history and glory of the nation and promote nation-building and unity. Advances have been made in this field.

The establishment and expansion of health services to protect the health of the people, improve their living conditions and enhance their capacity for work and production has remained one of the main tasks of the EPLF. The Eritrean people have suffered from colonial atrocities and oppressive psychological pressure. They have been prevented, by massive emigration, from exploiting their national resources to improve their living conditions and protect their health. This has led

to their increasing impoverishment. Furthermore, persistent drought has worsened the misery of the people, diminished the fertility of the land, decreased agricultural production and drastically reduced animal resources. As a consequence of the devastation caused by colonialism and natural calamities the health of the Eritrean people is deteriorating, the birth rate is declining and the death rate climbing. The lot of children, women, and old people has been particularly harsh. Under such wretched conditions the demand for health and medical services is great indeed.

To meet this demand the EPLF has worked vigorously to expand its health services. Before the strategic withdrawal, although the human and material resources at its disposal were limited, it had started to provide proper hospital services, set up clinics in the liberated towns and many parts of the rural areas and deploy mobile units of bare-foot doctors to all corners of the rural areas. Eventhough, the spread and growth of health services like all other activities, contracted for a limited period after the withdrawal, it subsequently saw marked resurgence and development.

In the secure base area, many hospitals have been set up and the services they provide have improved tremendously. In the liberated wid semi-liberated zones too, the number of stationary and mobile clinics and their services have grown. These serve not only the surrounding population but also the people who live in the enemy controlled areas as well as Eritrean refugees in the Sudan. The same holds true for the mobile teams of bare-foot doctors.

The expansion of health services require a properly organized staff of trained medical personnel. Fortunately, many Eritrean, doctors and other medical workers who had been educated and had practiced in Eritrea and abroad chose to join the struggle to serve their people. The growing participation and contribution of foreign voluntary doctors and medical organizations has also covered many shortcomings. Programs designed to train bare-foot doctors, mid-wives and other personnel have been regularly implemented and the trainees have

been making substantial contributions at the lower level. The Eritrean Medical Association was set up to upgrade the number and capability of skilled personnel by organizing and facilitating the participation and contribution of Eritreans living at home and abroad as well as that of foreigners. Since its establishment EMA has been playing an active and supportive role.

Moreover, as the training and increase in the number of health professionals is not in itself enough, health education has been provided to the population alongside political education. Regular as well as periodic publications have been issued to raise the health consciousness of the masses and to generate their active cooperation. This campaign has been effective in accomplishing its objective.

Another basic problem in health service is the shortage of medicine. Providing free health care to the people is the declared policy of the EPLF. But given the limited capability of the organization, it is impossible to provide free and adequate services to all. Neither can the impoverished people afford to buy medicine or pay for medical examinations. The available medicines, mostly donated and some purchased from abroad, can not satisfy the minimum requirements of the health services. The importance of the domestic manufacturing of basic drugs was therefore recognized and a pharmaceutical plant was established. The production capacity and quality levels of the plant have been growing and its output of intra-venous fluids, important capsules and pills as well as external preparations (syrups, ointments, etc) are attenuating many problems.

To satisfy the demand for medical instruments and equipment, serious effort was put into the production of what could be locally and easily made from available resources, while a continuous campaign to obtain adequate quantities of modern medical equipment from foreign sources has been formulated and implemented. With the assistance of friends and aid organizations, an infant food plant was set up to alleviate the lack of nutritious food which is a major cause of infant diseases, as well as a sanitary towels plant and a workshop

for making artificial limbs.

The EPLF's health services is one of the sectors which has achieved amazing progress in the past decade. And yet, the devastation of war has been a constraint on the expansion of the service. Moreover, when viewed in light of the need for a general improvement of the living and health conditions, which is conditional on the supply of nutritious food and clean water for drinking and sanitation, the service is still at a low level.

The social problems resulting from war and natural calamities such as drought are innumerable. Backwardness itself creates social problems. These causes produce refugees, orphans, invalids, unemployment, dislocation of families, mental disorders, etc. The EPLF has shouldered the task of alleviating and controlling these problems, and, to this end, has drawn relevant policy guidelines and designed practical programs which it has been implementing. To ensure and safeguard the social rights of workers women children and old people the EPLF has introduced and improved social laws, formed institutions and has achieved tangible results.

The EPLF set up camps and ran programs to provide shelter and care for dislocated families and orphaned and abandoned children, to cure for and rehabilitate the blind and disabled, to resettle refugees and people displaced by war or drought, to aid those whose property and livestock were destroyed either by the enemy or natural disasters. The problem is formidable. It is almost impossible for the EPLF to provide shelter, food, water, clothes, money as well as, education, health and development services to tens of thousands let alone to hundreds of thousands or the whole population. But as the responsibility has fallen primarily on the shoulders of the EPLF, the organization has with courage and determination been doing all it can to ease the problem. Suffice it to note, however, that what it accomplished was only one hundredth of what it would like to do.

The EPLF and the Eritrean Relief Association conducted an extensive

campaign and made repeated appeals to the international community seeking assistance in the alleviation of these problems. In contrast, the colonial regime which considers the misery and suffering of the Eritrean people a factor that can assist its unjust war, attempted to aggravate the problem by a policy of continuous bombardment of civilian targets and incessant military campaigns and by resorting to pressure and intimidation in its diplomacy. In spite of the obstacles, many non-governmental organizations and aid agencies contributed substantial aid to the Eritrean Relief Association. But all the aid received amounted to 5% of the need and the problem remains. If the impending threat of locusts and the scope of desertification within the next ten years is taken into consideration, the urgency and seriousness of the matter becomes quite obvious. With regard to the case of refugees, particularly those in the Sudan, noncooperation on the part of the Sudanese government and the UNHCR have denied the EPLF the chance to ameliorate their plight. However, the EPLF's efforts to repatriate refugees have continued. Although the number of those who have so far returned is very small, this is expected to grow with the expansion of development projects and the improvement of the overall political and military situation.

The problem of prisoners of war is another social problem caused by the unjust war waged by the colonial regime. With the intensification and expansion of the Dergue's offensives starting before the strategic withdrawal, the number of conscripted Ethiopians who have died fighting in the war has reached more than a hundred thousand. Tens or thousands have been disabled. The number of orphaned children and families who have lost their bread winners, could well be deduced from the above. More than ten thousand Ethiopian soldiers have been taken as prisoners of war.

The EPLF has clearly laid down in its program its humanitarian policy regarding the treatment of prisoners of war. Although the EPLF's capacity to provide shelter, food, clothing and medical services to prisoners is limited, it has accorded them the same subsistence living that

it provides to its members. The EPLF has worked vigorously and made many contacts with governments and organizations, particularly with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), which claims to be responsible for them to find a fundamental solution to the problem. On the other side, the Dergue has disowned the POWs and denied their existence, claiming “there are no prisoners of war, only traitors” and has tried to prevent governments and organizations from raising the issue and providing assistance, thus obstructing the solution of the problem. The ICRC has created obstacles. Cowered by the intimidation of the Dergue, it created lame excuses, attempted to get involved in political and security matters which were none of its concern and has up to now failed to contribute anything. When the EPLF proclaimed the freeing of 3000 POWs in 1981 and requested assistance, the ICRC refused to cooperate, bowing to the threats of the Dergue which claimed “The EPLF is releasing paws, because it is afraid of the Red Star offensive,...and wants to redeploy the fighters who were guarding the troops. If the ICRC cooperates it would mean that it has chosen to collude with the EPLF.” Recently, however, contact channels have been reopened and the ICRC is currently conducting a study to alleviate the problem of the POWs.

Although the problem of POWs requires external assistance, the EPLF has single handedly discharged its duty with respect to the POWs in spite of the obstacles created by the Dergue and others, because it recognized that the easing of their lot is its responsibility. Providing food, clothing and other services although imperative is not a fundamental solution. The paws problem will exist as long as the unjust war which is its root cause continues. To bring the war to an end, it is necessary to arouse the people of Ethiopia against the war and to strengthen the Eritrean people’s solidarity with the people of Ethiopia, waging the struggle in the military and other fields. The EPLF has, therefore, adopted the politicization and education of the paws as one of its tasks, as they constitute a part of the Ethiopian people, and are indeed the primary Ethiopian victims of the unjust

colonial war. The ex-prisoners of war who have joined the ranks of the EPLF and are active in all fields of struggle and those who have joined Ethiopian opposition organizations and are fighting against the Dergue prove that the political education program conducted has heightened the consciousness of the pawns. Aside from political naivety, another weakness exploited by the Dergue is illiteracy. The EPLF has therefore, an ongoing educational program aimed at making the POWs literate; knowledgeable, self-supporting and capable of serving their people. All POWs can now read and write and many have advanced beyond the first stage of literacy testifying to the success of this program. Their participation in work, besides making a significant contribution to the liberation struggle and the upkeep of their health, is a program which enables them to acquire and upgrade their skills. As a result many have become skilled in the building and other trades. Spiritual or psychological pressure is another problem faced by the POWs. Confinement and alienation from family, people and country created psychological problems. To alleviate these problems, POWs are encouraged to engage in sports and cultural activities and to write and transmit via Radio Voice of the Masses messages of hope and encouragement to their families and to each other. These have produced good results. The EPLF has made many attempts to release POWs. Although some have been released, it has been necessary to keep the released POWs as free men in the base area. The Dergue's policy of imprisonment, repression and conscription and the establishment every where of "Kebeles" as police instruments has, as proven by experience, made it almost impossible for the prisoners to return to their villages and resume a peaceful life. Many who tried were forced to return from Ethiopia to the EPLF. Aside from its humane treatment of POWs the EPLF has been facilitating the departure of deserters from the Dergue's army to destinations of their choice, which mostly happen to be foreign countries. Although many individual and group attempts at escape and organized sabotage by POWs were experienced initially, these have decreased with the competent handling and politicization of the

prisoners and no longer pose a significant problem. One unsolved problem is the regimes continuous aerial bombardment of prisoner of war camps, which the EPLF has tried to minimize by frequently moving the camps.

The Anti- Colonial Political and Military Struggle

The national struggle of the Eritrean people is a fight against “Ethiopian” colonial regimes which are driven by empire building ambitions and supported by international colonialist forces. This struggle will continue as long as the imperial dreams and the interests that underlie them persist. The Dergue’s regime, its policies and actions should be examined from this perspective. And so has the Dergue’s seizure of power brought change in Ethiopia? A regime could be substituted by another and there could be differences in form and style between one regime and another. However , change in the system could only occur if there is a transformation of its essence. A snake does not cease to be a snake because, it has molted.

The backward and autocratic regime of Haile Selassie with the support of world colonialist forces, trampled on the fundamental human and democratic rights and particularly the national rights of the peoples of Ethiopia so as to ensure the dominance of one nationality, the Amhara. In addition, it strove to colonize the peoples of the Horn of Africa and especially Eritrea in order to realize its expansionist dreams. It also appropriated the wealth and in the first place the land of the Ethiopian people turning it into the private property of the Imperial family and the feudal aristocracy and causing misery. It was, therefore, natural that the struggles of the Eritrean people and the peoples of Ethiopia should overthrow the regime of Haile Selassie. But did the fall of Haile Selassie achieve the objectives of the struggles? This is a question that can only be answered by examining the Dergue, its policies and its evolution over the past 12 years.

Briefly speaking, if there is anything the Dergue has attempted in the

past 12 years, it is to strengthen the efforts at empirebuilding which it inherited from Haile Selassie. At first the Dergue found it expedient to condemning the misery of the Ethiopian people and the oppression of the Eritrean people. Not because it upheld the legitimate causes of the two peoples but because it was not in a position to confront them head on as it had not yet consolidated its power. Its initial move to institute a hybrid constitutional monarchy by raising the meaningless slogan of “Ethiopia Tikdem” (Ethiopia First) was thwarted by a broad popular opposition. Towards the end of 1974 it raised another equally senseless slogan, that of “Ethiopian Socialism”, feeling that this would echo the demands of the people. As the politicized student body was challenging the regime and agitating against its empty and deceptive slogans, the Dergue introduced in the guise of development and concurrently with its proclamation of “Ethiopian Socialism”, the “Zemetcha” (campaign) program and dispersed throughout the country all university and high school students and their teachers. This however, failed to achieve the Dergue’s objectives. On the contrary, it facilitated the spreading of the opposition and strengthened the challenge to the regime. In March 1975, the Dergue issued a proclamation to nationalize rural lands. In the second half of 1975 July to be exact it proclaimed the expropriation of all urban lands and buildings. It simultaneously initiated the establishment of urban and rural “Kebeles” to better control the popular opposition. As a finale it issued its document of “National Democratic Revolution” in the second quarter April of 1976. Towards the end of 1976 (October), the regime converted the Kebeles into organs of “Red Terror”. By then, what the Dergue touted as a “Bloodless Revolution” had turned out to be bloody and terroristic.

In dealing with the opposition, particularly students and intellectuals, the Dergue resorted to the tactic of isolation and gradual liquidation as open confrontation would have created difficulties for it. To wipe out the strongest of these opposition groups (then the EPRP), the Dergue exploited the “contradictions” among the various groups

claiming to be “Marxist” and won some of them to its side. Once it had finished with the EPRP, it turned against the rest and devoured them one by one. Although the so called “Provisional Office for Mass Organizations” and the Red Terror Kebeles in which MEISON was heavily represented-were instrumental in the liquidation of the EPRP, the next victim was MEISON, a major partner in the Dergue’s coalition. In the second, round, after the groups which had posed a threat to the Dergue were decimated, the rest were dissolved through terror and opportunism, and the organization known as “Union of Ethiopian Marxist Leninist Organizations” which had been formed by a collection of these groups was discarded and its place taken by a new grouping of so called “True Communist” individuals. Concurrently, the Dergue formed a “Commission to Organize a Workers Party” to consolidate its power, and after establishing the “Ethiopian Workers Party”, is now preparing to institute a “Republic”. These sequence of events show in a dramatic and concise way, the manner in which the Dergue emerged and the tactics it utilized to consolidate its power. They also add up to a complete picture which proves that the Dergue and its regime, its policies and actions are a continuation of the “Ethiopian” empire-building mission in which Haile Selassie and his predecessors had failed. “Marxism”, “Socialism”, “progress” and all sorts of accompany reforms and cosmetic changes and details should not confuse any one. One can not know the essence of a thing merely from its form and external appearance. It is therefore important to examine the essence of the regime and view the process of its emergence from the perspective of the fundamental political problems and their resolution.

If we look at the struggle of the peoples’ of Ethiopia and their basic demands, it becomes clear that the institution of a democratic system is a pre-condition for economic, social and cultural changes. And the question of nationalities is the foremost question of democracy. The solution of this question demands the recognition of the right of nationalities to self determination, acknowledgement of their

right to administer themselves and the setting up of autonomous administrative systems. Finally, it entails working for the formation of a democratic order” based on free union and equality, one that would serve their interest and foster their progress. This must also guarantee and incorporate the fundamental human and democratic rights. The issue is simple and straight forward. But has the Dergue, which has issued-proclamation after proclamation and schemed to consolidate its authority, seriously addressed it? No. In the first place, granting fundamental rights conflicts with its ambition of building a dictatorial empire and is therefore a threat to the regime. Moreover, a democratic solution to the issue would mean the end of its existence. Hence, it attempts to crush the democratic movements and demands of the Ethiopian nationalities as well as other opposition movements by force. The fact that contrary to its desires, and as a consequence of its fascist acts, the resistance of the nationalities and of other opposition forces is growing is a manifestation of the bankrupt nature of the Dergue.

What about the regime’s handling of the just and legitimate cause of the Eritrean people? The colonialist Dergue, just like the Haile Selassie regime, did not fail to recognize that the main threat to its expansionist and imperial ambitions came from Eritrea. It also realized from the start that it could not crush the Eritrean people’s struggle with the weakened state apparatus of Haile Selassie. As the Eritrean case was a burning issue, whose peaceful solution was demanded by the Eritrean people and the peoples of Ethiopia, the Dergue, as in all other questions, hypocritically declared its “readiness” to solve the problem. As the regime’s classified 1975 document reveals, however, the corner stone of its policy was to engage in peace maneuvers until such time as it consolidated its power. As it realized that if the Eritrean case with its solid legal grounds was raised on the international arena “Ethiopia” was bound to loose , the main objective of its foreign policy was one of isolating the Eritrean people’s cause in the international as well as regional

levels. In the event, it set up peace delegations and committees and met with the EPLF and ELF in an attempt at misleading the Eritrean people and the world. And although this initiative raised the hopes of the Eritrean people, who have always struggled for peace, and their organizations, it did not in any way deceive them. For parallel with its feigned peace pronouncements, the Dergue was conducting an extensive and brutal campaign of terror in the cities and rural areas, involving summary executions of innocent civilians by shooting and strangulation and the burning of villages. Even under these circumstances, the Eritrean Revolution demonstrated its readiness to enter into a dialogue for peace. Furthermore the EPLF sought to find out the Dergue's views on peace so it could also present its proposals and create the conditions for face to face talks. The Dergue, however, was not prepared. When the challenge became so strong as to deny it room for maneuver, the regime resorted to the one solution it envisages for Eritrea and launched its "Red March" offensive. After the failure of this campaign, it proclaimed its Nine Point Policy which was rejected. The Dergue's aim was to engage in hypocritical peace initiatives for public consumption while simultaneously carrying out military preparations to crush the Eritrean revolution.

Consequently the Dergue raised the alarm on a bogus "foreign threat" to induce the Ethiopian people to take up arms to fight in a war they didn't even understand. A second objective of the campaign was to divert the Ethiopian people's attention from its internal opposition. The sharpening of the Ethio-Somali conflict at that time, facilitated this deception. The remaining question, that of the acquisition of arms, was solved through Soviet intervention and largesse. The Dergue was, therefore, highly confident, that it would crush the Eritrean Revolution. To prepare the grounds that would serve as a pretext for the military offensives, brief, farcical peace talks were conducted in Berlin through Soviet initiative and East German orchestration. When the talks demonstrated that the EPLF would not succumb to pressure and intimidation or betray its cause, the Dergue initiated its large-

scale offensive. Now, after almost ten years of heavy destruction and bloodshed, it has become clear that the regime's goals and plans have failed. The experience accumulated in the past 12 years in this respect is one among many other things which expose the nature of the Dergue.

In the past 12 years, the Dergue has trampled on the Ethiopian people's fundamental rights those of speech, movement and organization- and denied them the opportunity to exercise popular power by prohibiting the formation of democratic institutions, and has worked to strengthen a "Workers Party" based on the army and the dictatorial police authority or the Kebeles. As a result opposition to the regime and desertion from it have been growing. Since the Dergue does not even trust its main repressive machinery - the military institution and is afraid the army might mutiny or carry out a coup, it has emasculated the army's role by miring it in continuous positional warfare in Eritrea and brutally crushing any signs of opposition. The much rehearsed scenario which the Dergue has been enacting as a prelude to proclaiming a "Republic" does not hold anything new. It will not lead to the exercise of the right of nationalities and the establishment of broad popular democracy in Ethiopia, or a political solution to the Eritrean issue. All these clearly show that there is nothing in the nature of the current regime to differentiate it from that of Haile Selassie.

In his attempt to expand his empire, Haile Selassie depended on foreign assistance. The Dergue too realized that it could not wipe out the Eritrean people's struggle and crush the Ethiopian people's opposition and thus sustain the Ethiopian empire without the support of external forces. From the outset, the Dergue did all it could to secure American assistance, so it could strengthen the army and meet the threat created by the increased strength of the Eritrean revolution and the Ethiopian peoples' opposition. The U.S. was hesitant in offering arms, not because it was suspicious of the Dergue but because it panicked at the fall of Haile Selassie and at the strength

and direction of the opposition which overthrew the regime. It did not want to take a hasty step. Badly in need of arms, the Dergue lost patience and did a volte-face turning its attention towards the Soviets. The Soviet Union, which had been watching developments from afar, quickly took advantage of the new opportunities opened for its global interests, and was only too pleased to deliver arms. In a short period, the Dergue's armed forces quadrupled both in number and weapons. The intervention of the Soviets and their accomplices wetted the regimes craving for imperial expansion and liquidation of the opposition. This external factor resulted in destruction and bloodshed unprecedented in Eritrean history, prolonged the conflict and blocked other possibilities for resolving the problem.

In addition to stimulating the regime's imperial ambitions on Eritrea, and consolidating dictatorial rule in Ethiopia, the intervention of the Soviet Union and its allies played a major role in destabilizing the region. Leaving aside the military measures taken by Somalia and used as a pretext by Ethiopia, Soviet intervention aroused the Dergue's fantasy of becoming a regional power in the 'Horn of Africa and beyond. Today Djibouti is a semi-colony of Ethiopia, the Dergue has invaded the territory of the Republic of Somalia, is trying to exploit the problem of Southern Sudan and is taking steps against the states in the region to force them to either submit to its domination or face destabilization. These developments not only reflect on the regime's outlook but also reveal the role that the Soviet Union has played in complicating the politics of the region.

Under these circumstances, which precluded a political solution, what should the EPLF have done? And what steps did it take?

In the two terror filled years preceding the first EPLF organizational congress, the nature of the Dergue and the line and direction it had adopted were clearly evident. Its peace maneuvers, the barbaric strangulation of youth and other atrocities it perpetrated on the civilian population in the cities, its burning of villages and massacres in the rural areas such as Weki-Duba and Om-Hajer, the Nine Point Policy,

the “Red March” invasion (July 1976), and large-scale military preparations did not leave room for doubt.

In the first organizational congress, the EPLF assessed the nature of the Dergue’s regime, decided to vigorously pursue its all-sided struggle, formulated and set out to implement a military strategy of popular liberation and went on the offensive. The town of Karora was liberated on the eve of the first congress (07-01-77). Nakfa(23-03-77) Afabet(06-04-77), Dekemhare(06-07-77), Keren (08-07-77), Segeneiti (03-08-77), Digs(05-08-77) were liberated in rapid succession. After the Massawa-Asmara highway came under the control of the Eritrean People’s Liberation Army on October 12, 1977, Dogali (08-12-1977), parts of Massawa (21-12-77), Dongolo and Gindae (24-1-78), Embatkala and Maihabar (25-01-78) and Nefasit and Seidici (27-01-78) followed suit. The ELF for its part liberated Tesenei (10-04-77), Agordat (31-08-77), Mendefera (24-8-77), Adi Quala (12-8-77). All rural areas and all Eritrean towns with the exception of Asmara which was under siege, partially freed. Massawa as well as Adi Keih, Barentu and Assab, were liberated.

These developments were a threat not only to the Dergue but also to its allies; the Soviet Union, Cuba, South Yemen, and Libya which intensified their intervention. Soviet delivery of weapons was increased and Cuban and South Yemeni armed forces deployed. The Libyans provided logistical and material support and in the middle of July 1978 a large-scale offensive was launched.

Until then the Eritrean revolution was in the stage of the strategic offensive. The fighting capability of the Peoples Army and the Peoples Militia was at a high level. But the intervention of the Soviet Union and its collaborators had changed the military balance in the Dergue’s favour . Given these developments, it was obvious that the EPLF could not defend all the land it had liberated and safeguard all of its other gains.

And faced with a historic question that demanded a correct answer,

the EPLF decided to effect a strategic withdrawal, after assessing the military changes which had taken place. But the strategic withdrawal did not imply the losing of hope. At that time comments to the effect that the Eritrean revolution was no more, were common in the international stage. Inside the country, there were those who claimed that it was impossible to confront the enemy's offensive and who accused the EPLF of adventurism. But when the EPLF decided on the strategic withdrawal, it did not intend to leave all of the liberated areas at one go or to fragment its forces and return to guerilla warfare. Since the liberation struggle is not only a military task but also political, psychological, social, economic and cultural; and since in a liberation war the existence of a base area is of fundamental importance not only for military objectives but also for conducting the all sided revolutionaries tasks and activities and since establishing a base area outside the borders in a neighbouring country creates dependency and imposes limitations which have a negative impact on the revolution, the EPLF decided to ensure the continued existence of a base area, irrespective of size. According to the EPLF strategy, the retreat did not mean taking a leap back to the base area. In the process of the strategic withdrawal, preserving human resources by avoiding unnecessary sacrifices, conserving weapons, inflicting man-power, material and morale loses on the enemy, and, what is more, increasing your fire-power, maintaining and boosting your morale, protecting institutions from destruction so they could later be used for reconstruction and the inevitable counter-offensive were the basic elements. Ofcourse, the implementation of such a strategy was not easy. It was a task that demanded heavy sacrifice, fortitude and perseverance. And thanks, to the heroism and steadfastness of the people and the EPLA, the objectives of the strategic withdrawal were achieved. In the course of the withdrawal, the People's Army upgraded its battle effectiveness, steeled its morale, increased its fire-power, safeguarded its basic institutions, roughly delienated its base area, and went on to ensure a secure defence.

The first phase -i.e, the strategic withdrawal- incorporates the first offensive which started in mid-July 1978 with the withdrawal from the South and includes the breaching of the Asmara-Embaderho front up to the battle of Makerka at the end of July; the Second Offensive which began on 20 November, 1978 and continued till the end of the month in the areas to the east and to the south of Keren; the Third Offensive, starting in January 1979 on the Anseba, Maamide and North Eastern Sahel Fronts and from February 6-9, around Denden on the Nakfa Front; as well as the enemy's futile attempts to breach the various fronts from 30 March up to 11 April 1979 in its Fourth Offensive. In the process of withdrawal, the Eritrean People's Liberation Army (EPLA) did not only effect a gradual and orderly retreat to its fortifications in Sahel but also intensified its mobile and guerilla operations behind the enemy lines and won important battles. As the enemy had incurred a combined loss of about 25,000 men in the four offensives and the EPLA's defence capability had grown in all respects, the Dergue was forced to make better preparations for its next attempt at breaching EPLA defence lines and liquidating the EPLA in a war of encirclement.

In the second phase, the EPLA aimed at consolidation while the colonial army's goals were to breach and encircle. After careful preparations and reinforcement of troops, the enemy advanced towards Agrae on 08-07-79 and also mounted simultaneous and continuous attacks on all fronts up to the end of July. However, the offensive was repulsed and the Dergue lost about 12,000 soldiers and an enormous amount of material. In this, the Fifth Offensive, the enemy also suffered a further deterioration in morale. In contrast, the EPLA's confidence and capability to defend its stronghold was enhanced and its firepower boosted. The strengthening of fortifications and foiling of successive offensives, however, was not sufficient to bring about the necessary level of consolidation. For this a defensive attack was required and at the beginning of December 1979, the EPLA launched a major counter-offensive on the Nakfa Front driving the enemy forces to the

outskirts of Afabet. It also mounted a supportive attack on the North Eastern Sahel Front which dislodged the enemy from its positions and restricted it to the plains. The failure of its five offensives, and the successful counter attacks launched by the EPLA to ensure the defence of the base paralysed the Dergue's offensive capability as evidenced by the two years of parity that followed. Aside from their impact on the military capability of the Dergue, these developments had important political repercussions on the national, regional and international levels. Consequently the Dergue carried out massive mobilization of men and material for a new military adventure. The new offensive was preceded by a political campaign in Ethiopia, a political and propaganda offensive in Eritrea aimed at demoralizing the people and an international diplomatic campaign. After successive meetings the Dergue issued, the "Asmara Manifesto" to give its offensive a semblance of legality and popular backing.

After all these preparations, the Dergue launched the "Red star" campaign which it touted as "the one and final" campaign. The plan of the offensive was to wipe out the EPLF in a two to three week war of encirclement. As a prelude to the main attack which commenced on 15-2-1982, the colonial army launched an extensive combing campaign in December 1981 to weaken EPLA mobile and guerilla units active behind enemy lines. This campaign was frustrated by our forces. The enemy then conducted an intensive aerial bombardment for a whole month. The enemy's strategy for the Sixth Offensive was to launch coordinated blitzes on the North East Sahel, Nakfa and Kerkebet (Barka) Fronts. After 18 days of the three prenged attacks, its armies were expected to rendezvous at Adobha. However, the Dergue's units deployed on the newly opened Barka Front were crushed with heavy losses and the Front collapsed in the first few days of the offensive. On the remaining two fronts heavy and bitter fighting which tested the mettle of the two armies continued for 95 days and was finally concluded with the defeat of the Dergue's army at the end of July. In this offensive the Dergue's casualties amounted

to over 40,000. It also incurred immense losses in weapons and other war material. To the EPLF, the 6th offensive was a valuable military experience in which it surmounted a difficult and trying stage-an important stage which steeled the resolve of the Eritrean people and strengthened the EPLA in fighting capability and weapons. It was also a significant political turning point on the international stage.

The heavy political losses it suffered in the 6th offensive pushed the Dergue to other suicidal and desperate measures. Mistaking its fantasies for objective reality, the Dergue concluded that the EPLF's manpower had been weakened and its defence capability debilitated by the 6th offensive. It was therefore necessary, the Dergue thought, to attack the EPLF before it got a breathing space and the chance to reinforce. Fooled by this assessment, the Dergue adopted a strategy of attrition to weaken the EPLA in an extended engagement and achieve the objectives of the failed 6th offensive. In marked contrast to the "Red Star Campaign", the Dergue launched the Seventh Offensive (The "Stealth" offensive) at the end of March 1983. This offensive differed from the previous "Red Star" campaign not only in the lack of an accompanying fanfare, but its tactic of feinting and stealth, of mounting a concentrated attack in one place and then changing the thrust to another, had nothing in common with the "6th offensive" strategy of attacking on all fronts simultaneously and for a short period. It continued for a record five months until the EPLA seized the initiative and carried out a counter offensive from 6 July up to the middle of August 1983. The Dergue's army suffered a total loss of 25,000 troops in the offensive.

The next stage was characterized by the EPLA's extensive counter offensive. At the beginning of 1984, on the 15th and 16th of January, the Dergue's forces in Tessenei and Alighider were attacked and the two towns came under EPLA control. Although a subsequent attack mounted by the EPLA on 22-2-84 against the regime's forces that had entrenched themselves for five years on the North East Sahel Front-"Wukaw Command" to the enemy- did not succeed, the enemy front

was liquidated and an extensive area liberated in a second onslaught from 19-21 March 1984. A successful Commando operation was also carried out on Asmara airport on May 21, 1984.

This extensive counter offensive was a continuation and intensification of the mobile and guerrilla operations conducted behind enemy lines. As the successful execution of major operations particularly in Western Eritrea led to the contracting of both the areas under the enemy and its defence perimeter, the EPLF decided to mount an attack on Barentu. The operation started on the 5th of July and the regimes forces were decimated. Operation Barentu inflicted heavy military losses in the colonial army and had major political repercussions which made the Dergue hysterical. To regain the towns, the Dergue mounted continuous counter attacks, and when these proved ineffective, it deployed many additional brigades and brought its biggest mechanized division from the Ogadeh. It subsequently recaptured Barentu on 24, August, 1985 and advanced towards Tessenei retaking the town on 26 August. Although operation Barentu inflicted heavy manpower and material losses on the enemy, boosted the EPLA's firepower and was successful in pre-emptying an imminent enemy offensive it did not lead to the strategic consolidation of the EPLA's position.

After Barentu, the Dergue reinforced its army in Eritrea by bringing 20,000 conscripts of the second round of "National Military Service". Assuming as usual, that the EPLA had been drastically weakened in the battle for Barentu and the regime's "Red Sea" counter-offensive to retake the town and hoping that its return to Barentu and Tessenei had raised the morale of its army the Dergue started a new large-scale offensive calling it "Bahre Negash" on 10-10-85. This offensive, once again touted as "a once and for all" campaign was as usual expected to liquidate the EPLA in a week. In the event, the offensive got bogged down in its first phase, but the Dergue which had already lost confidence, launched two more phases, until the EPLA counter attack on 4-12-85 brought the adventure to a halt. In this offensive, which turned out to be a complete fiasco, of the enemy lost a total of

7,000 men.

In 1986 although the enemy did not undertake any large-scale offensives, it established many outposts and Launched small scale campaigns to protect its rear as the EPLF strategy of extensive counter offensive initiated in 1984 and intensified in 1985 had created a serious threat to it. On its part the EPLF has been vigorously pushing and expanding its guerilla and commando operations by penetrating and operating in the cities and extensive rural areas, as well as areas immediately behind the enemy's front lines.

What emerges from the military developments briefly discussed here is that the Dergue's objectives of consolidating its power, of creating and expanding an empire by liquidating by force of arms and a huge army- the Eritrean revolution and the movements of the peoples of Ethiopia have failed. Initially, the Dergue registered military victories because it was able to exploit the prevailing chaos and channel the chauvinistic sentiments it aroused against the Somali attacks, and as a result of the acquisition of Soviet weapons and military advisors and the physical intervention of the Cuban and South Yemeni armies. But there after the Dergue's power and fortunes have been wanning. Moreover, as the political bankruptcy of the regime has become more evident, the political consciousness and the organized opposition of the Ethiopian people are growing. The failure of the program of national conscription to achieve its numerical targets and the successively decreasing number of conscripts from the first to the latest -fourth-round is a manifestation of the deterioration in the regimes position.

The Dergue's superiority in new weapons played a potent role initially. Not so any more. The EPLA has narrowed the gap by capturing and achieving proficiency in their use. The Soviet Union, as well as Cuba and South Yemen, who in the beginning had fielded troops, have discovered the impracticality of their plan to finish off the war in a matter of months and then congratulate themselves for having "liquidated a counterrevolution". They have, therefore, withdrawn

or reduced their forces in Eritrea and are keeping a low profile. The absence or reduction of their forces which had supplemented the military capability of the colonial army and filled the gaps in its resources and competence has further weakened the regime. The continuous deterioration in the army's morale and the existence of a persistent-sometimes open at other times latent-opposition within the army is another debilitating factor. The spectacle provided by ex-officials of the regime who used to plan and applaud its actions and who are now pronouncing in their speeches that "The Eritrean revolution can not be defeated militarily" is an indication of the general state of affairs. And now whether the Dergue? As long as its imperial ambitions persist, the Dergue can entertain no alternative to the military option. Therefore, another offensive -ofcourse after due preparation- is inevitable. The outcome of such an adventure is also predictable. It will end up in failure and finally bring the fall of the Dergue as demonstrated by the historical experience of the Haile Selassie regime and the 12 years of the Dergue.

The EPLF has, in the cause of the heroic war it has waged over the past 12 years, proven many fundamental points. It has shown its loyalty to the just struggle of the Eritrean people. It has proven that a just struggle cannot be vanquished no matter how huge the colonial military force (and that of external forces) arrayed against it. It has demonstrated beyond any doubt the correctness of the military strategy it pursued. And in the protracted war which has demanded heavy sacrifices, the EPLF has built a people's army with regular, regional and militia units evincing numerical growth, employing sophisticated strategies and tactics, possessing superior consciousness and morale, well organized, equipped and proficient in light and heavy weapons; dedicated, productive' and a guarantee for the liberation of Eritrea and its reconstruction.

The EPLF, however, is not a militarist organization, but a democratic organization which wages an all-sided national liberation struggle. It has worked tirelessly for a just and peaceful political solution because

it believes this to be the simplest solution, one which minimizes destruction and bloodshed and assures peace, prosperity and stability to the peoples of Eritrea, Ethiopia and the region as a whole.

The Eritrean people's struggle for a just and peaceful political solution goes back over 30 years. The Eritrean people took up arms and embarked on their just and legitimate armed struggle, not because this was their choice but because the world community had denied their case due attention. In the early years, dialogue of any kind was not possible as the Haile Selassie regime with the active collaboration of the United States had built walls of isolation around the Eritrean struggle and was striving to quietly liquidate the armed struggle.

After the fall of Haile Selassie, the Dergue made formal declarations about the issue, as a "peaceful solution" to the Eritrean case was one of the main slogans of the people. What the case demanded, however, was not empty proclamations and feigned acceptance of the people's will, but conviction and seriousness, which the Dergue lacked. This lack of commitment on the part of the Dergue doomed any-peace effort and the peace maneuvers it carried out when it first seized power ended in total failure.

In 1977-78 fake peace talks concocted by the Soviets and directed by the East Germans were conducted as a pretext for the imminent large-scale offensives of the Dergue. A collateral objective of the peace maneuver was to secure the submission of the Eritrean revolution through deception and intimidation. Four successive meetings were held at the invitation of the German Socialist Workers Unity Party. The first from 25-29/11/1977, the second on 2-2-78, the third from 22-23/03/77 and the fourth from 09-10/06/78. On 15/07/78, a month after the last meeting, the Dergue launched its first large-scale offensive.

At the first meeting held between the EPLF delegation and leaders of the Socialist Workers Unity Party of the German Democratic Republic (East Germany), the latter submitted the following deceptive opinion.

We affirm the right of the Eritrean people to self-determination up to independence, and the Dergue has also assured us that it believes in this right. There are some in the Dergue, however, who do not accept it. Talks should, therefore, start to resolve the case. The EPLF delegation gave this initiative its positive consideration and took the opportunity to elaborate on the just and legitimate nature of the Eritrean case, and assured the German side the EPLF's commitment to peaceful solution and its readiness to start dialogue. A date was set for the next meeting.

In the second meeting, the German authorities reiterated their previous opinion, informed the EPLF delegates of the presence of a Dergue delegation in Berlin and stated that it has assured them of its readiness to meet with the EPLF delegation. The EPLF delegation proposed that since the East German authorities were aware of the EPLF position, they should also get the opinion of the Dergue's delegation and act as mediators between the two groups. The EPLF put forward this suggestion because it wanted to find out if the Dergue really had a new proposal as the East Germans had claimed. On their part the Germans proposed face to face talks, and the EPLF agreed. But contrary to the assurances and statements of the Germans, the Dergue did not have a new proposal. In the meeting the delegation of the Dergue launched into a spiel on the 3000 year old history of Ethiopia, the place of Eritrea in that history, the role of the Eritrean revolution in the downfall of Haile Selassie, the Dergue's "Program of Democratic Revolution" and the purported gains achieved by the people on the basis of this program. The EPLF delegation stated that the myth of a 3000 year old history was specious and baseless, elaborated on the history and the just and legitimate struggle of the Eritrean people and expressed the EPLF's rejection of the Dergue's "Program of Democratic Revolution" as irrelevant to the Eritrean case. In addition it asked the Dergue's delegation to present its proposals if it had any.

In the third meeting as well, no new proposal was submitted. The

EPLF delegation declared that it would present its overall views on the issues. The German representatives presented a four point proposal dealing, in general terms, with the continuation of the dialogue and proposed that this should be studied by the two parties the EPLF and the Dergue. The meeting was concluded after it set a date meeting.

In the fourth meeting, the EPLF delegation handed to the East German authorities a memorandum clarifying historical facts and outlining its clear position on a peaceful solution. It declared that there was nothing to warrant a meeting with the Dergue delegation. However, as the German representatives suggested that the EPLF delegation also hand the document to the Dergue delegation and listen to whatever opinion it may have, a meeting was held and the memorandum given to the representative of the Dergue. When the delegation of the Dergue made a speech with a new and threatening tone, the EPLF delegation declared that the EPLF would, under no circumstance submit to threats and intimidations. The Germans too changed their tone and instead of their usual assurances, warned that the Dergue which had already defeated Somalia, had made massive military preparations, and advised that there would be dire and terrible consequence unless the EPLF changed its stand. They also stated that they would give their opinion on the EPLF memorandum after studying it and would set and announce the date for the next meeting. A month later, the Dergue started its large-scale offensive.

The Berlin meetings were taken by many parties as an opportunity to conduct a propaganda campaign against the EPLF and exploit the differences inside the Eritrean revolution, particularly that between the EPLF and the ELF. Although the EPLF has every right to independently initiate, conduct or engage in contacts, it decided to act in coordination with the ELF, because it was determined to ensure that the contacts would not be exploited as a pretext for worsening the internal conflict.

But the EPLF's proposal for a joint and coordinated move was not accepted by the ELF, which was only too eager to misconstrue the

talks as having been prompted by EPLF weakness and intensify the old defamation campaign of EPLF “collusion with the enemy”. The Soviet Union too attempted to exploit the Berlin meetings, by directing, through various means, an anti-EPLF propaganda campaign and more importantly by making numerous approaches and showing favour to the ELF in an effort at winning the organization.

The Dergue too went on the propaganda offensive, to accompany its large-scale military campaign professing to have made a serious effort for peace and alleging to have been rebuffed by the EPLF. Confident of quick military victory, the regime, after the Berlin talks did not consider using peace as a maneuvering chip. Meanwhile, the Numeiri regime in the Sudan, which and earlier (at Free town, Sierra leone) and for purposes of its own expressed support of the Eritrean people’s cause changed its stance, offered to mediate and started exerting pressure on the Eritrean revolution to induce it to compromise. Taking into consideration the efforts of the Sudan and other interested parties to organize negotiations, and more importantly, assessing the experiences of Berlin, the EPLF issued its Referendum Proposal on November 23, 1980 in which it set, in unequivocal terms, its views on a peaceful solution of the Eritrean case, Moreover, the EPLF continued with unflagging seriousness its intensive political and diplomatic work in search of sincere dialogue. Furthermore, governments, organizations and individuals continued to take initiatives for a peaceful solution, initiatives to which the EPLF gave positive consideration and whole-hearted support. But the Dergue was not interested. It was only after the debacle of the “Red Star Campaign” that the regime signaled through its agents abroad, its willingness to meet with the EPLF. In its approaches, the Dergue insisted that the meetings be conducted in secret and without the presence of a third party. The EPLF agreed and the first meeting was held on 23-08-82. Successive meetings followed on 11-11-82, 03-01-83, 18-02-83, 16-31/5/83, 19-07-83; 26-12-83, 02-03-84, 31-03-85.... In all there were ten exploratory meetings.

At first, the secrecy of the meetings was the main point of contention. The EPLF proposed that the meetings be formally declared, that a third party acceptable to both sides participate, and that each side submit its own proposal or work paper. The Dergue did not present any proposal but limited itself to repeating its desire of keeping the meeting secret. With respect to the issue of a third party, the Dergue, at first, emphatically rejected the idea and when it finally relented, it kept insisting on the third party being from those whose views are identical with its own and were thus sure to side with it. By the time the preliminary talks broke down, agreement had not been reached on the matter. In regard to the presentation of position papers that would serve as a basis for dialogue the EPLF submitted the points of its Referendum Proposal. In contrast, although the Dergue after considerable delay presented a paper similar in content to its regional autonomy proposal, it subsequently declared that the paper did not reflect its final position. This meant that the Dergue had failed to submit a paper incorporating its views. In this situation, the EPLF insisted that the regime present a definite position even if it is one that is not incorporated in the three options of the Referendum Proposal. The representatives of the regime, however, engaged in a maneuver to buy time, as they found it impossible to present a position paper, and to this end requested and were given a clarification on the EPLF's interpretation of the points in the Referendum Proposal. In addition, they kept taking contradictory stands in formal and informal meetings and concentrated their efforts on prolonging or pushing the dates of the meetings. When all the issues pertinent to the preliminary meetings were exhausted, the EPLF took up the basic question once again and proposed that proper negotiations should start in the form of formally declared meetings with the participation of a mutually agreeable third party when this too was rejected the preliminary meetings reached a dead end and were terminated.

Before the talks had broken dawn, peace initiatives advanced by other parties multiplied and gained wider support presenting the Dergue

with a new challenge. On numerous occasions, many governments and organizations called on the Dergue to resolve the issue through peaceful means. To allay the pressure, the Dergue replied that it was already there by meeting with the EPLF, by divulging the preliminary talks which it had insisted should be kept secret and to which it only paid lip service. This, in itself, was a bone of contention in the preliminary talks. Even then, the Dergue did not desist from exploiting the meetings for this purpose, while at the same time denying that it was violating the confidentiality of the talks. Internally, the Dergue which had trumpeted each of its offensives as the “final solution”, changed its tune, professed interest in peace, and used the preliminary meetings as an opportune expedient to silence the internal criticism of those who were opposed to the war and those who waited to exploit the failure of the 6th offensive. The maneuverings of the regime came to an end only when the EPLF formally disclosed that preliminary talks had taken place but had reached a deadend as a result of the Dergue’s obduracy.

The EPLF’s enthusiasm for a just and peaceful political solution has not been dampened by the failure of the preliminary talks. The EPLF has been conducting serious and extensive campaigns for a peaceful resolution of the conflict on the international stage. At the time when the drought was worsening the misery of the peoples of Eritrea and Ethiopia, the EPLF pointed out that the main problem was not drought but war, and that peace would ultimately aid in the control of future natural calamities. Moreover, it reiterated its desire for a peaceful solution and called for a ceasefire and the free passage of relief goods. Although this too was rejected by the Dergue, the interest shown by governments, organizations and individuals towards a peaceful solution did not decline but has steadily increased. One example is the recent peace initiative undertaken by the Sudanese government and frustrated by the Dergue. Today not only have the EPLF’s peace proposal and efforts won wide support in different corners of the globe but the efforts of other parties for peace are becoming more

organized and extensive. The EPLF will persevere in its pursuit of a just and peaceful political solution, no matter how much time and energy it demands. It is confident that ultimately and in conjunction with the struggle waged in other fields -among them the diplomatic field this effort will bear fruit.

Foreign Political and Diplomatic Activities

In today's world, political developments, international relations, wars, conflicts, treaties, economic relations and cultural exchanges increasingly influence each other and no political phenomenon or movement should be seen in isolation. To properly assess the EPLF's diplomatic activities over the last 10 years, therefore, it is necessary to analyze the international and regional political atmosphere under which it was undertaken.

Among the factors that influence political developments in the world, the decisive ones are the big powers. These powers in the first instance the United States and the Soviet Union are powerful and influential on account of their economic and military and hence their political right. Their power, however, does not derive solely from their own resources, but is buttressed by that of their allies and followers.

The world is generally presented as divided into two camps representing different socio-economic systems. But this assessment doesn't reflect the objective political situation of the world. Today the two camps are not divided on the basis of principles and ideology, but on the basis of the struggle for spheres of influence.

The EPLF realizes that the pervasive influence of the two super-powers, their opposition to the Eritrean people's right to self-determination and their contention in the region are the causes not only of the suffering of the Eritrean people but also of conflict and instability in the Horn of Africa. The EPLF has, therefore, repeatedly called on the US and the Soviet Union to recognize the rights of the

peoples of the Horn to decide independently their destinies and to use their influence to advance the causes of peace and instability in the region.

United states of America

The role and influence of the U.S. in the world can be analyzed under three topics: economic, military and political.

Over the last ten year the economic influence of the U.S. has been on the rise. It is the leading country of monopoly capital and its economic dominance in the world is based on its industrial, technological and trade capacity.

American campanies have increasingly dominated nationally or regionally based companies in other continents. Most independent companies in other industrial countries cannot compete with their American rivals in size, capacity and capital investment and are therefore dominated by the American giants. Moreover, many other companies in the developed world are U.S. subsidiaries, set up wholly or in part by American capital and technology.

In term of manpower too, the specialists, professionals as well as skilled and other workers of the developed countries directly or indirectly serve American industires, financial institutions and multinational companies. American scientific, technological and industrial innovations are supplemented by similar break-throughs and developments in other industrial countries.

The U.S. domination total or partial of the industrial development of Japan, the Far East, Western Europe, Canada and Australia, that started in earnest after the Second World War, has grown steadily over the past ten years spurred on by meteoric technological advances. There is an aspect of competition in the relations between the U.S. and other capitalist countries. But this is secondary and does not constitute a significant factor obstructing U.S. domination of the world capitalist

system.

Compared with the developed countries, the level of industrial development and economic independence of the semi-developed countries of Asia, Latin America and Africa is very low and is highly dominated by the US and the other developed nations. The industries of semi-developed countries remain an appendage of those of the U.S.A. and U.S. dominated developed countries due to the low level of education and technological development of the semi-developed countries and because the advanced industrial nations feel threatened by and therefore block their independent industrial and technological growth.

The underdeveloped countries, of Asia, Africa and Latin America usually referred to as the “Third World” are countries which boast of no significant industrial development. Most are either friends or followers of America and its allies. In the world economy, they play the role of sources of raw materials and cheap labour, and that of consumers. As dependencies and backyards they serve to strengthen the U.S. and other developed countries. The growth of American domination on the Third World in the last 10 years is manifested in the ever deepening economic crisis that has beset the “developing” countries.

The economic dominance of the U.S. and its partners has created major problems. American technological progress has brought about a high rate of unemployment in the developed countries and more poverty and crisis in the semi-developed and under-developed countries. More unemployment, poverty and economic crisis on a world-level are bound to follow.

The American domination of world trade is a projection of its industrial dominance. Although attempts are made to regulate trade between the U.S. on the one hand, and Japan, Australia, the developed countries of the Far East, Western Europe and Canada on the other through tariff and trade agreements financial and commercial might

eventually tilt the balance in America's favour. Therefore, American dominance and control of world trade is growing steadily.

The trade relationship between the semideveloped and the underdeveloped countries and the U.S.A. and other developed nations is not based on equality and mutual benefit. Most of the former are debt-ridden. The past ten years have seen many countries burdened by huge debts and interest payments which they can not meet. Moreover the general trend in international trade which has boosted the growth and dominance of the American economy has created friction between the USA and its allies.

The 1975 American defeat in Vietnam weakened US military dominance, but it did not change the strategic military balance in the world. As a result of the policy it subsequently followed and the military changes that appeared in the region and other parts of the world, U. S. was able to regain the ground it had lost and retain its military superiority.

For the U.S., military superiority is essential for the protection of its strategic economic interests. It, therefore, devotes huge resources industrial, financial and human to the production of weapons. The past ten years have seen not only an increase in U.S. nuclear capability but the development of a weapons system in space (Star Wars), which is based on the use of the results of scientific and technological research in space for military purposes. These developments have raised American military superiority and negotiating power.

Although the "Vietnam Syndrome" curbed direct U.S. military interference, American efforts to militarily strengthen client states have grown. The consolidation of the NATO alliance, the deployment of new nuclear weapons in Western Europe, the upgrading of the NATO Members' capacity to produce nuclear weapons, and the consolidation of NATO air, naval and ground conventional forces are indicators of American military thinking. The U.S. is also attempting to strengthen regional alliances and individual client states through

increased military aid to enable them, in the absence of direct American interference, to defend themselves and act as regional watchdogs. And in case this strategy fails, the U.S. has its military bases and Rapid Deployment Forces which it has been strengthening in the past decade ready. Moreover as the invasion of Grenada and the Libyan air raids show U.S. disinclination to resort to direct military interference that followed the Vietnam war, is very limited indeed.

An aspect of U.S. military strategy that has become more pronounced over the past few years is indirect military intervention, the support of opposition groups, and where these do not exist, the creation, organization and financing of groups to fight anti American or Soviet dominated states. Its support to the Contras in Nicaragua, UNITA in Angola and the Mujahedeen in Afghanistan is a manifestation of this policy, a policy which is supplemented by CIA espionage, sabotage, terrorism and assassination.

The American government claims to stand for liberty, brotherhood, equality, democracy and human rights in order to protect its worldwide interests. The policy of racial discrimination against Blacks and Native Americans, the violation of the social, economic and political rights of large sections of the population in Western Europe, the emergence of extreme right-wing and neo-fascist groups in the last ten years and the elimination of moderate and democratic forces by terror and sabotage are phenomena that give the lie to American claims.

The U.S. world political strategy can also be perceived from the type of regimes that are found in the semi-developed and under-developed Asian, African, and Latin American countries. Most of those allied with the U.S.A are military, monarchist and fascist dictatorships abhorred by their peoples. Moreover, those countries that establish true and democratic systems are subjected to US engineered coups, military pressure and economic sanctions.

In the last few years, the US has adopted a new foreign policy tactic.

When extremely notorious regimes are threatened by popular uprisings, the Americans promptly before things go out of hand-replace the unpopular leaders, leaving the regime intact. Moreover, the Americans goad client governments to carry out reforms to blunt popular opposition and ensure their survival.

It is the responsibility of international and regional organizations like the U.N. and the O.A.U. to prevent human rights violations and invasions and solve conflicts. But among other causes, American domination has virtually paralyzed these bodies. The US uses its international influence to prevent the cases of the oppressed from being raised in those bodies and to ensure their rejection if they are raised. It also pressures these international forums into passing resolutions that favour it. And when it does not suit its interests, the US by passes these bodies and resorts to force to solve the problems it faces. As a result bloody conflicts and injustices that have continued for a decade and more have not found proper solutions. The Eritrean case is one of many examples.

The Soviet Union and Its World Influence

Roughly speaking the economic, industrial, and technological might of the Soviet Union is equivalent to that of the U.S. But when we compare the overall economic strength of the U.S. and its allies in Western Europe and Japan with that of the Soviet Union and its allies, the Soviet Union comes a distant second. Soviet bloc trade with the semi-developed and under-developed countries is much smaller than that of the U.S. bloc. Within each bloc, economic and trade relationships are much stronger in the American one. The Soviet Union seeks to improve its inferior economic position, but when we compare growth in the economic influence of the two blocks in the last decade, we see that the growth of Soviet influence was minimal. The withdrawal of China from the Soviet camp, the splits that this caused, as well as China's growing, economic relationship with the

U.S. and the West were some of the factors that contributed to this situation.

The military strength and strategy of the Soviet Union must be seen within this context. In strategic nuclear weapons as well as conventional forces, Soviet strength is comparable to that of the U.S., leaving aside the relative superiority in some types of weapons and inferiority in others. Yet even in the military field, Soviet influence is waning. Though the Soviet Union has striven to increase its global military influence by basing its relationship with many countries, especially in the Third World, on arms deals, the results have been limited or negative. Poland, Afghanistan, Vietnam, Angola and the Horn of Africa can be cited as examples.

The Soviet Union claims to stand for “Socialism”, “Progress”, “Self determination” and “Democracy”, However, since its relations with other countries are based on considerations of world dominance and the global competition with the U. S., it stands, in reality, against the forces of democracy and liberation. During the decolonization period, the people of the Third World, world democratic movements as well as national liberation movements especially in Africa and the Middle East were confident in the Soviet Union and its support. But when experience showed that, Soviet policy is not what it claims to be, the prestige of the Soviet Union declined. Its relationship with the countries of the Far East, after the Vietnam War, and with countries and organizations in the Middle East, Africa and Europe could be cited as examples. So can its past and present stand on the just struggle of the Eritrean people.

To win the support of the international community, it is imperative to win the support of the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. In Eritrea’s case, both super-powers have a hostile stance and therefore, the just struggle of the Eritrean people has not yet found a just solution or recieved international recognition.

It was the U.S. which from the start obstructed a just solution of

the Eritrean case. The U.S. which found Eritrean self-determination incompatible with its global and regional interests took a hostile stand on the Eritrean struggle and provided the Haile Selassie regime with military, economic and diplomatic support. After the fall of Haile Selassie, the U.S. was unwilling to hastily deliver arms to Ethiopia as it felt threatened by the orientation of the popular uprising. Consequently its role was taken by the Soviet Union. This development which had a major influence on American global and regional interests did not, however, result in a change on the U.S. stance on Eritrea. On the contrary, American economic and diplomatic support for the Dergue grew as the Americans, basing themselves on the experience of Soviet relations with the Third World, particularly Middle Eastern countries Egypt, Sudan, and Somalia- reasoned that Soviet influence in Ethiopia would follow the same course. To aid these process, the U.S. gave the Dergue economic and diplomatic backing and refrained from raising or supporting the Eritrean case. It also persuaded its friends and allies to take a similar position. Leaving aside the just and legitimate right of the Eritrean people for self-determination, it raised the diversionary issue of the nature of the EPLF, whom it labeled "Marxist".

The EPLF, nonetheless, persistently called on the U.S. as a very influential member of the international community to change its stand and play an active role in bringing a just political solution to the problem. Even though the American administration has not yet responded positively, the EPLF with some success continued to take its case to the American people and Congress.

Before the federation, the Soviet Union supported the right of the Eritrean people to self-determination. But when the federation was being violated and the Eritrean people repeatedly appealed to the U.N., the Soviet Union did not raise its voice in support of justice. On the contrary in an attempt at exploiting Haile Selassie's positive image in Africa, the Soviet Union gradually improved its diplomatic ties with Ethiopia, offered economic aid, built the Assab oil refinery,

established the Bahrdar technical school and expanded its trade. It did not offer, any support to the Eritrean revolution or Ethiopian opposition forces, until the overthrow of Haile Selassie. Even when the monarchy crumbled, the Soviet's preferred to watch closely the unfolding events and did not take any initiative to support the just struggle of the Eritrean people.

When the U.S. failed to deliver on time the military weapons the Dergue needed, the Soviet Union was invited to fill in the gap. Considering this a golden opportunity to advance its interests in the Horn of Africa and the Middle East, the Soviet Union abandoned Somalia, and delivered massive military aid to the Dergue. Slandering the just struggle of the Eritrean people and the democratic movements of the Eritrean people as "counter-revolutionary and imperialist instigated" and pressuring its followers to do the same, the Soviet Union intervened in support of the Dergue's colonial war. It also strove -directly and through its allies in the world and the region- to discredit and isolate the Eritrean revolution. The EPLF consistently called upon the Soviet Union and its followers to end their intervention and to recognize the right of the Eritrean people for self-determination. The Soviets responded by the escalation of their intervention, which the EPLF has been successfully confronting.

Within this context of U.S. and Soviet policy, we will analyze different regional and national stances on Eritrea. But first let's look at developments in the struggle of the Ethiopian people, which has a close bearing on our struggle.

The problems of Ethiopia the national problem in the first instance- are the products of Amhara and Tigrean kings unrealized dream of empire building. The consolidation of Amhara dominance during the reigns of Menelik and Haile Selassie brought all "Ethiopian" nationalities under the dictatorship of the ruling class of one nationality. But Menelik and Haile Selassie, whose regimes were backward and resorted to feudal repression could not unite "Ethiopia" or help develop a common national consciousness. The development

of nationality sentiments was therefore inevitable.

During the Haile Selassie era, there were a number of national uprisings in response to the regime's repressive empire-building measures. But as Haile Selassie quickly suppressed the uprisings by brute force and sometimes by buying out leaders-national movements and organizations were not able to establish themselves. Neither could multi-national organizations since elementary human and political rights were denied. The low level of education, the backward subsistence economy that was little influenced by economic and political changes in the world also left their marks on political developments in Ethiopia. This also was one of the reasons for the failure of the 1960 coup d'état.

The student movement and the growing political awareness among intellectuals and students were unable to influence the cities, let alone the country side. Most of the national and multi-national organizations came into existence at the beginning of the 1970s. One exception is the national movement of the Somali people in the Ogaden. But this should be seen within the context of the existence of an independent Somali Republic.

The peoples' uprising that took place in the early 1970's was the outcome of the crisis created by the drought and the colonial war in Eritrea. It was not led by any political organization. Hence the political vacuum that was created after the fall of Haile Selassie in 1974.

The expansionist and imperial ambitions of Ethiopia's rulers are a threat to the cooperation, peace, stability and prosperity of the peoples of Ethiopia, Eritrea and the region. Solidarity among the liberation and democratic forces of the region is, therefore, necessary. The EPLF believes this solidarity must be based on a clear common program and concrete cooperation and has been working to establish and consolidate relations with all Ethiopian national and multi-national organizations.

The EPLF bases its relationship with Ethiopian movements on the following principles recognition of the right to self-determination of “Ethiopian” nationalities, recognition of the national and multi-national organization, formation of an anticolonial and national democratic solidarity front, and all -sided cooperation.

On the part of Ethiopian organizations the EPLF asks that they recognize the just and legitimate anti-colonial struggle of the Eritrean people and that they be willing to participate in the solidarity front.

At the beginning of the 1970s the EPLF established relations with the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Party (EPRP). The EPLF did not establish the relationship for tactical reasons or temporary gains but on the basis of the principles outlined above. When the EPRP accepted the principles, the two organizations began to cooperate and continued to do so for some years. However, a statement put out in 1977 by the EPRP Central Committee Plenum explained that the EPRP did not recognize the right of the Eritrean people to independence. It also stated that the EPRP considered both the EPLF and ELF undemocratic and its relationship with them “tactical”. Consequently, frictions developed and ties were broken.

EPLF’s relations with the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF) started in 1976. The relationship was based on EPLF’s recognition of the right of the oppressed nationalities of Ethiopia and on TPLF’s recognition of the just right of the Eritrean people for self-determination. The cooperation continued and grew for almost ten years. Nevertheless, documents put out by the TPLF, especially last year, state that the TPLF had resolved five years ago that the EPLF was not a democratic organization and that its (TPLF’s) relationship with the EPLF was “tactical”. The EPLF had thought that its cooperation with the TPLF was genuine and not based on temporary tactical considerations. An so, when the TPLF’s secret stand became public the EPLF realized its “naivety” and although it did not regret its past actions, decided to break its relationship with TPLF and not enter into polemics with it.

The Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement (EPDM) is an organization that came out of the EPRP. Ever since the EPDM adopted a clear-cut stand on the Eritrean people's right to self-determination, the EPLF, has worked to consolidate its relations and cooperation between the two organizations has been growing. But reservations have arisen because the EPDM states that it does not consider the EPLF "a strategic ally". Unperturbed, the EPLF recently sent a delegation to the areas the EPDM operates in to further clarify the relationship and explore new fields of cooperation.

On the basis of the basic principles, the EPLF's relationship with the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) has been developing. Of all the Ethiopian nationalities, the Oromo people are the most oppressed. The size of the Oromo nationality and the extensive geographical area it covers and the stage of its political development combined with its problem of access to neighbouring countries have prevented the OLF from expanding its cooperation with the EPLF.

Long standing emotional ties bind the Western Somali Liberation Front (WSLF) with the Eritrean revolution. In fact, the Eritrean revolution's relation with the Somali people go back decades. Yet, the steps taken by the EPLF to develop the ties on the basis of clear views and practical cooperation, did not meet with commensurate measures from the WSLF. Therefore, EPLF-WSLF relations have not grown.

The relationship with the organization that is fighting for the right of the Sidama people, the Sidama Liberation Movement (SLM), is at a preliminary stage. Besides the considerable distance that separates Eritrea from the areas in which the SLM operates, and which militates against regular contact, the SLM has reservations on the EPLF's views on "Ethiopian Unity". Moreover, the EPLF has been trying to gain a better understanding of the views and practices of the SLM. So developments in EPLF-SLM relations remain to be seen.

The Afar national movement in Ethiopia is complex. Besides

the problems posed by the historical, cultural and geographical uniqueness of the nationality, the Ethiopian government and other outside forces, including Eritreans, have tried to disorient and use the Afar Movement by trying to arouse sentiments of a “Great Afar Homeland” and intervening to split and weaken it. After following developments closely, the EPLF in the past few years entered into continuous dialogue with the Afar Liberation Front (ALF). On the basis of the mutual understanding reached the EPLF is cooperating with the ALF in its task of uniting the Afar movement.

One of the multi-national organizations the EPLF tried to establish relations with is MEISON (The All Ethiopian Socialist Movement). Meeting between the two organizations were held in 1984 and subsequently. Although there were differences in the assessment of MEISON’s role when it was a partner with the Dergue, an agreement to cooperate was reached, when MEISON affirmed recognition of the Eritrean people’s right to self determination. However, recent MEISON publications raise a number of questions and since no steps have been taken to seek clarification, the question of what shape EPLF-MEISON relations will take, will have to wait.

Apart from relations with these organizations, it is important to discuss the EPLF’s attitude and views on the right to self determination, secession, unity, coalition and solidarity.

The right to self-determination is a basic right of all oppressed people - nations as well as nationalities. But it is a question that is susceptible to different interpretation. The process of the drawing of boundaries and formation of nations among the colonized people of the Third World has been explained in the introduction to this report. The origins of “Ethiopia” and the imperial ambitions of its rulers as well as subsequent developments have also been clarified. The right of self-determination of the Eritrean people who are waging an anticolonial national struggle is also beyond question.

But how is the right of nations to self-determination to be interpreted

in Ethiopia? The right to self-determination includes the right to secession, and in principle, if a people want to secede force should not be used to stop them. Obviously unity must be voluntary based on equality and must serve the common interest of oppressed nationalities. The demand and aspirations of the oppressed nation are necessarily diametrically opposite to those of the oppressor nation. However, there has to be a common ground in the views of vanguard organizations fighting for national liberation and for democracy. It is correct to assume that secession is possible if national conflicts become irreconcilable. But given, the history of "Ethiopia" and the present relations among Ethiopian national and multi-national democratic organizations, the possibility of the intensification of the conflict is minimal and it is clear that the final solution will be unity. Therefore, the objective of all the democratic forces must be unity. The existence of chauvinist organizations with imperial dreams who are doomed to failure does not justify secession. Moreover, since the united democratic forces will have the upper hand, unity as an objective and slogan is essential. These principles and beliefs underlie the EPLF's view that voluntary unity is the best solution to the question of nationalities in Ethiopia. Of course, the EPLF does not have the right to try and implement its views, as it is not a party to the resolution of the national question in Ethiopia. Any differences of opinion that may arise on this issue between the EPLF and Ethiopian organizations should be subjects of dialogue and not regarded as a basis of differentiating friend from foe.

Next comes the question of coalition among Ethiopian organizations. There are numerous national and multi-national organizations in Ethiopia each with its own and preferred forms of struggle. Their primary objective is to overthrow the Dergue. And what after the downfall of the Dergue? If these organizations fail to resolve this question before hand conflict and armed clashes are inevitable. This can only be avoided by the establishment of a common front that would create a forum for thrashing out differences and would also

enable them to unite their forces and coordinate their efforts. If the alliance is only tactical, conflict is inevitable. For this reasons and since the prospects for voluntary unity are high, the EPLF calls upon all Ethiopian organizations to establish a common front to overthrow the Dergue. After the fall of the Dergue the united front would set up a central administration or government and allow all nationalities to form their autonomous administrations or governments. The United Front would ensure that the central government would be established on the basis of consent, equality and democratic discussion, and that the autonomous administrations would ensure the full rights of nationalities. Moreover the United Front would have a common program and legal framework that clearly defines the relationship between the central administration or government and the nationality self administrations or governments on the one side, and between the autonomous administrations or governments on the other. This would be the result of the struggle waged under a common front and a common program and it is obvious that the EPLF cannot bring about these changes or impose its views in this regard, on anyone.

The third point concerns the solidarity between Ethiopian organizations and the Eritrean revolution. Cooperation between the Eritrean people and the peoples of Ethiopia and the coordination of their struggles are important for the overthrow of the Dergue. And also for eventual peace, stability, prosperity and progress of the peoples of the two countries and the region. It is for these reasons that the EPLF has been establishing relationships with Ethiopian democratic organizations and has proposed the setting up of a cooperation and coordination solidarity front. Though the EPLF's views and proposals were correct and realistic, the desired results have not been achieved. But the EPLF is not discouraged, as it is aware that the task demands patience, time, comprehensive study and correct handling.

Before we look at the regional and international developments that took place over the last ten years we shall examine the situation of the peoples of the Horn of Africa.

The Sudan land, people and regimes has a direct and strategic influence on the struggle of the Eritrean people. Along side its international and regional relations, and in particular relations with the Dergue, the Numeiri regime's inconsistent and disastrous domestic policies led to its downfall. The question of South Sudan, economic crisis, the demands for justice and democracy were the main problems facing the regime. Eventhough, the Addis Ababa agreement had helped Numeiri to mollify the Southern problem and consolidate his power, he reignited the conflict by violating the agreement and mishandling the problem. Under Numeiri, Sudan's wealth gradually fell into the hands of a few Sudanese and foreigners. Corruption and misappropriation of resources became rampant. All this created a deep economic crisis. Moreover, the Numeiri regime violated the democratic rights of the people, consolidated its dictatorial rule and arbitrarily decreed laws that trampled on the unity and rights of the people. These were the main causes of the people's uprising that overthrew the Numeiri regime.

After the Addis Ababa agreement, Numeiri put pressure on the Eritrean revolution to please the Haile Selassie government. But after the downfall of Haile Selassie and Soviet penetration of Ethiopia, he openly supported the Eritrean struggle. Confident of its military strength, the Dergue did not at first, seek the help of the Sudan in the Eritrean revolution. Moreover, it launched an intensive propaganda campaign against the Numeiri regime in its effort at presenting the Eritrean revolution as "foreign instigated". However, after the strategic withdrawal and failure of its numerous offensives, the Dergue reversed its policy, improved its relations with the Sudan, prodded the Numeiri regime to put pressure on the Eritrean revolution, and during the sixth offensive, it even used Sudanese territory to attack the EPLF. After the failure of the sixth offensive as Sudan's internal crisis, in particular the problem in the South intensified, the Dergue started to support the Southern opposition forces in an effort at further weakening the Numeiri regime so as to extract more

concessions from it at a latter date. In response, the Numeiri regime eased the restrictions it had placed on the Eritrean revolution. But with Saudi Arabia's growing influence in the Sudan -and the Saudis were interested in strengthening malleable Eritrean groups at the expense of the EPLF the shift in the policy of the Numeiri regime did not benefit but harmed the Eritrean struggle.

In its peace initiatives, too, the stance of the Numeiri regime was inconsistent; at times it fully supported the just rights of the Eritrean people, at others it pressured the Eritrean revolution to compromise.

After the fall of the Numeiri regime under the blows of a popular democratic uprising and the establishment of a provisional government, the door was opened wide for the Eritrean revolution to engage in political work and establish relations with Sudanese political parties and mass organizations. The sympathetic stance of most Sudanese political parties and the democratic atmosphere enabled the EPLF to make extensive contacts and explain the position of the Eritrean revolution on different issues. The results of two years of political activity were encouraging, and with the exception of the Sudanese Communist Party and it for obvious reasons no Sudanese force has opposed the just struggle of the Eritrean people.

The newly elected Sudanese government has taken several positive measures regarding Eritrea. It has clearly stated that the just struggle of the Eritrean people and the Southern Sudan problem are separate and different issues. It has promised to work for peace and stability in the region, supported a peaceful solution for the Eritrean case and took initiatives to bring it about. But pressing domestic problems including the Dergue's destabilization campaign, the constant pressure from the SPLA, the unresolved Southern problem, economic difficulties, foreign interference and pressure are constraints on the attention that the Sudanese government could give to the Eritrean revolution and the role that it can play in the region.

What deserves special praise is the political consciousness and maturity,

the generosity as well as the firm support to the Eritrean struggle of the Sudanese people. Before 1961, the Sudanese people sheltered Eritrean patriots and assisted in the start of the armed struggle. And over the past 25 years, when the Eritrean people became victims of colonial atrocities and natural calamities, the Sudanese people gave refuge and succour to their Eritrean brothers. The Eritrean revolution could remain active despite changes in regimes, and especially in the last ten years, in the face of the inconsistent policies of the Numeiri regime and continuous pressure, only because it had the solidarity of the Sudanese people. The increased support and sympathy that are evident today, in a democratic atmosphere are a continuation and proofs of the longstanding stand of the Sudanese people.

Among the problems of the Horn of Africa, the border conflict between Ethiopia and Somalia remains unresolved. But the main problem is the cause of the Somali people of the Ogaden. During the decolonization period, when Somali nationalism was at its peak, there was a political movement among the Somalis of both Italian and British Somali-land, as well as Djibouti, the Ogaden and the Northern Frontier District to set up a single Somali state. In Northern Kenya, the movement came to a virtual stop. Djibouti became independent in 1977. But the Somali national movement continued in the Ogaden. During the Haile Selassie period, there was no possibility of the peaceful resolution of the cause of the Somali people in the Ogaden. Moreover, it was the cause of conflict between Ethiopia and the Somali Republic. With the coming to power of the Dergue, the conflict reached its peak. The two countries went to war and initial Somali advance was blocked when Cuban troops intervened on the side of the Dergue.

The negative repercussion of the Ogaden War, the economic problems it entailed and the aggravation of the tribal and ethnic divisions which the Somali Revolution had set out to efface combined to weaken the Somali government. Internal and external opposition grew. Exploiting these developments, the Dergue won a section of the Somali opposition to its side and under the guise of an opposition

attack, sent its troops to invade Somali territory.

After the break in Soviet-Somali relations in 1978, the Somali government approached the West the U.S. in particular and the Arab countries for military and economic aid, but failed to get substantial help. Hence, Somalia's defence capacity remains limited and its economic problems critical. The Dergue did not hesitate to exploit these problems. Exerting military pressure and expressing willingness to solve the conflict peacefully at the same time, the Dergue met with Somali leaders in Djibouti, Given Somalia's weak position, the Dergue calculates it can force Somalia to capitulate on the border conflict, withdraw its support for the right to self-determination of the Somali people in the Ogaden and, on this basis, sign a peace agreement with Ethiopia. This would enable the Dergue to employ the troops deployed along the Somali border to crush opposition forces in Eritrea and Ethiopia. Since the Dergue is not interested in a genuine peaceful solution, indications of the failure of the Ethio-Somali talks are already apparent.

The solidarity of the Somali people and government with the Eritrean struggle goes back decades. Given its limited resources, Somalia's aid to the Eritrean revolution is significant. It also maintains a close relationship and all-sided cooperation with the EPLF. The EPLF strives to strengthen and further develop its relations with Somalia, because it supports the stand of the Somali people and government on the right to self-determination of the Somali people in the Ogaden, condemns the Dergue's invasion of Somali territory, and cooperates in Somalia's efforts for freedom and stability in the Horn of Africa.

Strategically, Eritrea is part of the Middle East. It also has historical ties with the region. For these reasons, developments in the Middle East significantly influence the Eritrean people's struggle.

This is the region where the Eritrean revolution has been active and had initially received support and sympathy from. But in the last ten years, this support has generally declined. For several reasons.

First of all the region is extremely divided, beset by crisis and highly influenced by outside forces. The division was further aggravated when Egypt signed the Camp David Treaty with Israel. Egypt as the decisive force in the region had played a major role in support of the Palestinian struggle for self-determination and the united struggle of the Arab people against Israel. Therefore, its withdrawal from the Arab Front created a vacuum. Subsequent attempts to heal the division failed because many foreign powers have an interest in the instability of the region and due to the many contradictions among the Arab regimes. These contradictions manifest themselves in the different stands that Arab regimes take on the Palestine question. Lebanon and the Iraq-Iran war. The weakening of the Arab national movement which had developed in the sixties also contributed to the fragmentation of the region. All these developments have negatively affected the Eritrean revolution.

The solidarity between the struggles of the Eritrean and Palestinian peoples, when seen from the perspective of the relations between the organizations of the two peoples, has declined. When the Dergue allied itself with the Soviet Union, many Palestinian organizations maligned the Eritrean revolution, which they had been supporting, as a “tool of imperialism”. Consequently relations were broken. Furthermore, PLO solidarity with the Eritrean revolution cooled, when the Dergue allowed it to open an office in Addis Ababa. The EPLF has tried to preserve its relations with the PLO and other Palestinian organizations, but it has not received a positive response.

South Yemen and Libya are openly hostile to the Eritrean struggle. Both have intervened militarily on the side of the Dergue, causing damage and destruction. Though South Yemen withdrew its forces from Eritrea, it was, until the recent internal crisis, offering air and naval logistic support to the Dergue. Libya too continues to support the Dergue, although their relationship has cooled. Egypt has remained reserved on Eritrea because it wants to improve its relations with Ethiopia as part of its effort to protect its interests in the Middle

East, and, particular in the Red Sea and Nile basin. Recently the Mubarek regime began to lobby for the Dergue and against the Eritrean, revolution. This could have been prompted by the decline of Egyptian influence in the Sudan. Although, the EPLF strives to establish friendly relations with Egypt, as with other Arab countries, it has expressed its objection to the Mubarek government's recent stand.

Saudi Arabia is a wealthy nation with great influence in this region. After its first organizational congress, the EPLF actively worked to establish a friendly relationship with Saudi Arabia. But from the start, Saudi Arabia did not like the EPLF's independent political line, and embarked on the task of creating and consolidating Eritrean groups that would serve its regional interests of ensuring its dominance by destabilizing others. Over the last four years, it intensified its efforts to weaken the EPLF and played a major role in setting up the defunct ELF-United Organization on the basis of the "Jeddah Agreement". The EPLF expressed its opposition to Saudi interference but more importantly, it called upon Saudi Arabia to play a positive and constructive role to bring about the unity of Eritrean organizations, but to no avail. To further strain the relationship, Saudi Arabia closed the EPLF's office and confiscated EPLF weapons. Even though, the "Jeddah Agreement" has failed it is still busy setting up sabotage groups.

Kuwait has stood on the side of the just struggle of the Eritrean people for a long time. It has consistently raised the Eritrean issue in the U.N. and other forums. Kuwait's leaders have also made continual endeavours for a peaceful solution of the Eritrean case and have provided humanitarian aid. The EPLF appraise highly Kuwait's role and stand, supports its peace initiative, and strives to develop and consolidate the relationship.

The United Arab Emirates supports the just cause of the Eritrean people and has played a major role by giving financial aid to the Eritrean revolution. It has also shown interest and good will to assist

in uniting Eritrean organizations.

Syria has stood on the side of the Eritrean revolution for a long time. Its position on the EPLF improved after the EPLF's first organizational congress. Syria has allowed the EPLF to set up an office in Damascus, facilitated contact with Arab movements and generally played a positive role.

Iraqi -EPLF relations have not improved over the years despite the existence of an active EPLF office in Baghdad. Iraq supports a diminutive group which claims to be Baathist. Nevertheless, the EPLF values highly Iraq's consistent support for the just struggle of the Eritrean people for self determination.

Algeria has yet to play an active role regarding Eritrea or provide support. Still, the EPLF maintains an office in Algiers.

In addition to its relations with individual countries, the EPLF had also worked to, gain the morale and political support of the Arab "League. In 1981, the League activated its role in support of the Eritrean struggle and attempted to unite, Eritrean organizations. The attempt failed. Since then, the League, whose influence on member states is limited, has not pressed the Eritrean case.

Africa is another important area. Haile Selassie's claim that Eritrea is an integral part of Ethiopia and his misrepresentation of the Eritrean struggle as Arab instigated had a negative impact on Africa. Yet many attempts have been made to include the Eritrean case in the O.A.U. agenda. These were not successful because the Dergue resorted to the deceptive tricks that had worked so well for Haile Selassie, and the OAU, already weak, has been afraid of the impact that raising the Eritrean question may have on the organization. On several occasions, the EPLF sent delegations to many African countries to explain its cause and seek support. Although the results were positive, the efforts were not continued and expanded. Indeed effective diplomatic and political work was not done in Africa. Yet Africa's interest on, and knowledge of the Eritrean struggle is gradually growing.

In the past few years, and especially during and since the drought, interest on the Eritrean case has grown significantly in Western Europe, North America, in particular Canada, and Australia. The contribution of active Eritrean support-committees in many countries, the supportive stand of the European Parliament, the support of the Socialist International, the sympathy shown by Scandinavian countries -particularly Norway, the Support of the British Labour Party, the French Socialist Party and many trade union organizations, the repeated discussion of the Eritrean case in the German, Danish, Dutch and Italian Parliaments can be cited as examples. Thanks to the role of journalists, non government organizations, support committees, representatives of different parties and governments as well as individual sympathizers, substantial sectors of the people of these regions have learned about the people of Eritrea and their struggle. Today in these countries, an array of different types of groups, organizations, parties have gone beyond providing emergency relief aid, and are seeking fundamental solutions to the problems of drought and war. These groups have already taken serious measures in search of a peaceful solution of the Eritrean case. The EPLF has encouraged and cooperated with those forces to help in the success of their efforts.

In the United Nations, the EPLF has continued to present appeals and memorandums. Similar steps have been taken during conferences of the Non-aligned Movement and the Islamic Conference Organization. But this work yields little result unless it is supplemented by grass root proselytizing and the hostile stand of the influential superpowers has remained a problem. Nevertheless, the EPLF will not tire from this necessary task.

To sum up, over the last ten years, the EPLF with stood large-scale intervention, defeated the continuous large-scale offensives of the colonial regime, showed tangible development in different fields, proved that the military solution sought by the Dergue is impossible, and in the process earned admiration, sympathy and interest at the

regional and international levels. Today, the Eritrean revolution finds itself in a better and-stronger position.

victory to the

Masses! !

NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC PROGRAMME **ERITREAN PEOPLE'S LIBERATION FRONT**

OBJECTIVES

1. Establish A People's Democratic State

- A. Abolish the Ethiopian colonial administrative organs and all anti-national and undemocratic laws and cancel the military economic, political and cultural treaties affecting Eritrea signed between the colonial power, Ethiopia, and other governments.
- B. Establish a state that safeguards the interests of the people and does not serve those of foreign forces.
- C. Constitute a People's Assembly through a free and democratic election of people's representatives. The People's Assembly shall draw the Constitution, promulgate laws, formulate policies, ratify new treaties and elect popular executive and judicial organs.
- D. Protect the democratic rights of freedom of speech, the press, assembly, workship and peaceful demonstration as well as the right of nationalist political parties and nationalist associations of workers, peasants, women, students, youth and professionals.
- E. Assure all Eritrean nationals equality before the law without distinction as to nationality, sex, affiliation cultural level, occupation, position, wealth, faith, etc.
- F. Punish severely Eritrean lackeys of Ethiopian colonialism who have committed crimes against their country and people.

2. Build an Independent, Self-Reliant and Planned National Economy

To develop the Eritrean economy there shall be private and public sectors in agriculture, industry and trade. The basic economic resources shall be state owned. Domestic capital investment in the private sector and foreign capital investment in the public sector shall be allowed and encouraged.

A. Agriculture

1. Put all land in the hands of the aggressor Ethiopian regime in the service of the Eritrean people.
2. Convert big farms requiring modern techniques into state farms and use, their produce for the benefit of the people.
3. Implement an equitable distribution of land to make the land benefit the tiller.
4. Encourage the peasants to adopt modern agricultural techniques, introduce them to advanced agricultural implements and provide them with advisors, experts, veterinary services, fertilizers, wells, dams, transportaion, finance, etc., to alleviate their problems and improve their livelihood and working conditions.
5. Provide the nomads with livestock breeding, veterinary and agricultural education as well as advisors, experts and financial assistance to enable them lead settled lives, adopt modern means of animal husbandry and agriculture and improve their livelihood.
6. Provide for the peaceful and amicable settlement of land disputes and inequity among individuals and villages in such a way as to harmonize the interest of the aggrieved party with that of national construction.

7. Advance the economic and living conditions in, and bridge the gap between, the cities and the country side.
8. Make extensive pastures and forests public property, preserve wild life and forestry and conduct a campaign of reforestation.
9. Maintain a proper balance between agriculture and industry in economic planning.

B. Industry

1. Nationalize all industries in the hands of Ethiopian colonialism, its Eritrean collaborators and foreigners hostile to Eritrean independence.
2. Make big industries, mines, marine resources, communication, public transport and power plants state owned.
3. Exploit marine resources, expand the production of salt and other minerals, develop the fish industry and explore available minerals.
4. Encourage nationalist Eritreans with capital to participate in national construction by setting up factories and enterprises in the private sector.
5. Strive to develop heavy industry so as to promote light industry, advance agriculture and combat industrial dependence.

C. Finance

1. Centralize banking and put all Insurance companies and banks under the state to regulate economic activities and accelerate economic development.
2. Establish a state owned central national bank and issue an independent national currency.

3. Prohibit usury in all its forms and extend credit at low interest to save the people from exploitation.
4. Design and implement an appropriate tariffs policy to protect the domestic market for the nation's agricultural, industrial and handicraft products.
5. Formulate and implement an equitable and rational taxation policy to provide for the administration and defence of the country, sustenance of productive activities and the extension of social services.

D. Trade

1. Extend a network of land, air and sea communications and transport essential to develop the nation's trade.
2. There shall be state and private trade and the state shall regulate private trade to ensure its compatibility with national construction.
3. Ban the export of essential consumer goods and limit the import of luxury items.
4. Regulate the exchange and pricing of the various domestic products.
5. Strictly prohibit controband trade.
6. Establish trade relations with all countries irrespective of political systems.

E. Urban Land and Housing

1. Make all urban land public property with leasing allowed under state regulation.
2. Review the incorrect nationalization of houses carried out by

the Dergue.

3. Every national will be allowed to build houses for residence and rent.
4. Set a rational rent price that takes into account the prevailing standard of living in order to improve the people's livelihood.
5. Build houses as needed through modern plans to alleviate the shortage of housing and solve the problem of the people.

3. Develop Culture, Education, Technology and Public Health

A. Culture

1. Destroy the decadent alien cultures and disgraceful social habits spread by Ethiopian colonialism and other foreign forces to subjugate and exploit the Eritrean people and destroy their identity.
2. Eliminate the bad aspects of the cultures and traditions of Eritrean society and develop their good and positive contents.
3. Provide, in the educational opportunity accorded the Eritrean people, for the proper awareness, respect and development of the history of Eritrea and its people, of the struggle against colonialism, oppression and for national independence, of the sacrifices and heroism as well as of the national folklore, tradition, and culture of the Eritrean people.
4. Ensure that the Eritrean people remain proud and always cherish the memory of the heroic martyrs of the struggle for freedom and independence who, loyal to their revolutionary ideals, gave their lives for the salvation of their people and country.
5. Establish cultural centres, clubs and facilities, such as theatres, cinemas, etc., to develop a progressive national culture.

B. Education and Technology

The educational policy of the EPLF aims to secure the development of industry, agriculture and technology in order to improve the livelihood of the people; to narrow and eliminate the gap in the levels of cultural development; and promote the national unity of the Eritrean people.

1. Combat illiteracy to free the Eritrean, people from the darkness of ignorance.
2. Provide for universal compulsory education upto the middle school; each nationality may give elementary education in its language or any other language of its choice.
3. Establish institutions of higher education in the various fields of science, arts, technology and agriculture; English shall be the language of instruction in education above the elementary level.
4. Teach Arabic as a subject at all levels of education.
5. Grant students scholarships to pursue studies in the various fields of learning.
6. Establish schools in the various parts of Eritrea, with special focus on the regions where education is not widespread.
7. Separate education from religion.
8. Make the state run all schools and provide free education at all levels.
9. Integrate education with production and put it in the service of the people.
10. Enable nationals, especially the students and youth, to train and develop themselves in the sciences, literature, handicrafts and technology through the formation of their own associations.
11. Provide favourable work conditions for experts and the skilled

to enable them to utilize their skills and knowledge in the service of the people.

12. Engage in educational, cultural and technological exchange with other countries on the basis of mutual benefit and equality.

C. Public Health

1. Strive to provide free health care for all the people.
2. Eradicate diseases and promote public health by building hospitals and health centres as needed all over Eritrea.
3. Develop the country's traditional medicine through the application of scientific methods.
4. Establish sports and athletic facilities to cultivate a healthy population.

4. Safeguard Social Rights

A. Workers' Rights

1. Provide for the highest degree of organization of the workers and the raising of their productive potential as they are the ones who shoulder the heaviest tasks for the development of the country's industry and agriculture.
2. Abolish the administration, laws and sham trade unions set up by Ethiopian colonialism and its collaborators to exploit and oppress Eritrean workers.
3. Limit an eight-hour working day and protect the right of workers to rest one day a week and twenty five working days a year.
4. Promulgate a special labour code that duly protects the rights of workers.
5. Assure workers comfortable housing and decent living

conditions.

6. Devise a programme of social security to care for and assist workers who, because of illness, disability or age, are unable to work.
7. Prohibit unjustified dismissals and undue pay-cuts.
8. Provide for the participation of workers in the management and administration of the enterprises in which they work.
9. Struggle to eliminate unemployment.

B. Women's Rights

1. Develop a union through which women can participate in the struggle against colonial aggression and for social transformation.
2. Outline a broad programme to free women from domestic confinement and raise their political, cultural and productive levels.
3. Assure women full rights or equality with men in politics, the economy and social life as well as equal pay for similar work.
4. Promulgate marriage and family laws that safeguard the right of women.
5. Protect the right of women to two months' maternity leave with full pay.
6. Protect the rights of mothers and children and provide delivery nursery and kindergarten services.
7. Struggle to eradicate prostitution.
8. Respect the right of women not to engage in work harmful to their health.
9. Design programs to increase the number and upgrade the quality

or women leaders and public servants.

C. Families of Martyrs, Disabled Fighters and Others Needing Social Assistance

1. Provide necessary care and assistance to all fighters and other nationals who, in the course of the struggle against Ethiopian colonialism and for national salvation, have suffered disability in combat or in jails.
2. Provide assistance and relief to the victims of Ethiopian colonial aggression, orphans, the old and the disabled as well as those harmed by natural causes.
3. Provide appropriate education and training programmes to disabled nationals so as to make them productive.
4. Render necessary assistance and care for the families of martyrs.

5. Ensure the Equality and Consolidate the Unity of Nationalities

- A. Abolish the administrative systems and laws instituted by world and Ethiopian colonialism and their lackeys to divide, oppress and exploit the Eritrean people.
- B. Rectify all errors committed by opportunists in the course of the struggle.
- C. Combat national chauvinism and narrow nationalism.
- D. Nurture and strengthen the unity and fraternity of Eritrean nationalities.
- E. Accord all nationalities equal rights and responsibilities in leading them toward national progress and salvation.

- F. Train cadres from all nationalities in various fields to assure common development.
- G. Safeguard the right of all nationalities to preserve and develop their spoken or written language.
- H. Encourage all nationalities to preserve and develop the positive aspects of their cultures and traditions.
- I. Oppose individuals or groups who, for the sake of their parochial interests, create sectarian groups on the basis of nationality, tribe, province, etc., and obstruct the unity of the revolution and the people.
- J. Each nationality may establish its own democratic administrative organ or organs compatible with its specific conditions.

6. Build a Strong People's Army

- A. Pursue in the armed struggle for national liberation, the military strategy of people's war to liberate the people and the land step by step.
- B. Build regional armies and people's militia forces to safeguard the gains of the revolution in the liberated and semiliberated areas.
- C. Build strong land, air and naval forces capable of defending the country's borders, territorial waters and air space as well as safeguarding the territorial integrity, full independence, progress and dignity of the Eritrean people so as to attain prosperity and the highest economic level of society.

The people's army shall be:

- . Politically mature, enjoying comradely relations and steeled through revolutionary discipline;
- . Resolute, imbued with a spirit of self-sacrifice and productive,

and

. Equipped with modern tactics, weapons and skills.

As the defender of the people, it serves the entire people of Eritrea irrespective of religion, nationality or sex. The basis of this army shall be the revolutionary force presently fighting for national independence and liberation.

D. Establish an advanced military academy.

7. Respect Freedom of Religion and Faith

A. Safeguard the freedom of religion and belief of every national.

B. Separate religion from the state and politics.

C. Bar religious education from all schools while allowing clerical institutions to provide only religious education.

D. Punish those who, whether during the armed struggle or in a people's democratic Eritrea, try to undermine the struggle and progress of the Eritrean people through religious discord.

8. Provide Humane Treatment to Prisoners of War and Encourage the Desertion of Eritrean Soldiers Serving the Enemy

A. Oppose the efforts of Ethiopian colonialism to forcibly conscript soldiers to serve as tools of its aggression to oppress and crush the Eritrean people.

B. Encourage Eritrean soldiers and "bandas" who have been forced to serve in the Ethiopian colonial army to return to the just cause and join their people in the struggle against Ethiopian aggression and welcome them with full rights of equality.

C. Provide humane treatment to Ethiopian prisoners of war, make

them aware of the justness of the Eritrean cause, provide them with education and professional training, set them free and help them return to peaceful life in their country.

- D. Punish severely the die-hard, criminal and loyal servants of Ethiopian colonialism.

9. Protect the Rights of Eritreans Resident Abroad

- A. Struggle to create conditions for Eritreans resident abroad to join the armed struggle against Ethiopian colonialism, participate in the mass organizations and professional associations set up a and, as Eritrean communities, safeguard their culture, identity and rights and strengthen their mutual cooperation.
- B. Strive to protect the rights of Eritrean refugees, win them assistance from governments and international organizations and improve their social conditions.
- C. Encourage them to return to their country and become participants in their country's daily struggle and development.
- D. Conduct efforts for the voluntary repatriation and rehabilitation in the liberated areas of Eritreans who have been forced to flee their land and country by the vicious aggression and oppression of Ethiopian colonialism.

10. Respect the Rights of Foreigners Resident in Eritrea

- A. Grant full rights of residence, work permit and citizenship on demand in accordance with the immigration laws to aliens who have openly or covertly supported the Eritrean people's struggle against Ethiopian colonialism and its collaborators and have not worked against the revolution provided that they wish to live in harmony with the legal system to be established.

- B. Punish mercilessly resident foreigners who, as collaborators, lackeys or followers of Ethiopian colonialism, spy on or become obstacles to the Eritrean people.
- C. Punish legally resident aliens who become tools of any hostile foreign power.

11. Pursue a Foreign Policy of Peace and Non-Alignment

- A. Present appeals to the United Nations and its member states and conduct diplomatic activities to assert the legitimate right of the Eritrean people.
- B. Welcome the assistance of any country or organization which recognizes and supports the just struggle of the Eritrean people without interference in its internal affairs.
- C. Establish diplomatic relations with all countries irrespective of political and economic systems on the basis of the following five principles:
 - . Respect for independence, territorial integrity and national sovereignty;
 - . Mutual non-aggression;
 - . Non-interference in internal affairs;
 - . Working for equality and mutual benefit; and
 - . Peaceful coexistence.
- D. Establish good friendly relations with all neighbours.
- E. Expand cultural, economic and technological ties with all countries consistent with national sovereignty and independence and based on equality, without aligning with any global military organization or allowing the establishment of any foreign military base on Eritrean soil.

F. Support all just and democratic movements, as our struggle is an integral part of the struggle of the world's people's, in general, and the struggles of the African, Asian, and Latin American peoples against world colonialism, intervention and racism in particular.

G. Become a member of various international and regional organizations consistent with the identity and independence of Eritrea.

Victory to Masses!

