

ERITREAN LIBERATION NIGHT SPEECH

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(Speech presented at Eritrean Night, February 15, 1975,
by a representative of Eritreans for Liberation in North
America (Chicago Chapter))

Eritrea, a small nation at the horn of Africa has an area of 45,750 square miles and a population of 3 million. Stretching for about 1,000 miles along the African coast of the Red Sea, between the Sudan and the Somali, Eritrea has historically played a very important role in the scheme of imperial piracy and plunder, otherwise known as international trade and commerce. Thus, from very early in history, Eritrea's geographic location at the confluence of Africa, the Middle East and Asia had attracted the persistent attention of territorial imperialism of the old type. Indeed, this strategic position has made Eritrea a tempting victim of Pharonic Egyptians, Alexandrite Greeks, Sabeian Arabs and Asian traders. With the rise of modern imperialism, Eritrea has suffered from the colonial oppression of the Ottoman Turks, fascist Italians, the British, and at present Ethiopian colonialism.

During the 15th century the Portuguese, as leaders of European colonialism, went along the Atlantic and Indian Ocean coasts of Africa, and also spread along the Red Sea coast. They were confronted by the Ottoman Turks who at that time controlled the whole of North Africa, northeastern Africa and the Middle East. The Turks found the upper hand in their war with the Portuguese and thus Massawa and the hinterland along the coastal region of Eritrea came under the control of the Ottoman empire from 1557-1865. Shortly after the Turkish occupation was

over, a small Pharonic Egyptian rule which established itself along the Red Sea area, expanded over the lowlands of the eastern and western parts of Eritrea until 1884. The Egyptian rule not only exacted tribute but also reorganized the nationalities of Agordat, Keren and Massawa, bringing them under a national government. With the opening of the Suez canal in 1869, the horn of Africa attracted the attention of European powers in their search for new markets, and sources of raw materials. Military control over the Red Sea meant not only assurance and safe flow of commercial activities and transfer of wealth from Africa and Asia to Europe, but also a military spot to weaken competitors. wealth from Africa and Asia to Europe, but also a military spot to weaken competitors.

The struggle for control of the Red Sea and the horn of Africa involved the major colonial powers: Britain, France and Italy. In their race for colonial supremacy in Africa, Britain and Italy formed a joint alliance to curb French expansion from Djibuti in the east and Chad in the west. Thus in 1882, with the support of Britain, Italy was able to establish a protectorate at Asab, a major port in the southeastern part of Eritrea. By 1885, Italy intensified its aggression and took control of Massawa, another port in the northeastern part of Eritrea. The Eritrean people waged a fierce resistance to repulse this aggression and to preserve their independence by inflicting heavy losses on the enemy. A 500-man Italian garrison was completely wiped out at Dogali, a few miles inland from the port of Massawa. A four year resistance of the people was brutally crushed and Eritrea became an Italian colony in June, 1889.

In 1941, during the world peoples' fight against fascism, the Eritrean people rose up once again to drive the

Italians out and to liberate their country. The results of this uprising were stopped by the British, who pretended to liberate Eritrea from the Italians but nevertheless occupied it themselves. As soon as the occupation was completed, the British began to reveal their true intentions about Eritrea's political future. The Eritreans began to understand that the British had not come to liberate the country, but just to defeat an enemy. The British, in order to create a cluster of colonies under one administration, developed a new plan for Eritrea according to which the Eritrean lowlands were to be merged with the Sudan and the highlands with their ally, Ethiopia. They created political dissension between the Moslem and Christian communities and they used the situation as a pretext for their partition plan. The Eritreans were victorious in their bitter struggle in as much as they foiled all the imperialist conspiracies. They resisted all political and economic pressures and intrigues; they unanimously rejected the British plan of partition which was secretly approved and supported by Ethiopia. Yet international imperialism was very much alive and the struggle continued both in Eritrea and in the U.N.

In 1946 a peace treaty for the former Italian colonies was initiated by the then big powers: Britain, Russia, United States and France. After a series of failures they brought solution to all except for the Eritrean question, which they handed over to the General Assembly of the U.N. The fourth session of the U.N. General Assembly decided to send a commission of inquiry to Eritrea to ascertain the wishes of the people regarding their political future. The commission consisted of representatives from Pakistan, Guatemala, Burma, Norway and South Africa. As soon as they arrived in Eritrea they discovered the genuine and impressive strength of different political

parties and their determination to defend the right and dignity of the country. They saw the economic possibilities of the land and found that Eritrea had every prerequisite for a self-supporting independent state. In their report to the U. N. Secretary General on June 8, 1950, four of the five members of the commission agreed on the most important point that the country should not be annexed to Ethiopia. Only the delegate of Norway supported the Anglo-American plan for the annexation of the eastern part of Eritrea to Ethiopia and the retention of the western part by Britain. When the five-member commission's report was examined by the General Assembly, the representative of the United States strongly opposed the proposal for the independence of Eritrea. He argued that it did not satisfy Ethiopia's claims and made the following statement:

Independence for Eritrea is not practicable either now or in the future because it ignores the legitimate interests of Ethiopia and would only increase tension in east Africa.

This was an absurd and one-sided judgment, unworthy of the representative of a great country. When it came into voting, the U.S. which had then a tremendous influence in the General Assembly, managed to obtain 46 votes for its draft resolution, with 10 states opposing and 4 states abstaining. Thus the resolution for Ethiopian-Eritrean federal union was adopted December 2, 1950.

The worst came when the U. N. General Assembly sent a commission to Eritrea to implement the federal resolution. Contrary to the universally accepted theory of constitutional federalism and repeated references in the federal act for a distinct federal government, the commissioner decided to identify the Ethiopian government with the federal government. An absolutely

irrational and disloyal decision flagrantly violated all the avowed intentions of the General Assembly and turned the U.N. resolution into a meaningless document. In fact, if one of the members of a federation can be identified with the government of the same federation, it is senseless to speak of federal government, federal organs, and federal matters, unless one wishes to deliberately deceive the people who have faith in justice and understanding. But that was exactly the position taken by the U.N. commissioner, who greatly contributed to the creation of a sham federation between Ethiopia and Eritrea.

Eight months after the federation was established, the U.S. was paid for its conspiracy in the General Assembly. A mutual defense pact was signed between the U.S. and Ethiopia, and thus the Kagnew station was built in Asmara, the capital of Eritrea. The 70 million dollar base was the largest high frequency base outside of American domestic facilities and was used to spy on African liberation movements and against the Arab people. In violation of the federal act, the Ethiopian Government sent a representative to Eritrea. This representative, followed by 20,000 soldiers and arms, ultimately neutralized all the democratic safeguards of the federal act and paralyzed the autonomous functioning of the Eritrean government.

--Labor unions were dissolved, freedom of the press was ruthlessly suppressed and the Eritrean courts were deprived of their authority.

--In 1958 Eritrean workers staged a massive nationwide demonstration of protest, which paralyzed the neo-colonial urban economy for 4 days. Haile Selassie's response was to order the barbaric massacre of the workers in which 9 people were killed and 543 wounded.

--In November 1969, the Eritrean flag was removed and the Ethiopian flag was hoisted in its place.

--In the second half of 1966 the seal of the Eritrean government was withdrawn and its inscriptions were changed from the "Government of Eritrea" to "Eritrean administration."

--On November 14, 1962, a simple written statement was read by the chief executive to the members of the Eritrean parliament:

"The statement that I am going to read to you is a final issue of the Eritrean case, and there is nothing you can do other than accepting it as it is. We have rendered the federation null and void and are henceforth completely united with Ethiopia."

This was read in Ethiopian language, which most of the parliament did not even understand. This was the way the U.N. General Assembly's decision was nullified by completely disregarding a referendum in which the people's voices could have been heard. The Eritrean people tried to resist this crude strangulation of their autonomy and the imminent political murder of their country through peaceful means such as public demonstrations and petitions to the U.N. What they found was a deaf ear from the U.N. and more barbaric action from the Ethiopian army. This signified the end of any hopes for a peaceful solution of the Eritrean case and pointed to armed struggle as the only way out of the colonial oppression and imperialist exploitation of the country. The armed struggle which erupted from the Eritrean liberation movement is therefore a continuation of the heroic resistance of the Eritrean people. The Eritrean liberation movement was later named the

Eritrean Liberation Front and has been fighting the Ethiopian occupation army for the last 14 years. During this period the armed struggle had to go through a series of setbacks which originated from certain reactionary elements in the leadership. They created a non-existent specter of religious and tribal intolerance in the Front and caused a civil war. Thus in 1970 it was divided into two, namely, the Eritrean Liberation Front General Command, and the Eritrean People's Liberation Forces. They stayed divided until very recently when efforts were made from all corners of the country to start negotiations towards the creation of a United Front. After several meetings with the people's representatives they reached an agreement under one slogan: "Let us point our guns toward our common enemy and find a democratic solution to our contradictions."

The recent crimes and atrocities committed by the Ethiopian occupation army are not new to the Eritrean people:

--In 1970 the town of Keren was savagely bombarded and 2,000 people were brutally killed. During the same year Haile Selassie ordered a state of Martial Law in Eritrea and since then 100,000 people fled their homeland to languish in refugee camps in the Sudan and neighboring countries.

--In August, 1974, 250 civilians were massacred in Urn Hajer and hundreds drowned while running away from the sight of terror.

--The inhuman poisoning of Eritrean waters caused the death of hundreds of human lives and countless loss in livestock.

--In December, 1974, the bodies of 50 Eritrean students strangled by piano wire were found in driveways. These are but few of the innumerable crimes committed by the fascist Ethiopian government.

The fascist military junta of Ethiopia, in desperate attempt to crush the struggle of the Eritrean people for independence, has once again unleashed a new wave of terror against the Eritrean people. Since the beginning of the month of February the junta using U.S. supplied arsenal has been carrying out air raids over Eritrean villages near Asmara. So far several villages have been leveled to the ground, thousands have been killed and many left homeless. In Asmara, the Ethiopian troops have undertaken a rough house to house search. There are reports that bands of undisciplined, ill-trained Ethiopian soldiers have begun to loot and shoot in the city. People have been shot down indiscriminately all over the place. Moreover, the junta is detaining hundreds of Eritreans in Addis Ababa and is driving them into concentration camps where they could be held as hostages. United as it stands, the liberation struggle in Eritrea is raging fiercely. Eritrean freedom fighters have stepped up their attacks on the 20,000 Ethiopian troops whom they completely encircled and isolated from their re-enforcement. In the heavy battles of the last two weeks, none of the additional 15,000 Ethiopian soldiers were able to reach Asmara. The freedom fighters have already shot down five U.S. supplied Ethiopian F-5 fighters and three spotter planes.

Why do the Eritrean people persist in this bitter struggle? Ho Chi Minh has already answered this question: "Nothing is more precious than independence and freedom." The freedom fighters will continue their struggle until final victory is won. The Ethiopian junta, on the other hand, which claims to be building socialism, has

arrogantly declared that it will fight until the last drop of blood. It is racing troops and U.S. supplied tanks, armored cars and planes into Eritrea. How can a socialist country insist on forcibly suppressing the right of a nation to determine its destiny? This, and its suppression of the democratic rights of the Eritrean people shows that the Ethiopian junta is not socialist but fascist. The Eritrean people would have long ago defeated the feudal government of Ethiopia had it not been for the massive economic and military aid given by the U.S. U.S. involvement in Eritrea, which possesses abundant oil resources and a strategic location at the mouth of the Red Sea, has to be seen within the context of the whole situation in the Middle East and the horn of Africa. It is evident that the U.S. imperialists and Israeli Zionists have been conspiring to undermine and crush the Palestinian revolution. The same forces, in collaboration with reactionary local governments like the Shah of Iran and the Ethiopian junta, are trying to wipe out the liberation movements of Oman and Eritrea. The U.S., using the Omani island of Masirah as a base, is trying to gain control of the entrance into the Arabian Gulf. It is arming the Omani reactionaries while Iran has invaded the liberated areas in Dofar and Oman. In Eritrea the U.S. was using the Kagnaw military base along with Israeli bases in the Eritrean island of Haleb and Fatma in its efforts to control the southern entrance to the Red Sea.

The Eritrean struggle is an integral part of the worldwide struggle against imperialism. Under the vanguard of the United Front, Eritrea has very recently achieved what it could not get through peaceful means. Now Eritreans will go shoulder to shoulder with all the progressive movements throughout the world, to liquidate imperialism and reserve the rights of nations to lead their own destiny.

DOWN WITH THE FASCIST ETHIOPIAN JUNTA!

**HAIL THE VICTORY OF THE ERITREAN PEOPLE'S
STRUGGLE FOR NATIONAL LIBERATION!**

**WORKERS AND OPPRESSED PEOPLE OF THE
WORLD, UNITE!**