

# **VANGUARD**

**VICTORY TO THE MASSES !**

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## Editorial

### Determined to foil the Dergue's all-out preparations

Once again, the Ethiopia military junta is preparing for a large scale offensive to drown in blood the struggle of the Eritrean people. The Dergue is conducting saturation bombing of the liberated cities, towns and villages. In the meantime, thousands of Ethiopian and other foreign advisors are being flown into Asmara, Eritrea's capital. Tanks, armored cars, heavy artillery, bombs, anti-personnel mines and light weapons are being unloaded every hour. A force of tens of thousands of aggressor troops stands on guard in Tigray and Beghemeder (Ethiopia's northern provinces) ready to cross the Eritrean border.

To create public opinion in favor of its offensive among the peoples of Ethiopia and the world, the fascist Dergue resorts to cheap propaganda. The Eritrean fighters, says the Dergue, are "bandits fighting under the influence of hashish" and are "out to sell Eritrea in exchange for Arab petrodollars." Puffed up by the support of foreign powers and the glitter of sophisticated weapons, the Dergue howls, "The Ogaden victory will be repeated in Eritrea," "Shaabia (EPLF) and Jebha (ELF) will be smashed."

The world waits with anxiety. When will the planned offensive start? What form will it take? Will the Ethiopian aggressors armed with modern weapons and backed by foreign troops succeed in extinguishing the flames of national liberation war which have engulfed Eritrea for 17 years? Or will the Eritrean people smash the Dergue's offensive as they did in the past? These are questions agitating people's minds.

Yet, the Eritrean masses and their vanguard, the Eritrean People's Liberation Front, are unruffled. With full confidence, they are sharpening their weapons, ready to deal death blows to the aggressors. They remain convinced that, as in the past, the Dergue's current offensive will end in total fiasco.

Wherein lies the source of confidence of the Eritrean people? It lies in the justness of their cause—the cause of a people fighting against foreign occupation, for the inalienable right to self-determination and independence. It lies in their granite-like unity and iron determination to fight even in the

face of overwhelming odds, in their ardent patriotism and revolutionary zeal, in their readiness to pay the dearest sacrifices for the achievement of their age-old aspirations for freedom and democracy. It lies in the correct line of their vanguard, the EPLF, and the heroism of their army, the EPLA, who have been tempered in the crucible of protracted people's war.

Experience—including that of the Eritrean people—shows that no aggressor army and no weapon have yet been built that can defeat an organized, conscious and armed people waging a just struggle under the correct leadership of a revolutionary organization.

On this basis, we want to reassure our genuine friends—and all those who have the interest of the people and revolution at heart—that under the leadership of the EPLF the Eritrean people will defeat any war of aggression that may be unleashed by any enemy, however strong or well equipped it may be. At the same time, we call on them to strongly condemn the Dergue's preparations for an all-out offensive and concretely support our just and self-reliant armed struggle.

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## Great Strides Towards National Unity

“Genuine and principled national unity,” “Establishment of a single national democratic front with the worker-peasant alliance at its core and uniting all patriotic forces”—these are among the key slogans of all peoples waging national liberation struggles. In Eritrea, these slogans have been raised by the patriotic masses and liberation fighters with particular insistence and urgency.

The reason is not hard to find. The Eritrean people united behind the demand of national independence have hurled themselves into the greatest war in their militant history. They have inflicted heavy defeats on the Ethiopian occupiers and their backers and brought their liberation war close to victory. However, the existence of two fronts (the Eritrean People's Liberation Front and the Eritrean Liberation Front) and the contradiction between them has hampered the early achievement of the people's aspiration. Taking advantage of this situation, the Dergue is preparing for an all-out offensive to reverse the tide of the war, weaken and finally crush the Eritrean struggle.

### Two-Line Struggle

From the outset, there has been a two line struggle in the Eritrean liberation movement on how to resolve the secondary contradiction between the EPLF and ELF. The reactionaries within the ELF have consistently sought to resolve this contradiction by force of arms. Towards this end, they declared a war of liquidation against the EPLF in February 1972 and plunged the Eritrean liberation movement into a criminal civil war. After the cessation of the civil war in November 1974, they turned to sabotage in an attempt to foil the military exploits of the Eritrean People's Liberation Army. They also resorted to widespread beating, imprisonment and assassination of members of the EPLF's mass organizations and people's militia.

The enemies of the Eritrean struggle have tirelessly fanned the fire lighted by the internal reactionaries, hoping that a second civil war might break out between the EPLF and ELF. The Dergue has expressed its readiness to negotiate with Eritrean "progressives" in an attempt to split and then crush the liberation movement. The Osman Saleh Sabbe clique of traitors and counter-revolutionaries (the so-called "Peoples Liberation Forces") has worked overtime to sharpen the secondary contradictions so as to gain recognition as an alternative "third force." In an effort to strengthen the reactionary forces—including the Osman Sabbe clique—and isolate, weaken and smash the EPLF, certain Arab countries have interfered wantonly in the internal affairs of the Eritrean struggle.

Emanating from its firm conviction that the unity of all patriotic and democratic forces is a strategic necessity for the victory of the national democratic revolution and taking into account the enemy's maneuvers, the EPLF has waged a consistent and protracted struggle to resolve secondary contradictions democratically and step by step achieve the establishment of a single national democratic front. During the period of the civil war, it raised the slogan, "All our guns against the common enemy, democratic solution to secondary contradictions" and took a defensive military position vis a vis the ELF. Throughout, it directed all its fire-power against the enemy and persisted in organizing, politicizing and arming the masses. It dealt a powerful rebuff to the enemy's attempt to split the Eritrean movement by openly declaring that it will negotiate with the Dergue only in the presence of the ELF. It consistently called for cooperation and joint work with the ELF on the basis of a commonly agreed upon minimum programme. It carried out persistent agitation among the masses and the ELF fighters calling on them to actively struggle for genuine and principled national unity.

## October 20 Agreement

The protracted struggle of the EPLF and the masses bore fruit on October 20, 1977. On that day, the ELF and EPLF signed an important agreement on national unity in which they outlined the general principles for the establishment of a single national democratic front in Eritrea. The October 20 agreement also calls for the formation of a joint political leadership and joint committees dealing with military, economic and social affairs, information and foreign relations to coordinate the work of the two fronts in the transition period. It charges the joint political leadership with the task of convening a unification congress after proper conditions have been created for its convocation and in accordance with procedure agreed upon by both

organizations.

The October 20 agreement signed the death warrant on the Osman Sabbe clique when it refused to recognize it as a third force and called on its rank and file to join the ELF or EPLF.

On March 15, 1978, after 6 months of bitter struggle, the October 20 agreement took an important step forward with the signing by the EPLF and ELF of the "Document for the Practical Implementation of the October 20 Agreement." The March 15 document lays down the political principles that form the *basis* for the unity of the two organizations and *detailed* the practical steps that have to be taken to convert the October 20 agreement into reality.

The March 15 Document states that the EPLF and ELF agreed to abide by the following general political principles:

- ★ Oppose Ethiopian colonialism, world imperialism, Zionism and fight for the complete independence of Eritrea.
- ★ Oppose internal reaction—i.e. all those who weaken the unity of the Eritrean people; exploit the masses and violate their rights by inflaming backward tribal, regional and religious sentiments.
- ★ Oppose all foreign interference that infringes upon the identity and unity of the Eritrean people.
- ★ Fight to consolidate the unity of the Eritrean people.
- ★ Consolidate relations with the progressive forces and liberation movements throughout the world.

The March 15 Document asserts that the joint political leadership will base its work on these general principles and implement the tasks agreed upon by both organizations.

On the basis of the March 15 Document, the leaderships of the EPLF and ELF held an important meeting from April 20-24. In this meeting the joint political leadership made up of 6 members, 3 from each organization—the Secretary General, Vice-Secretary General and Chairman of the Military Committee of the EPLF and the Chairman, Vice-Chairman and head of the military bureau of the ELF—was formed. The committees dealing with the military, economic and social affairs, information and foreign relations were set up.

The October 20 agreement, the March 15 Document and the decisions of the April 20-24 meeting are of far-reaching significance. They will enable the Eritrean masses to unite all their resources, enhance their fighting spirit and capacity, and deal a crushing blow to their enemies. No wonder the masses received the news of the signing of the agreements with boundless

joy and mammoth demonstrations of support.

Conversely, news of the agreements brought fear and dismay to the enemies of the Eritrean revolution. Not reconciled to their defeat, the Dergue and its backers, the internal reactionaries—in particular the Osman Sabbe clique— and their supporters are working feverishly to sabotage the October 20 agreement and obstruct the steady march towards principled national unity.

However, no matter what twists and turns lie ahead, the establishment of a single national democratic front in Eritrea—which is the categorical demand of our heroic and patriotic masses—is inevitable.

## Hail the First (Founding) Congress of the General Association of Eritrean Peasants

Under the banner of “consolidate the worker-peasant alliance,” the First (founding) Congress of the General Association of Eritrean Peasants was held from March 11-15, '78 in the liberated city of Keren. The Congress was attended by 287 delegates representing the peasantry from all corners of Eritrea. The Secretary-General of the EPLF and other members of the Central Committee and representatives of the mass organizations of workers, women, youth and students attended the Congress.

The first congress of the Association of Eritrean Peasants was an important historical event which marked a new stage in the development of the Eritrean revolution in general and the struggle of the Eritrean peasantry in particular. As the EPLF's Secretary-General, Comrade Romadan Mohamed Nur, stated in his opening statement to the congress:—

“For the peasant masses to consolidate their unity, defend their class interests and forge a solid alliance with the workers it was a historical necessity that they would establish their own organization. Indeed, this Congress is a giant step pushing the victory of the Eritrean masses closer to its final objectives.”

### Struggle of the Eritrean Peasants

For many centuries the Eritrean peasants have led a life of degradation and exploitation under the Ethiopian colonialists and the preceding colonial



**One of the delegates explaining the Eritrean' peasants past experience in their revolution.**

powers; the peasant masses have seen nothing but hunger, disease, illiteracy and servitude. The imposition of an unbearable tax system, the expropriation of their land, the indiscriminate bombing of their villages and the burning of their crops are the causes for the acute poverty of our peasant masses. Thus, foreign domination, feudal exploitation and wars of aggression have caused the Eritrean peasants innumerable suffering.

Throughout their militant history the Eritrean peasant masses have never accepted foreign domination and exploitation. They have resisted in different forms, including mass insurrection and the forceful seizure of land from the landlords and the colonizers. They were also among the first to join and support the armed struggle when it started in 1961.

In a colonial and semi-feudal country like Eritrea, the bulk of the population is composed of peasants and the social relations regarding the land are mainly feudal.

On account of their size, crude oppression and militant history of struggle, the Eritrean peasants are the main motive force and the solution of their demand for land is the basic question of our national democratic revolution.

However, because of the reactionary leadership which dominated the Eritrean revolution, the participation of the peasant masses was limited to providing water and food to the fighters. They were told that politics was beyond their comprehension. This state of affairs continued for 9 years until the creation of the EPLF.

After concretely analysing the objective condition of our country and the living experience of our heroic people, and convinced that unorganized, unpoliticized and unarmed masses will not be able to play their proper role in the revolution, the EPLF has conducted a vigorous campaign to organize, politicize and arm the peasant masses. It has led the peasants, with the poor and middle peasants as the core, to wage the struggle for land reform, the establishment of democratic people's assemblies and the formation of people's militia. Today, the creation of peasant associations throughout the rural areas and the creative implementation of EPLF's correct political line have paved the way for the peasant masses to hold their rightful place in the Eritrean revolution.

As a result of this revolutionary work of the EPLF, profound changes are taking place in the Eritrean countryside. The forces of rural democracy have risen up to overthrow the forces of rural feudalism. The privileges which the feudal lords and the colonizers enjoyed for thousands of years are being shattered to pieces. In the process, the peasant masses have acquired enormous practical experience and their class consciousness has deepened tremendously.

The effort of the EPLF to demolish the old, colonial and feudal system



**Peasant delegates passing resolutions democratically.**

and to set up a people's democratic state power in the heat of the national liberation war is being crowned with success. The fact that the peasant masses have passed the stage of spontaneous and unorganized struggle and have reached the stage of forming their own national organization (General



**“The peasant masses of Tora and Tzenadegele . . . like all peasants . . . do not have any conflicting interests, our aspirations and interests are the same.”**

(Association of Eritrean Peasants) is a colossal event in the history of Eritrea.

The first congress of the GAEP summed up the successes and shortcomings of the peasant movement and took up for discussion the vital problems that are facing the Eritrean revolution in general and the Peasants Associations in particular. The Congress called on the peasant masses to develop their struggle to a higher level, work harder to shoulder their responsibility and frustrate all enemy machinations. Last but not least, it expressed its gratitude to the EPLF which by its heroic struggle accelerated the liberation of the peasant masses and other revolutionary and patriotic classes.

On the final day of the Congress, the delegates unanimously adopted the constitution and objectives of the association and democratically elected their central committee composed of 34 members.

The formation of the General Association of Eritrean Peasants, in which the poor and middle peasants are dominant, demonstrates that the peasant masses of Eritrea, more united than ever, have become the iron bastion of our revolution. Thus, one of the strategic tasks of the EPLF in the NDR has been accomplished.

Nevertheless, the problem of national liberation can not be considered as solved. The unity of all patriotic classes and groups with the proletariat as the leader and the worker-peasant alliance as the core must be consolidated further so as to carry through to the end the Eritrean national liberation struggle. Only then will EPLF's popular slogan “Victory to the masses!”

become a reality.

**Excerpts from the Resolutions and Recommendations of the 1st Congress of the General Association of Eritrean Peasants:**

The Congress;—

- ★ Condemns Ethiopian colonialism for depriving the Eritrean people of their right to self determination and conducting a war of aggression to liquidate the just struggle of the Eritrean people. The Congress, fully supporting the EPLF vanguard, reaffirms the determination of the Eritrean masses to persist in their struggle until total independence is achieved.
- ★ Rejects colonialist Ethiopia's "peaceful solution" which is designed to hoodwink the world's people and isolate the Eritrean revolution from its real friends. The congress extends its support of the proposal for peaceful solution adopted by the EPLF at its first organizational congress.
- ★ Supports the unity agreement that was signed between the EPLF and ELF on Oct. 20, 1977.
- ★ Asserts that Eritrean peasants will make an all-out effort to increase agricultural production so as to translate the slogan of self-reliance into reality.
- ★ Fully supports Eritrean women in their struggle to bring about the social transformation of our society.
- ★ Reaffirms that the peasants who have been and still are the backbone of the Eritrean revolution will stand on the side of the EPLA and fight with arms in their hands until final victory is achieved.
- ★ Expresses its unflinching support to the oppressed peoples throughout the world and particularly the oppressed peoples of Palestine, Oman, Western Sahara, Zimbabwe, Azania, Namibia and East Timor in their just and revolutionary struggle against imperialism, colonialism, Zionism and internal reaction.
- ★ Reaffirms its support for the democratic and revolutionary movements of the proletariat of the capitalist countries and expresses its determination to struggle side by side with the oppressed masses of the world in the fight against imperialism.
- ★ Supports the struggle of all democratic forces in Ethiopia; calls on the oppressed masses of Ethiopia to condemn the Dergue's war of aggression in Eritrea and to struggle against the Dergue's chauvinist slogan "The call of the motherland."

- ★ Expresses its gratitude and appreciation to those governments and organizations who at this critical moment of our revolution give us material and political support. The Congress calls on them to continue their support at a higher level.
- ★ Calls on all countries to refrain from interfering in the internal affairs of the Eritrean revolution, particularly in matters concerning the national unity of the Eritrean Fronts.

—The Congress resolved to struggle:—

- ★ To organize the broad masses of the peasantry to join the Associations of Eritrean Peasants, heighten their political consciousness and fully participate in their revolution.
- ★ To make all villages and districts the iron bastion of the revolution and every peasant a member of the people's militia.
- ★ To train in a short period of time a large number of capable cadres that can lead the Association of Eritrean Peasants.
- ★ To smash the power of the reactionaries and feudalists in every village and set up democratic people's assemblies of the peasant masses.
- ★ To consciously and arduously put into practice the principles, objectives and resolutions of the Association of Eritrean Peasants.

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## Afabet: One year after liberation

After decades of successive colonial domination, Afabet, the largest city in Sahel province, was liberated by the heroic Eritrean People's Liberation Army (EPLA) on April 6, '77.

The liberation of Afabet gave a new impulse to the Eritrean National Democratic Revolution. The EPLF gained freedom of movement in the areas extending from the Sudanese border all the way to the major cities of Massawa and Keren. Ela Bered, Dekemhare, Keren and numerous other cities were liberated shortly thereafter. The organization, politicization and arming of the masses advanced to a higher level.

It is not surprising, therefore, that April 6, 1978 was celebrated with great joy and enthusiasm in Afabet. The most significant aspect of the celebration was the organized participation of the masses of workers, peasants, youth and women. During the parade, the masses, who through their bitter experience have grasped the essence and meaning of liberation, were carrying banners and posters that clearly manifested their spirit of struggle and determination to continue the fight until total independence, equality and justice is achieved. Some of the banners read:

- Long live the Alliance of Workers and Peasants,
  
- Our People's Militia is the defender of our liberated cities and countryside,
  
- Equality and Emancipation of Women is a historical inevitability.

Members of the mass organization from the surrounding regions and the EPLF cultural troupe were present during the celebration. The presence of the cultural troupe electrified the atmosphere with jubilation and enthusiasm. The songs and dances that were presented by the troupe depicted the heroism of our struggling masses and the EPLA. This revolutionary performance was time and again interrupted by stormy applause and cheers.

Today, under the correct leadership of the EPLF, profound transformations of the political, economic, social and cultural order are taking place in Afabet. The dark days of oppression have gone and the bright days of freedom have begun to shine. The entire social development is proceeding according to a definite plan and to protect the interest of the masses.



**The residents of Afabet in one of the demonstrations in support of the EPLF.**

The backward colonial and feudal system is giving way to the new and progressive system. Land is being given to those who till it. New economic relations of mutual assistance and cooperation are being created, and the equality of women has been asserted.

To fully grasp the significance of these changes and to appreciate the achievements of the EPLF and the people of Afabet, an understanding of the past is necessary.

### **Afabet—old and new**

Before its liberation, Afabet was a stronghold of the Ethiopian army. It was a city full of terror and fear. A mere challenge to injustices brought the masses suffering and agony. Torturing and killing of innocent people were common occurrences. For a long time the Ethiopian troops looted and burned the property of the civilian population. On the final day, when they were encircled by the EPLA, the mercenary soldiers ripped doors and windows of residential buildings to fortify their trenches.

Their property looted, their houses burned and their democratic rights violated, the people of Afabet were forced to live in the nearby hills or as refugees in the Sudan.

April 6, 1977 brought to an end the dark days of terror and oppression. Although the EPLF had organized cells of mass organizations, it was the liberation of Afabet that created favorable conditions for the organization,



politicization and arming of the masses in their hundreds. The mass organizations that stayed underground for a long time were declared open and intensive political work was carried out for all the social forces to join their respective organizations. As a result of the EPLF's mature and far-sighted approach, the masses of Afabet organized, politicized and armed are today fully utilizing their boundless creative energy in the service of the revolution. Even though they face the hard conditions of war, they have scored important achievements and brought about tremendous changes in the political, economic, social and cultural fields.

### **In the political field**

The seizure of political power is the first prerequisite for economic and social transformation of any society. Organized, politicized, armed and led by the EPLF, the people of Afabet have demolished the feudo-bourgeois political apparatus of the Ethiopian occupiers and internal reactionaries. In its place they have set up the power of the masses. This new power is represented by the people's assembly.

The representatives to the people's assembly are democratically elected. They are individuals who have won the support and the respect of the masses for their dedication to protest the basic interest of the people and the war of national liberation. It is only the masses who have the right to elect or remove their representatives. After all issues concerning the city are democratically discussed by the mass organizations, it is the people's assembly which has the full authority to deal with the daily life and activities of the masses.

With the oppressive political apparatus, the colonial police and army structure were smashed and in their place the army of the masses—the people's militia—has been established. Hundred of workers, peasants, women and youth have already become members of the people's militia. The Afabet people's militia defends the city and engages in production. For example, to achieve self sufficiency in food, it has started a cooperative vegetable farm.

The acceptance of the people's assembly by the masses as their own genuine power, as well as the creation of the people's militia is living testimony of the political maturity of the people of Afabet, and their determination to uproot exploitation and oppression once and for all from Eritrean soil.

### **In the economic field**

An economic order that protects the interests of the revolutionary and patriotic classes has replaced the economic order of the colonialists and feudalists. This too should be counted among the achievements of the

masses of Afabet.

The people's assembly of Afabet, guided by the leadership of the EPLF, pursues an economic policy that aims to advance our national liberation movement, to improve the living standard of our masses and to secure the material condition of our people's army. To achieve self sufficiency in the production of basic food stuffs, land that was held by the colonial government and feudal landlords has been reclaimed and given to the peasants for cooperative farming. Hundreds of men and women (young and old) have been organized on a voluntary basis and are performing part-time or full-time labour. As a result of this concerted effort, the farm output in Afabet and the surrounding regions has exceeded the pre-liberation level.

In order to effectively control and regulate the price of grain and other consumer goods, the people's assembly in cooperation with the EPLF has put out a general guideline. The guideline restricts those merchants who want to sell their grain outside of Afabet before the basic needs of the residents in the city and the surrounding region are fulfilled, while encouraging and giving the necessary assistance to those merchants who bring the essential goods into the area. As a result of this correct economic policy, the price of grain and other necessary commodities is stable and hoarding has disappeared. To further raise the living standard of the masses and to supply them with basic goods at minimum price, the preparation for the opening of a people's cooperative store has been completed.

### **In the cultural and social field**

The colonial culture that has been one of the factors which hindered our social development is being attacked, weakened and eliminated at its foundation. In its place a national, scientific and mass culture that is a true reflection of our people's revolutionary activity is on the rise. The most profound manifestations of the new culture that is blossoming in Afabet are the new status of women and the masses' attitude towards work.

In the old Afabet, the women's place was in the kitchen. Let alone political issues that concern the whole community, elementary issues dealing with the well-being of her child or the right for divorce were considered the domain of men. However, as a result of the correct leadership of the EPLF, a profound change is taking place in the status of women. The submissive attitude of women and the chauvanist attitude of men are rapidly changing. The women of Afabet have established their own democratic mass organization, raised the correct slogan, "equality through equal participation," and are making a worthy contribution to the advancement of the Eritrean National Democratic Revolution. They are serving in the people's assembly and constitute 12% of the people's militia.

In old Afabet the working masses were held in the least respect. Labor

was regarded as degrading. Today, this has become history. Those who work are the most respected members of the society. A new attitude of love of work—particularly cooperative work—has developed among the masses. As a result, the people of Afabet organized according to their class or social group are jointly building roads, repairing houses that were damaged by the enemy, cleaning their city, etc. Only four months ago they constructed a 30 km. road within 10 days.

In the area of social services such as education, medical treatment and public transportation, a radical change is taking place. Colonial education, which propagated the ideas of the ruling class and which was the exclusive right of the sons and daughters of the rich, has been shattered.

Today, the sons and daughters of the poor are attending school. A literacy campaign for adults is in full swing. Classes are taught on the basis of the EPLF's curriculum and moreover in the people's language—Tigre. Although classes are held at night because of the enemy's air raids, the number of students has increased tremendously.

In the medical field, the EPLF is providing free medical service to the people of Afabet and the surrounding areas in accordance with its National Democratic Programme.

The people of Afabet have traversed a hard path and won significant victories. They realize, however, that the road ahead is long and tortuous; that their gains can only be safeguarded by the nation-wide victory of the EPLF-led national democratic revolution. On the occasion of the celebration of the 1st Anniversary of the liberation of their city, they pledged to frustrate any kind of conspiracy directed against their revolution and to persist in armed struggle until the total liquidation of colonialism, imperialism and feudalism from Eritrea.

## Hail May Day—1978

May First, the day when the workers of all countries celebrate their unity and solidarity in the struggle against oppression and exploitation, has arrived once again.

May Day has come at a time when the forces that constitute the revolutionary camp, i.e., the socialist countries, the workers' movement in the capitalist countries and the national liberation movements, are locked in fierce combat with the camp of imperialism and reaction. In every corner of the globe, the working class and the oppressed masses have unfurled the banner of revolution and making light of sacrifices and difficulties are facing the violence and terror of the reactionaries. On their part, imperialism and its puppets, despite the heavy blows they have suffered, are uniting their forces and working feverishly to choke the genuine socialist countries, the workers' movements and the national liberation struggles.

On May Day 1978, the proletariat and the oppressed masses will roll up their sleeves to step up the struggle for the establishment of a world without oppression and exploitation. On May Day, the working masses and their revolutionary organizations will reaffirm—much to the anguish of the imperialists—their adherence to the immortal slogan “Workers of all countries, Unite!” and “Workers and oppressed nations of the world, Unite!” They will pledge to actively support each and every revolutionary movement with propaganda, sympathy and material aid.

The struggle of the Eritrean working class and people against Ethiopian occupation, imperialist domination and domestic reaction and for national independence and people's democracy is an integral part of the world national liberation movement and holds a secure place in the revolutionary camp.

On the occasion of May Day 1978, the Eritrean working class and people and their vanguard, the Eritrean People's Liberation Front, salute the workers of all countries. They pledge to carry through to the end their revolutionary national liberation struggle in the strategic Horn of Africa. They pledge to give principled support to the revolutionary movements in the region and throughout the world and resolutely shoulder their national and international responsibilities.

On the occasion of May Day, the Eritrean masses and the EPLF call on all socialist and democratic states, progressive organizations and the freedom-loving peoples of the world to correctly assess the significance of the anti-colonial, anti-imperialist, anti-zionist and anti-feudalist struggle of the Eritrean people and render it moral, political and material support.

Long Live May Day!  
Workers of all countries Unite!  
Workers and oppressed nations, Unite!  
Victory to the Masses!

## EPLF Secretary General and ELF Vice Chairman Address Mammoth Rallies

The formation of the joint political leadership of the EPLF and ELF on the basis of the October 20 Agreement and the March 15 Document has sparked tremendous enthusiasm among the Eritrean masses. This was clearly manifested in the mammoth rallies held with the participation of members of the joint political leadership on April 20-23, 1978 in Agordat and Keren respectively.

On April 22, 1978 the members of the joint political leadership arrived in Agordat. As they entered the city, the masses of Agordat, who were standing in line from the outskirts to the center of the city, welcomed the joint leadership with enthusiastic cheers and slogans hailing the unity agreement. In the mass rally that followed, leading members of both organizations spoke on the significance of the October 20 agreement and called on the masses to step up their struggle to foil the enemy's machinations.

The next day—April 23, 1978—the members of the joint political leadership arrived in Keren. When they entered the stadium where the rally was held, the over 20,000 people who were assembled there broke into cheers and thunderous applause. The EPLA and the people's militia fired shots of welcome into the air. The mass organizations unfurled their banners and shouted slogans hailing the EPLF—ELF unity agreement and other revolutionary slogans.



**Joyous demonstration in support of the ELF, EPLF unity agreement.**

When the members of the joint political leadership took their seats, a member of the people's assembly of Keren addressed the rally. Speaking on behalf of the Keren branches of the mass associations of workers, peasants, women, youth and small owners, he expressed the Keren people's resolute support of the EPLF—ELF unity agreement and their determination to intensify their revolutionary struggle in all fields until the achievement of victory.

An atmosphere of eagerness and joy gripped the masses when it was announced that members of the joint political leadership would address the rally. Speaking first, Ibrahim Totil, Vice-Chairman of the Revolutionary Council and Executive Committee of the Eritrean Liberation Front, explained the significance of principled unity between the EPLF and ELF and the importance of the unity of the Eritrean people in the national liberation struggle. He called on the rank and file of the "third force" (the so-called "People's Liberation Forces") to join one of the two fronts in the shortest possible time. The vice-chairman concluded his speech by calling on the masses to stand firmly behind their revolution, mobilize all their resources and prepare for the decisive battles ahead.

The Secretary-General of the Central Committee of the Eritrean People's Liberation Front, Romedan Mohammed Nur, opened his speech by welcoming the leaders of the ELF in liberated Keren. Continuing his remarks, the Secretary-General spoke on the significance of the historic October 20 agreement and reaffirmed that the EPLF will resolutely safeguard the gains of the revolution from any enemy and work with all its strength

for the full implementation of the unity agreement. The Secretary-General called on the rank and file of the “third force” to join one of the two fronts and warned the reactionaries to refrain from sabotaging the October 20 agreement. Speaking about the preparations of the Dergue for a major offensive, he told the masses that counter-revolutionary violence cannot defeat the people’s revolutionary violence and called on them to prepare with all their energy and zeal to foil the enemy’s plans and deal him the final blow. Comrade Romedan Mohammed Nur then announced to the masses that a joint delegation led by the Secretary General of the EPLF and the Chairman of the ELF will visit a number of countries to explain the recent developments of the Eritrean revolution and seek political and material support. He expressed confidence that the delegation will succeed in gaining the support of the socialist and democratic countries and liberation movements.

After the speeches of the members of the joint political leadership, the Cultural Troups of the EPLF and the “Red Flowers” (children from the ages of 9—15 who have been organized into their own mass organization) presented revolutionary songs and the cultural dances of all Eritrean nationalities. During the cultural program, leaders of both organizations danced together—a symbolic act which fired the enthusiasm and joy of the masses, who gave vent to their happiness by shouting slogans, singing revolutionary songs and dancing.

At 4:30 a.m., the historic rally came to an end with a minute of silence in honor of the memory of our heroic martyrs and a quiet pledge to carry forward the banner crimson with their precious blood.



The masses of the people enthusiastically supported the unity agreement of the ELF and EPLF. The picture shows a demonstration held in support of the formation of the Joint political leadership of the ELF and EPLF.

## Uncalled For Admission

The Ethiopian military junta is notorious for its shameless mendacity. It habitually turns truth on its head and confounds right and wrong. In regard to Eritrea, for instance, the Dergue, flying in the face of facts, maintains the tale—carried over from the days of Haile Selassie—that the Eritrean liberation fighters are “bandits bought by Arab petro-dollars who enjoy no support from the people” for their demand for national independence.

Well, the chairman of the Dergue, Colonel Mengistu, has now unconsciously admitted that the majority of the Eritrean people are solidly behind the demand for independence. In an interview with *Africa* magazine (March 1978), Mengistu stated: “The Eritrean population is principally made up of the Tigrinya speaking people and the Tigre speaking people. In addition to these two major linguistic groups, there are the Afar, the Saho, the Kunama (Baza—Ed) and others who speak different languages...contrary to what the world is led to believe there are different nationalities (in Eritrea). The oppressed nationalities...of Eritrea, the Kunama (Baza—Ed), the Afars, the Sahos, etc...oppose the secessionist movements.”

Mengistu starts out pretending to have uncovered a carefully guarded secret, i.e., the existence of different nationalities in Eritrea. Anyone with the least understanding of the Eritrean struggle, however, knows that the Eritrean Peoples Liberation Front has never hidden the multi-national character of Eritrean society. In fact, the “unity and equality of nationalities” is one of the 11 points of the EPLF’s National Democratic Programme and is symbolized by a string of bullets in the EPLF’s emblem. Is it not rather unlikely that Mengistu has not come across the EPLF programme and emblem which has been widely distributed throughout the world including in Ethiopia?

Mengistu continues: There are oppressor and oppressed nationalities in Eritrea; the latter support the junta and oppose Eritrean independence. According to Mengistu’s logic, a people suffering under direct colonial domination can be divided into oppressor and oppressed nationalities. Facts, however, show that despite their divide and rule tactics, the colonialists oppress all nationalities and there can be no oppressor nationality in a colony.

The Eritrean people have suffered under the rule of successive colonizers (Italian, British and now Ethiopian). All of Eritrea's 9 nationalities have had their lands expropriated, their labor exploited, their property looted or burned and their languages and cultures suppressed. It is this history of common oppression that enabled the Eritrean masses to overcome the divide and rule tactics of their enemies—including the fascist Dergue—and wage a united struggle under the banner of national independence and democracy. Today, the Eritrean people of all nationalities—workers, peasants, students, intellectuals and small traders; men and women; young and old—united as one man have hurled themselves into the national liberation war. The Sahos, Afars and Bazas, which fascist Mengistu claims oppose Eritrean independence, are among the most vehement enemies of the Ethiopian occupationists. All of these are indisputable facts.

For the sake of argument, however, let us accept Mengistu's claim that the Sahos, Afars and Bazas oppose Eritrean independence. This means that over 85% of the Eritrean people support the national liberation struggle as these three nationalities constitute no more than 15% of the population. Facts are stubborn things and no matter how hard he tried to cover them up, Mengistu has been forced to unconsciously admit that the overwhelming majority of the Eritrean people demand an end to Ethiopian occupation and the establishment of an independent and democratic Eritrean state.

In his interview with *Africa*, Mengistu swears that he recognizes "the right of the Eritrean people to self-determination." If that is the case, Mengistu must have been prepared to accept the independence of Eritrea long ago, for that has been the consistent and unequivocal demand of the Eritrean people. Mengistu's expansionist and reactionary nature, however, cannot stand to see an independent and democratic Eritrea. This is precisely why his regime cannot help but seek a military solution to the Eritrean question.

Mengistu's interview with *Africa* is full of lies and distortions. Worse still, *Africa* presents an analysis of the Eritrean situation which is replete with statements that have no resemblance to the reality—such as that Osman Sabbe is the "Chairman of the loose coalition" of the EPLF and ELF, Ethiopia's counter-offensive has resulted in a "major setback" for the Eritreans, etc.

A word of advice to the gentlemen of *Africa* who have consistently attacked and slandered our just struggle. If you must write on Eritrea, investigate the facts. It is shameful for a magazine supposedly concerned about Africa, to base its writing on one of the most serious questions facing the continent on hearsay and outright lies.

## Dergue's Savage Bombing of the Liberated Areas

Since the beginning of this year, the Ethiopian military junta has resorted to saturation bombing of the liberated areas. In Keren, Dekemhare, Massawa, Ghinda, Ela Bared, Nefasit, etc., the Dergue's fighter planes have unleashed tons of napalm, rockets and bombs in crowded areas such as market places, hospitals, churches and mosques, killing hundreds of civilians mostly women and children and inflicting heavy damage on the people's property.

These latest atrocities perpetrated on the Eritrean masses have once again exposed the fascist nature of the Dergue. Even though the Dergue has shamelessly denied its bombardment of Eritrean cities and villages, numerous journalists and representatives of progressive organizations from different countries who visited the liberated areas have made it possible for



Burned residential houses in Massawa.

the whole world to know of colonialist Ethiopia's savage air war in Eritrea.

The Mengistu regime's bombing of the liberated areas is a sign of weakness and despair, a last ditch attempt to save its floundering colonial rule in Eritrea. The Dergue is desperately trying to terrorize the Eritrean masses, shake off their determination and prevent them from rendering active support to the heroic Eritrean Peoples Liberation Army; sabotage and wreck the building of a new democratic society in the liberated areas; and boost the sinking morale of its besieged troops.

The Eritrean masses, led by the EPLF, are foiling the Dergue's desperate schemes. In addition to the EPLA's anti-aircraft guns (most of which were captured from the enemy) which guard the liberated areas, the masses are effectively protecting themselves by digging trenches. Making light of all obstacles, they are fulfilling their obligation as the great rear to the front, contributing to the struggle to liberate the few cities still in the hands of the enemy.

This shows that just like U.S. imperialism's carpet bombing proved incapable of stemming the tide of the Vietnamese revolution, the Dergue's savage bombardment will fail to shake the Eritrean people's determination to fight and win.

## The Ethiopian Prisoners of War and International and Humanitarian Organizations

It has been 17 years since the Eritrean people started to wage a just and revolutionary armed struggle to liberate their country from Ethiopian colonialism, Imperialism, Zionism and internal reactionaries. In this fierce confrontation between the forces of revolution and the forces of reaction, the Eritrean people led by their vanguard the EPLF, have scored many victories. The Ethiopian colonial army, confronted by our heroic people and the EPLA, has sustained heavy losses with thousands of its aggressor troops killed, wounded and captured. Today, there are close to 6000 prisoners of war in the hands of the EPLF.

The POW s as the soldiers and officers of the Ethiopian colonial army and as tools of the Ethiopian ruling classes and imperialism, had invaded our country to liquidate our just and revolutionary struggle, killed our people, looted our property and burned our houses and crops. Nevertheless, the EPLF, based on its



### Ethiopian P.O.W.s receiving gifts sent by the international Red Cross organization.

revolutionary and humane principles and in accordance with the provisions of its National Democratic Programme, provides the POW s with humane treatment and care. They eat the same kind of food as our fighters. They receive medical attention and health care. They are given literacy and political education classes. Every week they conduct cultural and sports activities.

The Dergue, true to its fascist nature, has denied the existence of the POW s and ignored their plight. So also have the international organizations (in particular those which have been set up to deal with the question of POW s and to assist victims of war) and humanitarian organizations, with the exception of the token "christmas gifts to prisoners" (1170 packages which contained shirts, trousers and biscuits and 1765 packages which contained chocolate bars) that were sent by the International Red Cross and distributed to 2935 POW s in March 1978.

Why is it that international and humanitarian organizations have not come to the aid of the Ethiopian POW s? Is it because they don't know of their existence or is it out of hypocrisy? For us, the answer is the latter.

The EPLF has taken all possible steps to bring to the attention of the world the condition of the 6000 POW s in its hands. It has put out publications explaining their need for essential food stuffs, medicine and clothes. It has encouraged foreign journalists to visit, photograph and interview the prisoners.

It is true that Eritrea is not a party to the Geneva Convention on the treatment of POW s. But the Geneva Convention does not have provisions under which Ethiopian POW s in Eritrea would be excluded from receiving assistance from

international and humanitarian organizations. If we had violated the rights of or killed the Ethiopian POW s, we are certain that the same organizations, who today have kept their eyes and ears closed and their mouths shut, would be the first to call us “murderers”, “terrorists”, etc.



**Father and son P.O.W.s accidentally finding themselves together.**

## **Views of the Ethiopian POW s**

On the day the gift from the International Red Cross was distributed to the POW s, a Belgian television crew was present. Taking advantage of the occasion, the television crew interviewed the POW s about their opinions of the EPLF and the gift from the International Red Cross. In reply to the questions put by the crew, the prisoners said:—

“First and foremost we extend our appreciation to the EPLF. It is an organization that takes great efforts to provide us with food, clothing, medical care as well as literacy and political education. The way the EPLF treats us is something we did not dream about let alone expect. Thanks to the EPLF, we have clearly understood the essence and the true nature of the Eritrean revolution and we have come to realize that the Eritrean people are not our enemies, but a heroic people who are fighting for their independence. Our true enemies are the fascist Dergue and its supporters. They are found not

in Eritrea but right in the heart of our country, Ethiopia.”

Further commenting on the gift by the International Red Cross, the POW s said:

“Even this aid from the International Red Cross is an outcome of the persistent efforts of the EPLF. Even though the gift from the Red Cross does not cover one day’s meal let alone our basic needs (i.e. shortage of nutritious food and medicine) it indeed is a big victory for the EPLF and for us. It is the first response from the outside world recognizing our existence as prisoners of the EPLF. The Dergue’s denial of our existence does not surprise us at all. Its reactionary nature won’t allow it to admit our existence; if it does so it will be admitting its defeat in Eritrea. What surprises us is the failure of different organizations (including the United Nations) to extend their hands to us.

“We extend our deep appreciation to the International Red Cross for its help. We call on all humanitarian and international organizations to recognize our basic needs and send us material that can alleviate some of our problems.”

With these words, the Ethiopian POW s have made their hopes and demands clear. While the world is contemplating whether it should or should not respond to the calls of the Ethiopian POW s and give them material and moral support, the EPLF, in accordance with its revolutionary line on humane treatment of POW s, will do its best to satisfy their basic needs. But since its resources are limited and the number of Ethiopian POW s is increasing, the EPLF calls on all friendly countries to come to the aid of the 6000 Ethiopian POW s.

## **The Eritrean Struggle Is Not A Bargaining Chip**

During his recent visit to Nigeria, U.S. president Jimmy Carter expressed “concern over the possibility that a large number of Cuban troops” would be fighting alongside the Ethiopian army in its war against the Eritrean people. A week later, on April 5, 1978, Britain’s Foreign Secretary, David Owen, criticized Soviet-Cuban involvement in the Horn of Africa and also

expressed "concern over the possibility of large scale Cuban involvement in the Ethiopian offensive against the Eritreans."

Notwithstanding their words of "concern," United States and Britain do not care a whit about the fate of the Eritrean people. They have always opposed the Eritrean people's just struggle for independence and democracy. It was the U.S. and Britain which engineered the United Nations resolution of 1950 which violated the Eritrean people's right to self-determination and brought about the forcible annexation (disguised as "federation") of Eritrea by Ethiopia. It was U.S. imperialism which for a quarter of a century armed the autocratic regime of Haile Selassie and the military regime of Mengistu in their effort to suppress the armed national liberation struggle of the Eritrean people.

Even today, Washington and its allies continue to oppose the Eritrean liberation struggle. They have expressed unwavering support for "the territorial integrity of Ethiopia," which in effect means support for the continued forcible occupation of Eritrea, since they regard Eritrea as an integral part of Ethiopia. They continue to provide the Mengistu regime with spare parts and military vehicles and have even increased their economic aid. Witness, for example, the \$50 million economic aid recently given to the Dergue by the imperialist dominated World Development Bank. In addition, the Israeli Zionists—junior partners of U.S. imperialism—provide the Dergue with technicians (for F-5 jets), bombs and spare parts.

These activities of U.S. imperialism and its partners are most natural and least surprising. The Eritrean people's struggle aims at the total liquidation of colonialism, imperialism and feudalism from Eritrea. The birth of an independent and democratic Eritrea under the revolutionary leadership of the Eritrean People's Liberation Front will represent a heavy loss for U.S. imperialism in the strategic Horn of Africa. The imperialist powers are bound by their very nature and interests to oppose the revolutionary struggle of the Eritrean people.

What then is the meaning of the "fine words of concern" expressed by Carter, Owens and other representatives of Western imperialism? These words are nothing but a pretext for U.S. imperialism's intention to use the Eritrean struggle as a bargaining chip in its rivalry with the Soviet Union. They are part of the international power politics that is being played at the expense of the Eritrean people's just struggle.

Today, the fascist military regime in Ethiopia with all-out support from the Soviet Union and Cuba is waging a counter-revolutionary war of aggression to smash the Eritrean struggle. Simultaneously, the U.S. and its allies—with honey on their lips and murder in their hearts—are working deviously to stamp out the Eritrean revolution.

The Eritrean people, however, are neither cowed nor duped. We are not afraid of the sophisticated weapons and huge army of the Ethiopian ag-

gressors; nor do we have any illusions about the nature of U.S. and British imperialism, which we have always regarded as our arch-enemies. Neither the intervention of the Soviet Union and Cuba nor the tricks of the U.S. and its allies can stop the Eritrean masses from persisting on the path of protracted people's war until the achievement of the sacred goals of independence and democracy, for which we have struggled for decades.

Victory certainly belongs to the Eritrean people who united as one are waging a just and determined armed struggle under the revolutionary leadership of the Eritrean Peoples Liberation Front.

## **MILITARY COMMUNIQUE**

### **Southern Front: Dergue's Attempt To Break Out Of The EPLA'S Encirclement Smashed**

On March 14, 1978, 10,000 Ethiopian aggressor troops, supported by 20 tanks, numerous fighter planes and heavy artillery (including BM-21 multiple rocket launchers), set out from Asmara on two fronts to break out of the encirclement of the Eritrean People's Liberation Army. The aggressor troops moved out in a south eastern direction on the road to Adi Gombolo and in a south western direction through Adi Hawsha. In the battles that followed, the EPLA, fighting with heroism, dealt the enemy devastating blows. After heavy fighting that lasted for 3 days and 3 nights on the Adi Gombolo road and 8 hours on the Adi Hawsha road, the enemy was forced to retreat leaving behind 1500 dead and a large quantity of weapons. In addition, over 1500 enemy troops were wounded and a large quantity of enemy equipments including 5 tanks were destroyed.

In March 1978, the Ethiopian occupationist army, reinforcing its base in Adi Keyeh and the surrounding areas was preparing for a big offensive against the liberated areas. To foil the enemy's plans, the heroic EPLA launched a surprise attack against the enemy on March 31, 1978. In 4 days of fierce fighting, the EPLA inflicted heavy casualties on the enemy and frustrated its planned offensive. The EPLA now controls the strategic areas around Adi Keyeh and has tightened its encirclement of the city.

Adi Keyeh will soon be added to the list of the liberated Eritrean cities.



## Northern Front: EPLA Routs 7000 Ethiopian Aggressor Troops

From April 11-14 over 7000 Ethiopian aggressor troops supported by planes, tanks and heavy artillery set out from the northern side of Asmara and made repeated attempts to break out of the EPLA's encirclement. The aim of their military adventure was to loosen the noose around their necks, strengthen their defence of Asmara by seizing certain strategic positions and gradually regain control of the liberated areas.

After fierce fighting near the villages of Woki Duba and Adi Shimagle, the EPLA routed the aggressor troops on April 14, 1978. The Dergue's troops suffered heavy casualties of dead and wounded. The EPLA captured 17 heavy weapons, 55 light weapons, large quantities of ammunition and other military equipment.

In these battles, the people's militia and the broad masses of the northern zone played an active role. Members of the people's militia fought side by side with members of the EPLA while the broad masses brought food, water and ammunition to the trenches and took care of the wounded.

Never learning from its experience, the Dergue will certainly launch more military adventures on both the northern and southern fronts. No matter how many attempts it makes, however, it cannot make a breach in the iron wall built by the EPLA, the people's militia and the broad masses.

## A Note To Our Readers

Due to technical reasons, the English edition of *Vanguard* was not published after the August 1977 (Vol. II, No 5) issue.

We want to announce to our readers that beginning with this issue (Vol. III, No 1 May 1978), the English edition of *Vanguard* will be published regularly in the liberated areas. *Vanguard* will continue to carry up to date news and analysis of all aspects of the Eritrean revolution and its relations with the progressive and democratic struggles in the region and throughout the world.

Even though the political line and main content of the English edition of *Vanguard* is the same as that of the Tigrinya and Arabic editions, the English edition will include articles that would be of particular interest to foreign readers.

We welcome any suggestions or criticisms regarding the content, style and format of *Vanguard*. Please address your comments to:

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