

ERITREA

Dynamics of a National Question

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Introduction

It was difficult to finish writing this book. While events in connection with the Eritrean problem are still unfolding, that is not the primary reason.

The Ethio-Eritrean armed conflict was fluid in the political sense. The political and ideological character of the parties involved was still undetermined. It was difficult to comprehensively analyze the problem—and above all, to state conclusions and suggest recommendations with any measure of certainty.

The Eritrean armed movement, which was progressive during the years of Haile Sellassie, had been changing since Ethiopia embarked on the national democratic revolution. Between the forces of anti-imperialism and those of reaction and counter-revolution (frequently disguised behind labels of socialism and Marxism), intense strife unfolded.

At the same time, the Ethiopian revolution was going through various phases of transition. How far Ethiopia would go to realize its professed commitment to the socialist road remained unclear.

Most recently, both the armed movement in Eritrea and the Ethiopian revolution have stabilized. The armed movement—as distinguished from the *political demand* for self-determination—has degenerated to a pawn of imperialism. Its right wing and sectarian factions, supported by imperialism and Arab reaction, have prevailed over the truly patriotic and progressive groups. But the developments in Ethiopia were progressive. The Ethiopian revolution deepened and, with all its shortcomings, it has developed the most advanced socialist orientation in Africa.

These realities notwithstanding, Eritrea is still a problem. The socialist-oriented changes in Ethiopia have introduced a new context within which to resolve the problem, but have by no means eliminated

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it. Apparently they have not even minimized its acuteness to any significant degree.

The Ethiopian revolution has now consolidated power. Its formidable global and regional enemies are desperately trying to destabilize it by utilizing the movement in Eritrea. In other words, Eritrea is the most perilous problem of the Ethiopian revolution which has the brightest prospects of ushering the first socialist order into the African continent.

It would be unfortunate if these prospects were squelched as a result of failure to solve the Eritrean problem. It would be a tragic irony too because socialism is the system with the inherent capacity to solve such problems of the national question.

It is necessary to identify the nature of the Eritrean problem in order to devise effective ways of approaching it and to determine the solutions which are realistic or possible while at the same time gainful from the standpoint of peace and progress. For this purpose it is essential to examine: the roots of the Eritrean problem in Ethiopia's neo-colonial ties with the US; the experience of the Eritrean people or Eritrea's national oppression under Haile Sellassie; the early phase of the Ethiopian revolution and its impacts on the Eritrean movement; the Eritrean movement—the tendencies, differences, and conflicts within it; the revolutionary developments in Ethiopia, the Middle East, and the Persian Gulf area and the corresponding shifts in the tactics of US imperialism; and the struggle between world socialism and capitalism.

Tremendous lessons can be drawn from the history of the degenerate armed movement in Eritrea. The movement had started as one against imperialism, with the active support of the progressive world, including some members of the socialist community.

This tragedy may be repeated in future cases of national questions elsewhere. The lessons from the Eritrean experience can be of some help in minimizing the number of such tragedies in the future. It is thus important to examine how the political and ideological regression of the armed movement came about. For example, in what way was it facilitated by the nature of Eritrea's national and social makeup? In general, what internal factors, and what aspects of Eritrean history did imperialism exploit to gain control of the movement? Which social groups in Eritrea collaborated with imperialism in this regard and why?

How might this deterioration have been avoided? Does this decline in any way reflect mistakes on the part of the progressive world? How were the shortcomings of Ethiopia's revolutionary democrats reflected in the approach to Eritrea? To what extent and in what ways did they contribute to the political deterioration of the movement? What were the dilemmas of the socialist community in regard to Eritrea and the Ethio-

pian revolution? Could this community have responded differently?

I have discussed all the issues I think are important, using all the facts I believe are correct. Of course, these include issues relating to the errors of the Ethiopian regime. I believe such a discussion is responsible and appropriate today:

(i) The enemies of socialism and of the Ethiopian revolution are well informed. They know all the facts revealed in this book and much more. They are aware of and have been exploiting the flaws in the policies of the Ethiopian regime and those actions which are perceived by Eritreans as mistakes of the socialist states. They are utilizing everything which is perceived as unfair and unacceptable by Eritreans.

(ii) Now that the Ethiopian revolution has consolidated power, it can only benefit from such a discussion which may stimulate an exchange of ideas concerning a workable approach to the Eritrean problem.

The book addresses a number of audiences: Eritrean patriots, including those who are partisans of socialism; Ethiopia's ruling party and government, and Ethiopian progressives in general; the socialist community, and democratic and peace activists everywhere.

Perhaps, not all the audiences I have in mind would equally appreciate the importance of the details of the local, regional and global issues covered in this book. While this is unfortunate, there is no other conceivable way of presenting the discussion if the problem is to be addressed in all its dimensions. And the problem should be addressed as such if it is to be resolved in a way which would bring genuine peace in Eritrea, bolster the Ethiopian revolution and consolidate the gains of world socialism.