* *information bulletin*
of the ethiopian peoples' revolutionary party

مجـــلة الحزب الثورى لشعوب اثيوبيا

Published by the Study, Publication and Information Centre of EPRP

4

JAN 1985

ABYOT

YEAR 9 NO. 4 CONTENTS JANUARY 1985

PAGE

The Study, Publication and Information Centre of the EPRP wishes you all friends of the Ethiopian people a happy new year.

E D I T O R I A L

FAMINE, REFUGEES AND POLITICS

Dull political songs and repetitious slogans are the staple food of pro-Soviet regimes - and the Ethiopian regime is no exception. In connection with the famine it has been forced to acknowledge, it has coined a series of trite slogans and authored quite a few banal songs. In all cases, the condemnations are directed against "Nature" whom Ethiopians are called upon " to subdue with revolutionary struggle".

That the famine in Ethiopia is inseparably linked with politics is by now a truism only the very naive can deny. It is evident also that the political economy of the famine, to use a jargon the junta cadres can possibly understand, cannot be attributed mainly to "Nature and her foibles". Accusing nature maybe advantageous for the junta in so far as it is a dumb scapegoat, but it is hardly original. The drought in Ethiopia was visible for many years and had it not been neglected by the junta it wouldn't have had such disastrous consequences. Moreover, the drought is not the sole cause of the famine- what about the corrupt and bankrupt polcies of the junta itself? . This is a fact that the military regime cannot hide via its "we shall make Ethiopia a bread basket!" calls. The enemies of the regime are hammering this fact in an

effort to expose the junta's anti-people nature. Politics is thus again entwined with the tragedy which is claiming thousands of lives. This is a reality which can be welcomed or condemned but cannot be denied.

That humanitarian motives lie at the root of the concern of millions all over the world who helped our people is beyond doubt. And numerous international agencies have no political axe to grind. At the sametime, there are also some elements whose concern is permanently guided by political calculations and interests. One obvious example is the military regime itself which is feverishly trying to exploit the famine for its own political ends. This being so, it is not surprising that it should laud to the skies the meagre aid from the Soviet bloc while ignoring those from the West who have given massive help in contrast. The fact that it takes all opportunities to attack certain western aid donors may please its Soviet masters but endagners the lives of millions of starving Ethiopians.

The military junta is not alone in playing politics with the lives of innocent people. Those elements who believe that the aggravation of the tragedy will damage the junta politically have also hampered the releief effort. Pressurising

the starving and beleaguered people to flee into exile to become refugees is a practice that should be mentioned. In the last few months, thousands of starving people have trekked to the Sudan, a country which has its own drought problem and is already hosting more than its share of refugees. Scores of these hapless people have, according to media reports, died on the way and several are dying daily in the refugee camps. There is no doubt that quite a number of these people could have been helped inside Ethiopia itself if only those who herded them out were compassionate enough to forego the dubious advantages of headline-publicity.

As Ethiopians, this is a situation we cannot observe in silence. For long, the Sudan has served as a haven for Ethiopian refugees and we should be grateful for that rather than trying to stretch the country's capabilities and goodwill to its final limits. We believe that the junta's enemies should not resemble it in their acts or in their dealing with the plight of the people. Otherwise, claims to such tags as "democratic" or "popular" would be absurd. For, saving the lives of our people is crucial while aggravating their agony is criminal.

We continue to appeal for relief aid for our people and we continue to reassert our heartfelt gratitude for those who are helping our people. So far, the concern shown has truly been astounding and no one can fault those who are trying to save lives. However, we also note that those

whose concern for our people is marred by sectarian politics could very well disrupt the overall relief effort. False and exaggerated reports are making the junta appear as truthful by contrast. Attempts to further the aims of this or that opposition group through media backing is frustrating not so much the intended victim (the junta) as it is alienating others (Ethiopians included). Foreigners who raise the banners of this or that front or organization should not do so standing solidly on the writhing bodies of our people.

Drought has played a part in the famine which is wrecking Ethiopia. But the main culprit is the junta.

The famine has made thousands of Ethiopians homeless. But not all the refugees flee voluntarily without being pressurised or coaxed by false promises.

It will be naive to expect the famine to be divorced from political considerations. But one can call for more humane considerations to prevail. The great majority of the help being given to our people is for sure humanitarian. Keeping it that way is a good way of exposing the junta and winning the hearts of Ethiopians.

** ** **

EVENTS

Resettlement: Fact & Fic ion

The resettlement program launched by the military regime has become a controversial issue. The people concerned have as yet to express their opinions - the junta says they are being resettled voluntarily while other elements claim that it is using force. Since quite a number of forces are involved fact and fiction are being amalgamated to breed confusion.

As we stated in the previous issue of ABYOT, the whole project does not have such an encouraging history. As for the motives of the junta, they are anything but noble or humane. In other words, we take Mengistu's assertion that " the resettlement project is aimed at saving lives" with a sizable dose of salt. We remain equally unconvinced by the absurd claims of one particular liberation front alleging that the resettlement project is aimed wholly against it, to drain the water to kill the fish as it implies,using a rather overused and, in this case, inappropriate saying. A foreign journalist- whose blind partisanship had earlier been evidenced in a pampnlet which"revealed"to the world that the Amharas "who oppress the five million Tigreans" are only "a minority numbering four million"!- has gone as far as reporting that hundreds of settlers have fled to the Sudan from their Wollega camps and that while in the camps they were being given a cup of grain for food per week.

Leaving aside such apparent exaggerations, we shall present on the present developments of the resettlement program.

1) At this stage of the project, thee camps slated for resettlement exist in Kaffa (Gura-Ferda),Wollega (Assosa-Begi),Gondar (Metema area) and Gojjam (Metekel province). In the near future other camps are to be opened in Illubabor,Shoa and Gamo Goffa.

2) More than 120,000 settlers have already been moved to the Wollega and Kaffa camps. More have started to arrive in Metekel from Wollo. The sites near Metema have also been completed with the local inhabitants having to build the huts for the settlers. Soldiers have also been taken to the settlement sites: 1,500 regular soldiers have come to Metema alone.

3) Though the regime claims that the local inhabitants have voluntarily built houses and supplied grain contributions for the settlers, the example of Metema proves otherwise. Peasants and inhabitants of the area were ordered to bring in a determined quota of wood and dried grass for building the huts, and they were ordered to build the huts themselves.

That some settlers, who have found it too difficult to adjust to the new areas, have left the camp sites is a fact, though this has been exaggerated by some quarters. The food situation is also inadequate, at least in some camps, though the afore-mentioned one cup per week ration is not true. Medical service is also inadequate in the sites even if the new mobile hospital, operated and donated by the Soviets, is expected to cover the health problems in the Assosa-Begi areas.

5) The military regime has not yet sufficiently explained to the local people (or has not been able to convince them) as regards the proclaimed aim of the resettlement. Thus, clashes have occurred in the Metekel area between the arriving settlers and the local people.

Meanwhile, the program is underway and all indications are that the regime plans to force the people to cover the costs of the project. Outwardly voluntarily but actually compulsory campaigns have been launched to make people build houses, roads (and even airports for DC3s as in Shehdi),contribute grain, etc... On January 16, the junta opened a three-days seminar for some 2000 party cadres to be assigned as political organizers/supervisors in the various settlement sites. Mengistu himself has instructed the cadres that " this being the first resettlement projec in Africa ever to be undertaken under the leadership of communists, no weakness or execuses are acceptable." This

succeed or die order is accompanied by explicit calls to "organize the settlers under the Party". In other words, one can expect the cadres to launch with fervour the discredited cooperatives union of the regime, to tire the settlers with boring political indoctrination lectures, to appropriate the produce of the settlers and to impose state rationing. In short, to repeat the failures of the past nine years.

That the regime has not learnt from its past mistakes in the field of resettlement is being made obvious. Mengistu's wishful cry -" we shall advance forward crushing all man- made and natural obstacles"- suggests quite menacingly that the brunt of the failure of the junta's project will be carried by the people themselves. Another top official of the junta, politbureau member Legese Asfaw (who is also chairman of the Resettlement Project), took time to recount to the cadres the Soviet Defence Policy of World War II and how Vietnam, after its reunification, managed "to achieve great progress and to be self-sufficient in rice production". The resettlement program is being taken as a virtual martial effort and Ethiopians know that when the junta talks of war and sacrifices, of trampling all obstacles and advancing it means exactly just

that. And, unfortunately, quite literally so.

Mengistu Says:
"Ethiopians' Laziness Caused Famine"

The vast majority of Ethiopians are peasants and workers, they are poor but industrious. A peasant's work day, for example, begins long before dawn and ends after sunset. That subsistence farming prevails, that production is low can be traced more to the political and economic reality and the backwardness of the tools of farming than to the sluggishness of the people.

Not so for the arrogant dictator who thinks that the more he lies publicly the more he is becoming profound. In a public address he gave to his party cadres on January 18 the dictator asserted that " the main cause for the famine (in Ethiopia) is our laziness and we should not feel insulted when this truth is stated". The "we" does not indicate this time any royal pretensions but is meant to say "Ethiopians". Since no Ethiopian who values his life can publicly accuse the dictator of being one of the "lazy we", it is apparent that the junta chieftain is once again accusing the people for the crimes he and his cronies have committed.

This is not a simple case of passing the buck but rather an example of transferring the stink. The famine was ignored and aggravated by the junta itself and Mengistu himself, who is this criminal outfit's omnipotent leader, bears the main

responsibility. And unless the junta, with its usual "decisivness",redefines work to mean the act of incessantly ordering massacres and repression, it would be very difficult to imagine an industrious military junta and millions of lazy Ethiopians. who would rather starve to death than work.

Mengistu resorts to such shameless attacks not only because he is an addicted liar but it is also due to the fact that he knows the muzzled and gagged people of Ethiopia, like the other pet junta scapegoat -Nature- cannot respond. However, the crude lies and accusations of the junta mainly show its own bankruptcy and degeneration.

Mengistu's Trip to Moscow

In December, 1984, Mengistu undertook a quick visit to his patrons and protectors. He first went to Havana, then flew on to Moscow (where he met Chernenko), East Berlin and Sofia.

According to official reports, Mengistu went on the visits to thank these governments " for the humanitarian aid they have given to the famine victims in Ethiopia". Other sources indicated, however, that the dictator's hastily-arranged trip was motivated by the

junta's embarrassment (and preoccupation) due to the fact that the aid from the Soviet bloc has remained dismal while that from the West has been the opposite. Expectedly, all the hosts of the dictator have promised to send more help to the famine victims. However, aside from the mobile hospital sent by the Russians, the promised aid has yet arrive, especially in the form of food and medicine. The East Germans have, according to Addis Abeba radio report of Jan. 11/1985, sent to the Ethiopian police force 10 police dogs(with 20 more to follow) with a doctor and trainer. Such "aid", we believe is more in character.

Mengistu is also said to have discussed with the Cubans and Soviets on ways and means of combatting the bad publicity his regime is getting in connection with the famine. In the meantime, those Ethiopian officials who had been boasting that Mengistu's visit will result in a massive food aid from the Soviet bloc have had to swallow their words. Guns- yes! Bread-No! is the policy of Moscow.

Junta to Sell Meat to Egypt:
Accord Criticised

The agreement signed by the military regime with Egypt has been criticised by several quarters on the grounds that it is incorrect for Ethiopia to export meat while its people are starving for all to see. The export deal also covers frui

The regime has publicly rejected the accusations by arguing that the famine- stricken people need other type of

food and cannot consume fresh meat under their present physical condition. Leaving aside the validity or non-validity of the junta's argument, it has been learnt that the regime signed its accord mainly in line with its planned Ten Years economic development project and was not, at anytime, concerned about the present dietary capabilities of the afflicted people. The hindsight argument is one more example of a caught-in-the-act junta trying a fast cover-up.

As far as the Ethiopian people are concerned, their reaction to the whole issue can be none other than "man setton!"; i.e. "who has, who would give us fresh meat in the first place!?"

If it is any consolation, the callous junta can cite the wasteful project approved by the UN (and opposed by the the UN secretary-general himself and several other countries) to build at a cost of more than 73 million US dollars a headquarter for the ECA in Addis Abeba.

The Bette-Israel (Falasha) Exodus

On January 3, international news reports revealed that "thousands of Ethiopian jews" have been secretly taken to Israel in the past few months to be settled there. On its part, Israel made public its displeasure at the untimely exposure of an operation it had code-named "Operation Moses". In all instances, it was repeatedly stated that the Ethiopians referred to as jews were being "saved from famine and death".

The issue has also led to acrimonious verbal exchanges between the governments of the Sudan and Ethiopia. The latter has accused the Sudan of arranging the flight of the refugees to Israel while Sudan has denied the charge and stated that the Ethiopian regime shipped the people to Israel, through Massawa, in exchange for Israeli military and financial support. In any case, some 7000 Ethiopians have landed in Israel since November 1984.

To begin with, the term "Ethiopian jews" is nothing but a misnomer. The Bette-Israelis (for, this is their name while Falasha and Kayla have derogatory overtones) are by all qualifications (linguistic, cultural, etc..) members of the Amhara nationality who practice a form of Judaism, a fact which has led to their being considered as "Israelis". They number some 30,000 according to a decade-old unofficial census. For centuries, they lived in Gondar (mainly) and other parts of northern Ethiopia.

The Bette-Israelis, it must be stated, had for long considered themselves as one of the tribes of Israel. Their religion, differing as it does from the Coptic faith of other Amharas, had also contributed to their being segregated to a certain extent. In many areas, they couldn't intermarry with other Amharas though those who had settled in the south-western lowlands of Chilga province have done so. And though the late Emperor called himself the Lion of Judah and proclaimed an apparent affinity with Israel, the Bette-Israelis, who rendered the community invaluable service as ironsmiths, were discriminated against.

Surprisingly, at least in light of their present Israeli position, the Bette-Israeli were not considered as jews by Tel Aviv for quite a long time. Years back, an attempt by a Bette-Israeli to get married to a jewish woman was condemned by a number of rabbis. Even after Israel made its voltaface and officially accepted the unpalatable (at least for them) situation of considering blacks as bona fide jews, the government was quite reluctant to go ahead with the immigration (or Aliyah as it is called by jews) of the people commonly known as the Falashas.

The Israeli government presently claims that its "Operation Moses" was prompted by humanitarian considerations so as to save the people from death by starvation. The emphasis on this argument cannot, however, cover the fact that since the late 1970s Israel has been trying to take the Bette-Israelis. If need be, though this is irrelevant, one can also point out that those Bette-Israelis who were living in areas not affected by the famine have been taken to Israel. Hence, the Israeli move is primarily motivated by other considerations and not by the present famine situation. It should also be stated that the Israeli government was not that enthusiastic about the whole thing, especially in the late seventies. The main push came from Jewish agencies and organizations abroad, especially in the USA and Canada. This is why, even if some 7000 Bette Israelis were settled in Israel by 1984, despite the push by the various agencies the Israeli government took in a mere two hundred or so Bette-Israelis till 1977.

The 'how' of the present exodus is not that mysterious. That Israel has taken advantage of the present famine and general dislocation in Ethiopia to whisk away thousands of Ethiopians is obvious. On the other hand, the junta's claim that it has no relations whatsoever with Israel is not that convincing given the fact that the junta was repeating the same claim years ago till the late Moshe Dayan exposed the truth. The military regime has also grabbed the occasion to allege that its opponents have been enticing

people to flee into exile. This may be partially true in a particular situation (see the Jan. EPRP News Release) but there is no argument that the majority of the close to two million Ethiopian refugees fled to escape the bloody hands of the junta itself.

Why are the Bette-Israelis leaving? This concerns us above all rather than the other aspects of the situation. At issue is not the right of any group of people to emigrate or choose their nationality. We don't deny this right nor do we think others should. Will the Bette-Israelis be settled in occupied Arab land? Will they be used as soldiers to fight Palestinians? These are important and quite relevant questions. The Bette-Israelis have left Ethiopia primarily because their condition of life has prompted them to. We cannot neglect the effects of promises of a better life elsewhere can have on a suffering people, especially during hard times and conditions. Such vulnerability cannot, however, wash away the existing basic dissatisfaction. The junta's responsibility lies above all in this respect.

In conclusion, it is interesting to note that some of those sectors who had been quick to condemn the resettlement of Ethiopians inside Ethiopia itself have kept mum about this massive exodus and its apparent implications.

Famine Situation:
What Now?

Despite the massive international relief effort, the famine situation in Ethiopia is getting worse.

The total number of people affected by the famine has passed the nine million estimate and the death rate in many affected areas has not fallen considerably. Worse still, quite a number of people in Wollo and Shoa have died of what relief agencies are calling cholera and the government is insisting is simply acute diarrhoea. The military regime is denying the reports of cholera outbreak in the famine camps reportedly because it fears that admitting such a report may hamper its resettlement program. It is to be remembered that the regime plans to resettle some 2.5 million people: each settlement camp/village expected to cover 2500 hectares and to contain 500 families (average member of each family being five). Within a year, the settlers are expected to be self-sufficient.

According to reliable estimates, Ethiopia needs some one million three-hundred thousand tons of food aid till the end of 1985 if it is to reduce and check the death rate. The assumption is that by june this year, some rain may fall. On the other hand, the appaling sanitary condition prevailing in many of the camps (especially those in the interior which lie away from the itinerary of foreign visitors) is by itself causing many deaths and favouring the outbreak of epidemics\ cholera.

EPRA CONCLUDES
Month-Long Political Course

A month-long political education course organized by the Political Department of the EPRA has been successfully completed in early January 1985.

The course was given to members of the EPRA as well as those in the various departments as part of the on-going process of consolidating the political and military capabilities of the whole army. EPRA members attending the course have discussed, among other subjects, the present political situation in Ethiopia, the resettlement project and its specific implications in the Gondar-Gojjam area, the junta's impending military campaign against the EPRA, the ways and means of further developing the successful recruitment drive of the last six months, etc...

Members of the higher leadership committees of the EPRP & the EPRA were present at some of the sessions.

EDU & EPRP United Front
EMERGES INVIGORATED

In a communique made public on January 1,1985, the Ethiopian Democratic Union(EDU) and the EPRP have revealed that the united front they had formed more than three years ago has been renovated and invigorated, and will continue.

HIBRET (UNITY), the organ of the united front, has also been published.

It is to be remembered that the united front (the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Ethiopia) was formed three years ago by the EPRP and a faction of the EDU. The formation of the DFLE and the setting-up of an armed force to this effect did play a significant part in the intensification of the struggle of our people. However, the fact that the EDU was divided presented a considerable obstacle. This drawback, accentuated by anti-unity plots of divisive elements, hampered DFLE's work for quite sometime.

In August 1984, the various EDU factions successfully reunited thereby paving the way for the effective continuation of the DFLE. Subsequent meetings between the leaders of the united EDU and the EPRP led to their agreement to continue and strengthen the DFLE. This significant step is already being concretised in many fields of joint action and there is no doubt now that the DFLE will continue to mobilise the people for the struggle against the fascist

junta and Russian imperialism.

The DFLE has called on all Ethiopian democratic forces to heed the call of united action and to rally in a common front. The DFLE, which is based on the principles of equality, organizational independence, democracy and adherence to the common political program, is struggling to establish a democratic republic in Ethiopia. It embodies as a front our people's desire for a united and decisive struggle, for an end to division and dissipation of forces.

As is to be expected, the DFLE has its opponents. The junta and Russian imperialism are the obvious ones. Another is the TPLF, which seems to have made an anti-unity stand as its guiding policy. On several instances, this front has waged war against both the EDU and the EPRP and has never stopped its plots and propaganda attacks against the two. It is to be noted that the TPLF political program stands opposed (explicitly) to the united struggle of the peoples of Ethiopia and calls, instead, for separate struggles by each nationality. In addition, the TPLF practically believes in the settlement of political differences by violent means and has thus never refrained from

planning or undertaking subversive actions against the EDU & the EPRP - the two organizations who have paid great sacrifices in fighting the fascist junta and the Russian imperialists.

Still, the DFLE calls on all genuine Ethiopian groups and organizations to join the united front as this is the only way to defeat the enemies of our peoples. Since the DFLE is formed by the two most important Ethiopian organizations there is no doubt that this call will be heeded by all those Ethiopians who believe that sectarian interests and narrow ambitions should never take precedence over the main task of working for the liberation of the people of Ethiopia as a whole.

Eritrean Fronts Merge

The protracted and, at times, difficult talks between the ELF(RC),the ELF-PLF(UO) and the ELF-PLF(RC) have finally borne fruit and it has been announced that the three have merged to form a single Eritrean Liberation Front.

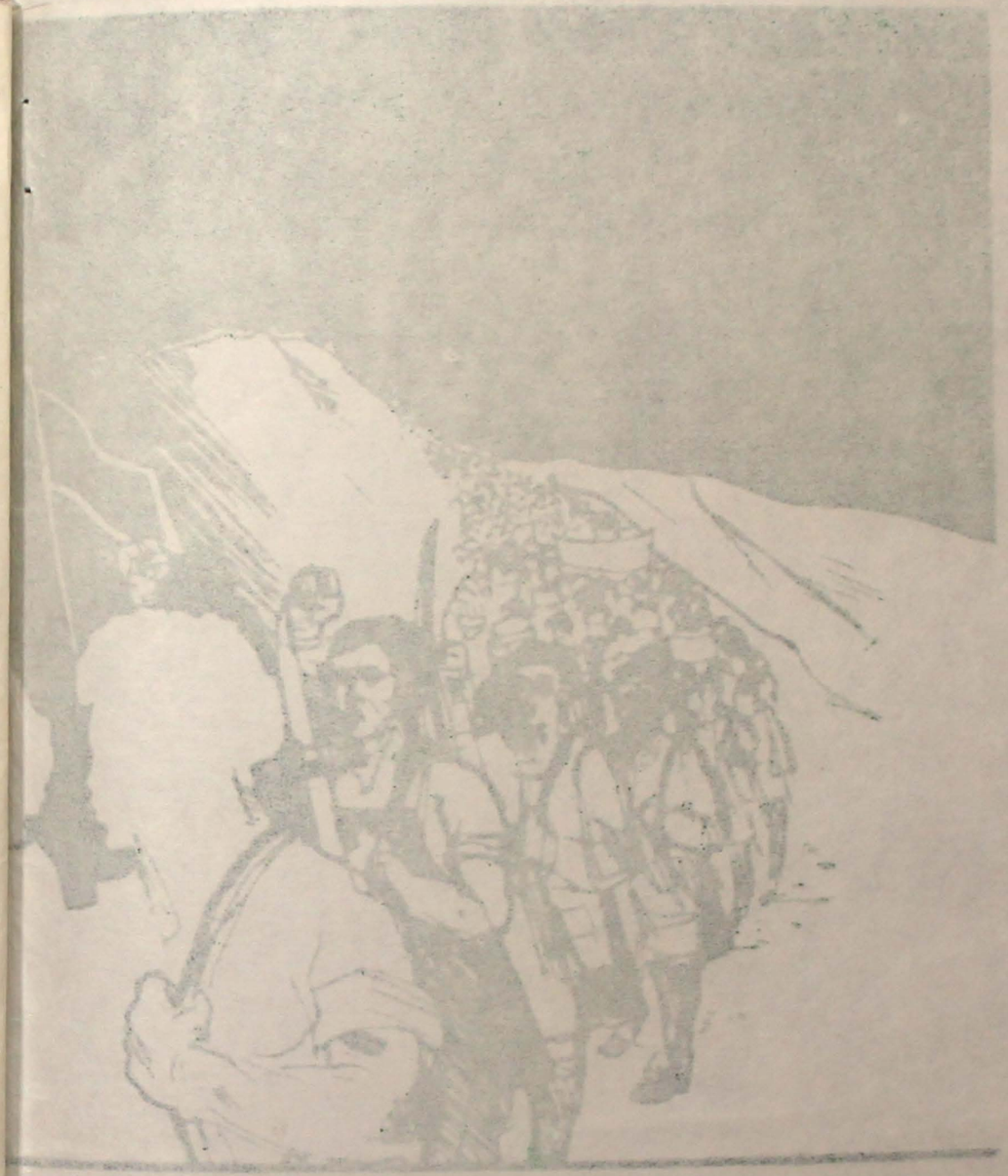
Osman Saleh Sabbe has been named the chairman of the united organization while Abdella Idris and Abdelkadir Jelliani have been named first and second deputy chairman respectively.

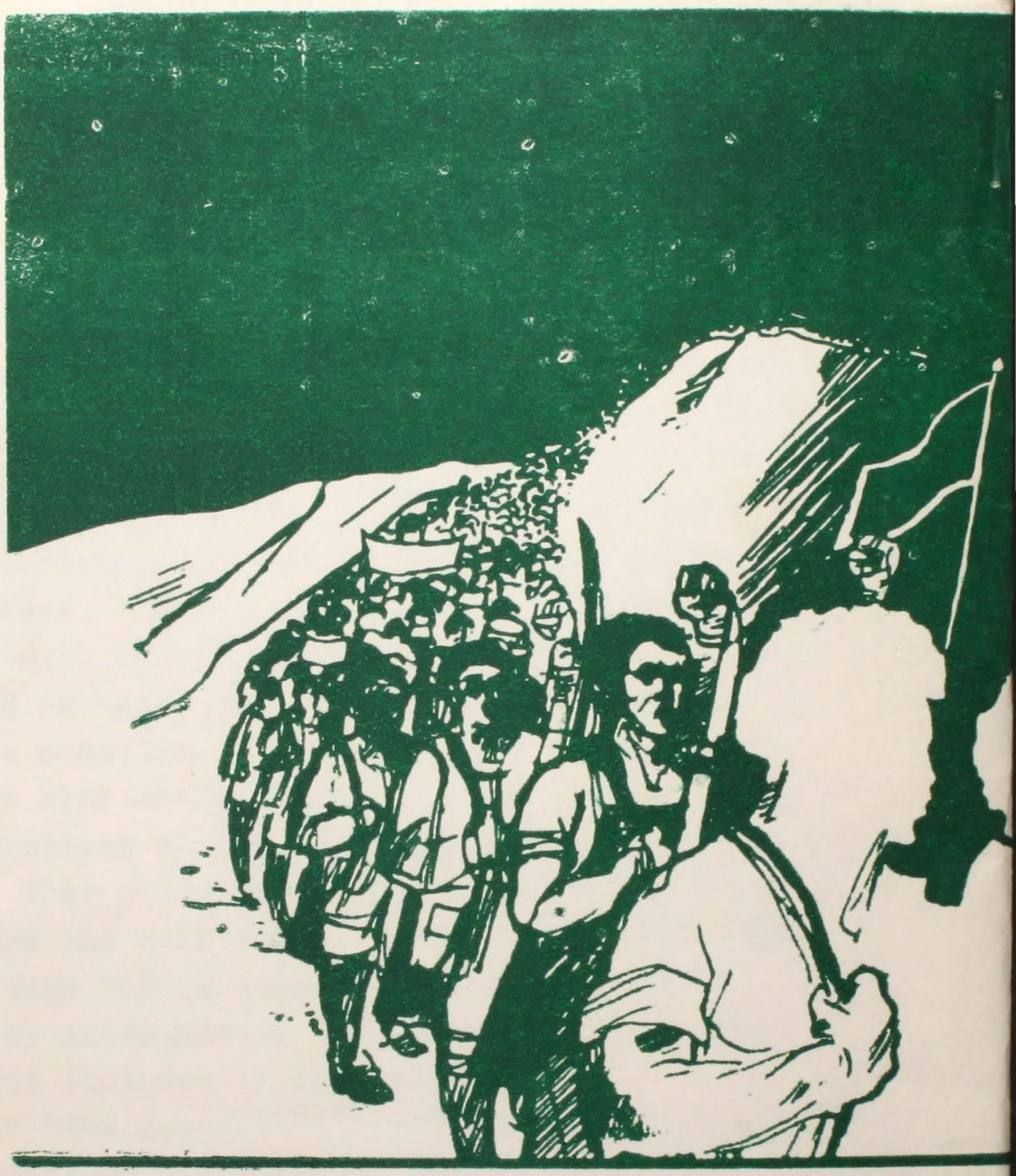
The success of the merger has come as a relief for all those friends of the Eritrean struggle who were beginning to despair in the face of the prevailing divisions and conflicts. While the road ahead will no doubt be difficult, it is hoped that the merger step will help in facilitating the task facing the Eritrean fighters. The consolidation of this fruitful step will contribute in eliminating the malaise which has gripped the Eritrean struggle for quite sometime.

The EPLF still remains opposed to the unity initiatives of the above groups but some sectors hope that cooperation talks could begin between it and the united ELF. It is to be noted that the name ELF is also used by another group led by Ahmed Nasser and Dr. Habte- this group is not included in the merger.

The EPRP supports all positive unity efforts by Eritrean fighters and groups. Thus, it hopes that the merger will pave the way for intensified struggle and further unity. It also expects the united organization to adopt a correct position vis a vis the struggle of the Ethiopian people and to strengthen its ties with genuine Ethiopian democratic organizations.

** ** **





Main Points of the EPRP Program

- To overthrow the rule of the fascist junta & Soviet social-imperialism and to establish a popular democratic republic;
- To establish a broad and popular democratic system;
- To build a national economy free from foreign domination & to improve the livelihood of the people;
- To recognise the full right to self-determination of oppressed nations / nationalities;
- To safeguard the rights and interests of the working people;
- To build a popular and democratic culture, educational system and a health service catering to the working people,
- To build an army that will defend the rights and interests of the people;
- To assure the equal rights of women in all fields;
- To pursue a foreign policy based on non-alignment, peaceful coexistence and anti-imperialism.