

THE NORWEGIAN CONNECTION

By Emnetu Tesfay

It is no wonder that the coming of about two dozen Eritreans to Norway during this year, has brought the intensity of the war in Eritrea to the attention of the common Norwegian. These Eritreans, like many thousand others in Europe and Middle-east, are victims of the brutal confrontation between the Ethiopian Military government on one side and the two liberation fronts on the otherside. Although the military government in Ethiopia tried forcefully to isolate the war in Eritrea from the international arena, it is no longer succesful.

The armed struggle in Eritrea, which is the longest in Africa, by no means serves the interest of the Ethiopian and Eritrean peoples. The only beneficiaries from this mass suffering are the imperialists and zionists, who shamelessly perpetuate and directly supervise the war. In Eritrea there is a big American military base and Isreali commando-training camps.

The present situation in Eritrea is not something that is accidentally created. It has its roots in 1950, when the United Nations, contrary to the wishes of the Eritrean people, pushed them to a federal partnership with Ethiopia. In examining the roots of the present situation, students of history, among other things, trace the Norwegian connection. And it is one of the many things that caused the course of events in Eritrea.

The Norwegian connection evolved in 1950, when along with Burma, Guatemala, South Africa and Pakistan they formed a United Nations commission to study the desire of the Eritrean people and make recommendations on the future of the country. Eritrea, it should be noted, was a colony of the Italians from 1889 to 1941. Following the defeat of the Italians in world war II, Eritrea fell under the disposal of the victorious allies of the war.

Failing to agree on a common solution to the future of Eritrea, the big four powers, namely the Russians, Americans, British and French refered the case to the United Nations. The 4th general assembly session of the United Nations, in turn, sent a five country commission to ascertain the wishes of the inhabitants about their political future. As soon as the commission arrived in Eritrea it discovered the genuine and impressive strenght of the "Eritrean Bloc For Independence", the political maturity of its followers, and the determination of its leaders to defend the right and dignity of their country. At the same time it fully became aware of the barbaric methods used by the Ethiopian government in order to achieve its political aims.

In the commissions report, three different opinions were expressed. While Guatemala and Pakistan strongly defended the right of the Eritrean people to full independence, the South African and Burmese delegations were in favor of `self governing unit federated with Ethiopia.` Their opinion, they reiterated, was based on the consideration that both states are economically interdependent.

The Norwegian view, as a breaking point, had immense weight and importance. But what was it? ". . . . the parition of Eritrea into two." The highlands, mostly inhabited by christians to become part of Ethiopia and the lowlands, mostly inhabited by moslems, to become part of the Sudan. This meant the obliteration of a nation. It meant the division of a country into two and give it away to its two neighbours on the basis of religion.

Finally, on the cover that Ethiopia needs an outlet to the sea and that because Eritrea is economically inviable the United Nations, contrary to the wishes of the big majority of the Eritrean people, ratified a federation of "Democratic Eritrea" and "Federal Ethiopia" with each state administering its own judicial, executive, and legislative powers. The federation was to last for ten years after which the Eritrean people to be asked again their future choice.

But the former king of Ethiopia, with the encouragement of imperialists, openly violated the federal act. He systematically dissolved the Eritrean parliament, banned trade unions, lowered the flag and arrested political leaders. The Eritrean people reacted with massive demonstrations and strikes. And in 1961 the armed struggle began. Haile Sellassie, with the help of his friends, had created a good image in the west as a cover for approval of his annexing Eritrea. But the truth about his suppressive rule and his role as agent of American imperialism in the region is now coming to the surface. Besides his notorious divide and rule policy, the king in an unprecedented move, closed most of the factories and transferred some of them to his capital. Higher education was discouraged. As a result, the Eritreans started to immigrate by thousands to Ethiopia proper and the neighbouring Arab countries.

The United Nations, ignoring its responsibilities, is silent to the cries of the Eritrean people. It actually witnessed the systematic destruction of our nation and its culture. The democratic people of Eritrea were thrown into the colonial machination of feudal Ethiopia. The Eritreans, in a dramatic reverse of civilization, not only lost their flag, freedom of press, parliamentary representation, trade unions but also fell victim to barbaric and wanton atrocities.

As a result of the wrong decision made by the United Nations in 1951, which was strongly influenced by the Americans and which obtained full collaboration of other western leaders, the entire people of Eritrea is today suffering under the hands of Ethiopian colonialism. About 30,000 youngsters have taken arms against the occupation force. More than 200,000 are under terrible condition in refugee camps in the Sudan, and some 11,000 under torture in Ethiopian prisons. Our rural population is a victim of Ethiopia's daily bombardment, well poisoning and other atrocities.

Norway, by the stand it took as a member of the commission in 1950, has its share of responsibility for the situation in Eritrea today. It has moral and political obligation to bring the Eritrean case at the United Nations forum. The only chance for peace and development to be realized in that part of the world, as is true every where, is when the right of the people to self rule is recognized.

(the author is a former librarian and a free-lance journalist who is now seeking political assylum in Norway.)

This article was sent to Dagblad, a local tabloid in the Oslo area on the 25.11.1976. The information in this article has without any doubt contributed to the norwegian public to feel responsible to the fate of the Eritrean people by the stand Norway took at the U.N. Commission for Eritrea.