

THE EMERGENCE OF POLITICAL PARTIES

IN

ERITREA

1941 – 1950

BY

LLOYD ELLINGSON

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THE origins of the present conflict in Eritrea may be traced back to the period of British administration which lasted from 1941 to 1948. More directly, they may be traced to the period which began in 1962, in Ethiopia's unilateral abrogation of Eritrea's special federative relationship with the Ethiopian Crown. While only a small number of Eritreans wish to sever completely their ties with the Ethiopian Government, during the British administration only a small group opposed such union, and this opposition included many who favoured a trusteeship status rather than immediate independence. In 1962, Eritrea became more closely tied to Addis Ababa through its incorporation into the Ethiopian State. It became clear to many who had hitherto favoured some sort of independence that Sellase's government that the fears of those who opposed union were well founded. To understand the present situation and the increasing political activity within Eritrea following the defeat of the Ethiopian army, the subsequent formation of political parties, the development of the

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10. H. Longridge, *Chief Ad. Com. May 1944-Nov. 1944*, in: *Adm. Com. in Entreat*, Mar. 1944, 6, para. 20, F.C. 371/391/57-3.

if they had been carefully memorized,⁹ while other representatives indicated very little understanding of the political parties they supported. Letters sent to the commission by disgruntled Eritreans (who felt that their opinions were not being properly represented and who therefore demanded an interview with the commission) argued strongly that the 'electoral' process employed by the B.M.A. had had no absolute criteria for representation and that only those of indigenous parentage should have the right to be represented.¹⁰

The B.M.A. had difficulty not only in establishing a process of representation that would meet the requirements of the commission but also with the lack of political consciousness among Eritreans, most of whom were totally unfamiliar with Western political processes. In 1944, Longrigg had described political consciousness, at least among the Orthodox of the Altopiano, as being slight,¹¹ although by 1947 it had risen sharply, largely owing to the flurry of activity associated with the emerging political parties. The majority of the Eritrean people, however, could scarcely have grasped the importance of what they were being asked to do. Never before in Eritrean history had there been anything that remotely resembled the political parties that developed in Eritrea in the late 1940s. It became the responsibility of the B.M.A. to awaken modern political consciousness among the Eritrean peasantry and to acquaint it with the political process by which its future was about to be determined.

The criteria for affiliation with a particular party varied considerably. Some merchants and urban notables, for example, felt union would bring freer trade with the possible elimination of the customs barriers which existed between Eritrea and Ethiopia. Others chose a political party on the basis of its potential for success, since to espouse political opinions and offer support to the losing party was to run a serious risk; this was the fate of several leaders of the anti-unionist group, notably Woldeab Woldemariam. There were others, 'disinherited landowners and officials, rivals and pretenders, criminals and fanatics', who 'contented with their present lot',¹² supported irredentism, hoping that Eritrea under Ethiopia's leadership would bring them some advantage. On the other hand, Harold Courlander, historian for the Cuneo Academic Project, observed that some small chiefs and lesser individuals, who had fared well under the Italians and the British, feared union because their collaboration might expose them to personal harm from any Ethiopian regime.¹³

The financing of the political parties clearly revealed the interests of

⁹ F.P.C., summaries, Appendices 159-73.

¹⁰ F.P.C., Appendices 137-58; F.P.C., Appendix 121, 4.

¹¹ Longrigg, 6, para. 28. F.O. 371/46116/748.

¹² Longrigg, 6, para. 30, F.O. 371/46116/748.

¹³ Harold Courlander to President Roosevelt, 22 Mar. 1943, U.S. Archives, 865D.01/608.

their backers. The non-unionist parties were largely financed by their membership, although outsiders, namely resident Italians, occasionally made sizeable contributions. The Pro-Italy Party, favouring an Italian trusteeship, was sustained by the Italian community. The Unionist Party was handsomely subsidized by the Ethiopian Government although, of course, this was never publicly admitted.¹²

Throughout the middle and late 1940s, the Orthodox priesthood openly encouraged Christians to favour the union of Eritrea with Ethiopia. The aim of the church's propaganda was not difficult to assess.¹⁴ Longrigg observed that the 'priesthood, a powerful force especially in rural districts, [could] expect greater liberty and privilege under a Coptic Empire'.¹⁵ There is ample evidence to suggest that the Orthodox Church in Eritrea not only supplied money, through its agents, to the Unionist cause but also warned its congregations that if they did not support union, they would be excommunicated or at least fall into disfavour.¹⁶

The Ethiopian Government, through the Unionist Party, continued to criticize the B.M.A., accusing it of thwarting the efforts of those who espoused the irredentist cause and of abridging common freedoms of assembly and speech. The B.M.A. could hardly be accused of abridging common freedom: considering the circumstances, it allowed maximum self-expression within the limits of order. Upon replacing the Italian Administration in 1941, the B.M.A. expunged all fascist elements, both legal and symbolic, but necessarily retained, by and large, the Italian body of laws and court system, deleting only those regulations which might be interpreted as prejudicial to native Eritreans. The B.M.A. also acted as an intermediary between the two commissions¹⁷ and the Eritrean people, supplying statistics and information, to achieve a final proposal which would satisfy the majority of the people. As administering authority, it also had the delicate and difficult task of maintaining an orderly environment in which Eritreans might enjoy the maximum opportunity to participate in determining their political future. In order to help create a positive ambience, the B.M.A. established a weekly Tigrinya newspaper, whose editorial policy permitted the expression of divergent political opinions and thereby encouraged the establishment of political parties.

One of the most unruly parties, giving the administering authority considerable trouble and accusing it of imperialistic aims,¹⁸ was the Patriotic Association for the Union of Eritrea and Ethiopia, better known

¹² See F.P.C., Appendix 20, 1, Financial Organization.

¹⁴ Abuna Marcos, the Orthodox Archbishop of Eritrea, was the emperor's chief resident agent for unionist propaganda.

¹⁵ Longrigg, 6, para. 27, F.O. 371/46116/748.

¹⁶ F.P.C., Appendix 00, 7-9.

¹⁷ The Four Power Commission visited Eritrea from 23 Nov. to 14 Dec. 1947, and the U.N. Commission from 24 Feb. to 5 Apr. 1950.

¹⁸ F.P.C., Appendix 01, 5.

as the Unionist Party.¹⁹ Its president was Dejach²⁰ Beiene Beraki, but Tedla Bairu became its most active member as secretary-general of a claimed 729,193 members,²¹ of whom 100,000 were said to be 'serfs'.²² The party had a central committee located in Asmara and regional committees in the major highland provincial towns, where its main strength was concentrated.²³ It also claimed to have 195,000 members who were Eritreans resident in Ethiopia. The F.P.C. noted that the 'relation of the various officials and bodies [of the Unionist P.] to each other and the method by which they are chosen are not made clear in the documents presented by the Association'.²⁴

Such lack of clarity in the party's organization, while undoubtedly due to the emperor's indirect control, was also a feature of its program. This called for the unconditional union of all Eritrea with Ethiopia. It opposed partition or trusteeship, the latter on the ground that the status implied preparation for self-government, which the Unionists considered Eritrea incapable of achieving.²⁵ Dismemberment²⁶ was opposed because the economic viability of Eritrea depended on the seasonal use of grazing land in both the lowlands and the highlands. The party also advocated the granting of Ethiopian citizenship to all inhabitants of Eritrea, including Italians. Moreover, it pressed for the release from their feudal ties of the Tigrai. But the sincerity of this last claim was open to question. The party included a number of prominent Muslim aristocrats,²⁷ who kept a type of serfdom alive,²⁸ and the Tigrai described their condition in a

¹⁹ This claimed to have been founded in Apr. 1941, in Asmara, but it was probably not founded until, at the earliest, 1944; in Feb., an organization of a similar name, The Society for the Unification of Ethiopia and Eritrea, was established in Addis Ababa. See Caldwell to Sec. of State, 865 D.O. 11-1544. For B.M.A. Unionist Party relations, see F.P.C., Appendices 19, 95; 5, and 97; and Trevaskis, 91-2 and 106 ff.

²⁰ Honorary title of senior dignitaries.

²¹ F.P.C., Appendix 20, 1; it should be noted that the figure 729,193 is 31% higher than the F.P.C.'s estimate of the party's strength.

²² These were the Tigrai, primarily of the Western Province, who were bound to the Nabitah families and clans of the Beni Amer tribe by monetary and service obligations. In 1944, the B.M.A. estimated their numbers at about 30,000, although several years before, an Italian source had claimed 43,000. There were also an unestimated number of slaves (mostly Tigras), maybe as many as there were serfs, but no estimates are available.

²³ Longrigg observed that the 'Muslim tribesmen outside the towns, who form half the population of Eritrea, and occupy nine-tenths of its soil, would be generally and probably strongly opposed to such union, although it is never admitted by Italianist spokesmen'; Longrigg, 6, para. 23, F.O. 371/46116/748.

²⁴ F.P.C., Appendix 20.

²⁵ S. H. Longrigg was very doubtful of the potential self-sufficiency of Eritrea, although owing to the temporary nature of the B.M.A., no long-term economic projects could be planned. Whether its economy could stand alone, therefore, remained a moot question throughout Eritrea's period of political uncertainty.

²⁶ It was unofficially suggested in the early 1940s that the Western Province be annexed to the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, but the idea was abandoned owing to widespread disapproval among the inhabitants of the area in question. See F.O. 371/46116/748.

²⁷ F.P.C., Appendix 18.

²⁸ A feudal system by which oppressive land-rent taxes, payable in produce or labour or both, were collected and asymmetrical obligations of goods and services were imposed. Throughout Ethiopia it is generally known as the *serfdom* system.

letter to the commission as 'a form of slavery that not even the Nazis have given the world'.²⁸ They concluded that Ethiopia, with its long history of social inequality, would provide no advantage in their quest for social justice;²⁹ thus the vast majority supported the Moslem League. The Unionist Party did gain some popularity by claiming that the Italians were going to return to power, and indeed there were still several Italians in official positions, especially in the courts. But in its early stages of growth, the Unionist Party relied mainly upon unemployment and the general weakness of the economy following the end of the war to increase its membership.³¹

The Unionist Party did more than issue propaganda; it resorted to less orthodox methods, such as terrorism. The summer before the arrival of the commission in November 1947 saw unprecedented political violence as the main parties vied for support. In June and July 1947, several bomb incidents occurred in Asmara and there were attempts on the lives of Dejach Hassan Ali, a leader of the Moslem League, and Woldeab Woldemariam, sub-editor of the Tigrinya newspaper, *The Eritrean Weekly News*.³² Following these incidents, there were several arrests of people connected with the Unionist Party, who had in their possession hand-grenades and other types of ammunition.³³ At the end of July, this violence culminated in the arrest and conviction of three members (who had posed as Muslims) of the Andinet Party, the youth section of the Unionist Party.³⁴ The Andinet Party became involved in several other incidents of violence in its attempt to disrupt the F.P.C.'s work.³⁵

The Ethiopian Government was never officially identified with this terrorism. It employed more orthodox methods to further its irredentist cause. In March 1943, Addis Ababa had broached the thorny question whether or not the British Government would allow the emperor to place a trade representative in Asmara where, the Foreign Office felt, and quite justifiably, he would act as an avenue for Ethiopian irredentist propaganda. Finally, in a despatch from the Middle East Command to

²⁸ Ibid. 2.

²⁹ See Slavery, Proclamation 12, passed by Ethiopian Government, 20 June 1942, indicating the presence of domestic slavery; The Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society's paper to Anthony Eden, 21 July 1941, F.O. 371.27537.2777, memo, 'Slavery in Ethiopia' by Lord Lugard, 16 Apr. 1941, F.O. 371.27537.1028; F. A. G. Cook, H.M. Charges D'Affaires to A. Eden, 30 May 1944, para. 5, indicating the presence of child slavery in northwest corner of Wollega Province, F.O. 371.46056/30.

³⁰ Before the British occupation, there were 3,141 Italian and 737 Eritrean officials in the Eritrean Government, while by Jan. 1943, the figure had been reduced to 2,240 Italians and 276 Eritreans. Not only were most of the officials not replaced by British counterparts, but it is also significant that the Eritrean component suffered the greatest relative loss of jobs. See Talbot Smith, American consul, Asmara, to Secretary of State, 12 Jan. 1943, 7, U.S. Archives, 865D.01,605.

³¹ *Eritrean Daily News*, 1947 (12 June: 3; 4 July: 3; 8 July: 3).

³² *E.D.N.*, 1947 (8 July: 3a and 23 July: 3a and c) and continuing to 1947.

³³ F.P.C., Appendix 124, 3.

³⁴ F.P.C., Appendix 142 (Annex).

the War Office, the idea was firmly rejected.³⁶ Later, however, a liaison officer, Colonel Negga Ifaile Sellasie, was appointed by the emperor, who supplied uncorroborated amounts of money directly to the Unionist Party.³⁷ The colonel and his chief secretary were thorns in the side of the administration until April 1949, when, after a raid on the offices of the Andinet Party in Asmara by British authorities, various 'compromising documents' were uncovered suggesting that Colonel Negga and his chief secretary, Tegola [sic], an 'homme de confiance' of the emperor 'may have had some connection with the assassination of Abdul Kadir Kadir', an anti-unionist leader. The British Administration, having long tried to force the colonel's chief secretary to leave Eritrea, now had sufficient evidence to expel him.³⁸

The Unionist Party was financed through membership fees, but mostly sustained by the Ethiopian Government, which helped to finance another irredentist political group. On 27 February 1944 in Addis Ababa, an organization called both 'Natsāi Hamāsān' (Free Eritrea) and 'The Society for the Unification of Ethiopia and Eritrea',³⁹ was established under the sponsorship of the Ethiopian Government. Among its founders was Woldegiorgis, the emperor's minister of the pen, who, in a letter from the British Legation to the chief administrator, was described as being a 'nationalist . . . adept at intrigue' and armed with summary powers of banishment;⁴⁰ Dawit Ogbazgi, the vice-governor of Addis Ababa, who was one of the more active partisans of the irredentist cause; and Gabremeskal Habtemariam, the Director of the Ethiopian Ministry of Posts and Telegraph, its president, who stated in the fall of 1945 that its membership was about three thousand, of whom eight hundred were active members.⁴¹ The main thrust of the new organization was to supply support propaganda, although its stated goal was to assist destitute, unemployed Eritreans living in Addis Ababa, who were to be placed in jobs or else repatriated to Eritrea at the members' expense. In addition, the society, on at least one occasion, 25 September 1945, attempted to influence international opinion for the 'return' of Eritrea to Ethiopia by demonstrating before the British, Russian, French, and United States Legations in Addis Ababa.⁴² The Ethiopian authorities supported the demonstration by allowing government employees to absent themselves on the day of the parade.

Relations between the Unionist Party and the B.M.A. were anything

³⁶ 7 Apr. 1943, F.O. 371/33031/1542.

³⁷ S. H. Longrigg, 'Some Problems of Administration in Eritrea', Mar. 1943, para. 27, F.O. 371/45119/743; F.P.C., Appendices 104 and 107: 2.

³⁸ D. F. Bigelow to Secretary of State, 4 Apr. 1949, U.S. Archives, 884.014/1149.

³⁹ It is unclear whether there were two separate organizations, both led by Gabremeskal Habtemariam and both established at approximately the same time; however, internal evidence and consistency leads one to conclude that they were one and the same.

⁴⁰ Longrigg to Minister, Addis Ababa, 7 June 1944, F.O. 371/41409.2344.

⁴¹ William E. Cole, Jr., Chargé d'Affaires ad interim, to Secretary of State, 3 Oct. 1945, U.S. Archives, 884.014/10-345.

⁴² Ibid.

but cordial. In a letter to the commission, dated 7 November 1947, the Unionist Party claimed that 'the British Military Administration has imperialistic aims in Eritrea'; that it encouraged 'every movement in opposition to the union of Eritrea with Ethiopia'; and that the administrative methods 'used by the British Military Administration are unjust and non-democratic'.⁴³ Though the B.M.A. had difficulties in keeping order while still allowing people, through permit only, to demonstrate and hold public meetings, no other parties complained about the motives and methods of the B.M.A.

Moreover, the Unionist Party accused the B.M.A. of press obstruction, a curious charge since the party had received permission to establish a newspaper in Tigrinya and Arabic. Although the chief secretary of the B.M.A. could 'forbid, modify, or delay any publication',⁴⁴ this proclamation had been considerably relaxed on the arrival of the commission. Editors were no longer required to submit their newspapers for compulsory pre-censorship although as of September 1946 it was forbidden to publish articles or cartoons which were defamatory of the B.M.A., H.M. Government, the British Information Service, or any individual or official of the existing government; which discussed judicial proceedings (as opposed to factual reports of trials); or which in any way might cause some danger to law and order.⁴⁵

After the Four Power Commission presented its report in December 1947 its figures showed that the Unionist Party had not attracted a majority.⁴⁶ As a result, the party became increasingly hostile to the B.M.A. and openly militant toward those Eritreans who did not favour union with Ethiopia. When, in 1948, various political parties opposing union with Ethiopia formed a coalition, known as the Independence Bloc, the Unionists stamped them as traitors and began a new wave of terrorism.⁴⁷ It failed to influence the F.P.C., which, on 15 September 1948, unable to reach a consensus on the disposal of Eritrea, referred the matter to the United Nations in conformity with Article 23 and Annex XI of the Treaty of Peace with Italy of 29 July-15 October 1946. Sporadic harassment, however, of those Italians and Eritreans not supporting irredentism continued from late 1948 to the arrival of the U.N. Commission in February 1950.

Opposition to the Unionist Party was led by the Moslem League, formed by Ibrahim Sultan late in 1946, initially to support the cause of Tigray emancipation. Sultan had been an interpreter for the Italian

⁴³ F.P.C., Appendix 95, 3.

⁴⁴ B.M.A., Proclamation 42, Article 6, 1945.

⁴⁵ F.P.C., Appendix 22.

⁴⁶ The combined figures for those political parties opposing union (c. 673,000) was approximately 23% greater than those in favour (c. 547,000). See F.P.C., Appendices 159-71.

⁴⁷ The Unionists may have derived inspiration from the accounts of contemporary Palestinian violence reported in the *Eritrean Weekly News*. For anti-separatist terrorism, see Trevaskis, *Eritrea*, 96 ff. It seems clear that, contrary to Trevaskis (*ibid.*, 102), terrorism and intimidation were largely Unionist tactics.

Government and saw an opportunity to

Western Province to free themselves from the crushing burden of paying tithes to their masters, the Nabtab. Through the resurrection of the ancient Tigray tribes and clans as important political units, Sultan could aspire to a chieftainship over them all.⁴⁸ Since many of the Beni Amer chiefs who had opposed any restructuring of their master-serf relationships with the Tigray had joined the Unionist Party, it was clear to Sultan and his associates that their work toward the Tigray emancipation could best be served by organizing a party opposing union. Therefore, on 3 December 1946, he met with Muslim leaders and community representatives at Keren to consider Eritrea's political future. At this meeting Said Abubaker El Mirghani was elected president of what became known as the Moslem League and Ibrahim Sultan was voted secretary-general with the power to guide the party's direction.

At the next meeting at Keren on 20-21 January 1947, attended by several thousand delegates, there was little agreement about Eritrea's future. The Tigray and Baria felt their interests would be best served under a British administration, while the few Beni Amer chiefs and elders who had joined the League, favoured a solution which would lead to independence. The Jiberti⁴⁹ of Massawa, the Kunama of the Western Province, the Saho, and the Afar all opposed any solution that would tie them in any way to the British Government. The Jiberti resented the acute unemployment caused by the closure of the Royal Naval Base; the Kunama felt they had been unjustly treated by the British Administration; the Saho were distressed by the lack of British protection from Ethiopian aggression; and the Afar blamed the British for the execution of their unofficial leader, Mohammed Yahya, the Sultan of Anseba, by the Ethiopian Government in 1944. The Afar actually favoured an Italian trusteeship, rather than incorporation into Ethiopia. Lastly, the more than seventeen thousand Sudanese, Arabs, Somalis and Indians, who had little to gain from Ethiopian rule, variously supported the Moslem League and other parties opposing union.⁵⁰

The League finally decided to aim for complete independence, with the qualification that 'if [it were] not considered possible, an international trusteeship for ten years, with internal independence under the control of the British Government'⁵¹ should be established, or an administration by the United Nations. Few at the Keren conference wished to place Eritrea under the tutelage of another foreign country, even Ethiopia. The boundaries of Eritrea were to remain as they were in 1935, unless the restoration to Eritrea of territories inhabited by people seized from it in

⁴⁸ F.P.C., Appendices 17 and 18; and Pollera, *Le Popolazioni Indigene dell'Eritrea* (Bologna, 1935), chap. 34, 168-90.

⁴⁹ Muslims of old stock with a kind of 'droit de cité', who are primarily merchants and tradesmen residing in Massawa and its environs.

⁵⁰ H. L. Farquhar to British Legation, 17 Feb. 1947, U.S. Archives, 884014/2-2047.

⁵¹ F.P.C., Appendix 20, 3.

the past [the Afar and the Beja peoples of the Sudan] was possible'.⁵² The League decided not to give Ethiopia access to the sea since the party thought it could not be accomplished without gravely prejudicing Eritrean interests. The conferees felt sure that, with foreign aid and proper management, Eritrea could become self-supporting and therefore quite capable of self-government. The League opposed the serfdom of the Western Province and declared that Christians and Muslims were brothers.

The Moslem League was financed by annual membership fees and voluntary contributions.⁵³ It claimed 731,764 mostly Muslim members (including women and children).⁵⁴ In the early stages, before splinter parties began to form, its membership had significant numbers of Christians, who later formed their own group primarily because few of them spoke the party's official language, Arabic.

When the party's programme became known, the fact that a British trusteeship had been suggested as a possible alternative to complete, immediate independence was sufficient 'evidence' for the Unionists to accuse the League of being under the control of the B.M.A. While the charge is surely exaggerated, it is clear, after examination of statements made by the Canadian Government to the F.P.C., that the British Foreign Office was interested in partitioning Eritrea in hopes that the Western Province, after a period of trusteeship, might one day be annexed to Sudan.⁵⁵ To win Rome's support for this plan, Great Britain diplomatically encouraged the return of Italian settlers to their African homes, where they could use their considerable knowledge and skills in furthering economic development.

While the League ascertained the benefit to be derived from continued Italian economic presence, it viewed Ethiopia askance. A memorandum from the party to the F.P.C. argued that the Ethiopian Government

still retains the old worn out 'Feudal' system of Government; its people are in such a state of disorganization, ignorance and backwardness that they have had to face chronic poverty despite the fertility of the land and the privilege of independence.⁵⁶

It blamed the Orthodox Church for Ethiopia's historic isolation from the enlightenment of the western world and claimed that in a country where a 'Muslim doesn't have the right to be equal to a Copt', Ethiopia was not fit to be granted any more territory in its 'hope for imperialistic expansion'.⁵⁷ Further, the League asked:

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ An unnamed Italian planter contributed £3,000. See George R. Merrell to Secretary of State, 29 Aug. 1949, U.S. Archives, 884.003-2949.

⁵⁴ The figure 731,764 is 48% higher than F.P.C.'s estimate of its strength.

⁵⁵ United Nations: C.F.M., D.L. 48, IC/179, 9 Aug. 1948; see also F.O. 371 41510/3693, Minutes.

⁵⁶ F.P.C., Appendix 103, 4.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

Is it just that a still barbaric and primitive nation such as the Ethiopians—whose government is unable to improve the lot of its own people—should come into possession of a territory which is far more disciplined, advanced and civilized than Abyssinia?⁴⁸

The same document also attacked the defunct Italian administration for thinking of Eritreans 'as beasts', and for viewing 'a simple Italian peasant [as] better than 1,000 of the so-called chiefs and notables'. While blaming village chiefs for hindering educational and material progress in Eritrea, the League especially attacked headmen who had profited from selling labour to the Italians and recruiting soldiers to join the colonial army for service in Libya, Somaliland, and Ethiopia in 1935-6.⁴⁹ Experience with the Italians had convinced most Muslims that a British trusteeship would be preferable.⁵⁰

According to the F.P.C., although the League did not enjoy majority support, its general program of political non-alignment with Ethiopia accorded with the views of most Eritreans.⁵¹ The commission's findings demonstrated that a majority of Eritreans wanted either independence or a trusteeship which would lead eventually to independence after a set period of time.

In March-April 1947, Muslims of Massawa, desiring to separate themselves from the League, established the National Moslem Party of Massawa, whose program, however, was nearly identical to that of the League.⁵² Osman Adam Bey, its secretary-general, stated that Eritrea was not ready to receive 'freedom and independence' and therefore proposed British trusteeship for a period of ten years, to be followed by complete independence, feeling that Great Britain was 'the only Government which could easily enable the people of this country to be free and independent', since the B.M.A. had been 'very much interested in the welfare and progress of the people of the country'.⁵³ The establishment of native courts, the building of schools, and the improvement of health conditions by the B.M.A. had made a favourable impression with the National Party, which also felt that Eritreans were being granted a degree of freedom in determining their own future that they had not known before.

The party claimed a membership of 56,377, of whom 25,000 were said to be Afar of the northern tribes. The commission, however, doubted if the Afar were actually members, after a deputation of northern Afar failed to mention any affiliation with the party.⁵⁴ The party eventually became absorbed into the Independence Bloc after the commission's failure to achieve a solution for Eritrea's future.

The opinions of the League and the National Party were shared by a

⁴⁸ F.P.C., Appendix 107, 2.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ F.P.C., Appendix 124, 2.

⁵¹ See representative strength of political parties in F.P.C., Appendixes 157-73.

⁵² F.P.C., Appendix 20, 10.

⁵³ F.P.C., Appendix 116.

⁵⁴ F.P.C., Appendix 116.

number of Eritrean Orthodox who also saw no advantage in being joined to Ethiopia, but who felt their interests could be best served by a party of their own, which was accomplished at Adi Caieh on 18 February 1947. Its official title was the Eritrean Liberal Progressive Party (E.L.P.P.), better known as 'Eritreans for Eritrea'. Its president was the venerable conciliator, Ras Tesemma Asmerom. A successful merchant, Seium Maasio, acted as secretary-general up to 1950. Its most active member, however, was Woldeab Woldemariam, the sub-editor of the Tigrinya newspaper, *The Eritrean Weekly News* (circulation, c. 5,000), published by the British Information Services.

The E.L.P.P. claimed 53,000 members, of whom only 1,300 were from the predominantly Christian highland area. It was financed exclusively by its members, each of whom had to have been born in Eritrea. On 25 October 1947, the party unanimously decided that Eritrea must have absolute independence within its present boundaries under the guidance of an Eritrean committee of 'intellectuals' and the present administration which, under the general supervision of the United Nations, gradually would devolve its power during a period of not more than ten years.

The E.L.P.P. took up the banner of the Tigray irredentists who felt that all Tigrinya-speaking people should once again be united as before 26 October 1896, when Eritrea's southern boundary with Ethiopia was determined. In addition, the party suggested that the territory in the Sudan inhabited by the Habab, Beni Amer and Beja, be annexed to Eritrea.⁶² It categorically opposed ceding Asseb or Massawa to Ethiopia as such a move would 'paralyse the general economic life of Eritrea'.⁶³ In order for Eritrea to develop its economy, the party advocated the granting of a long-term loan by the United Nations; raising domestic taxation⁶⁴; enlarging the fishing industry; developing the salt industry; reducing the salaries of foreign employees (who might remain in various departments after independence); improving the cattle stock through cross-breeding; suspending further immigration; and increasing the productivity of the gold industry. The E.L.P.P. wanted a parliament on the British model, and thought the courts (still based largely on the Italian system) should be completely reorganized and new laws promulgated to determine jurisdiction over Europeans and Eritreans. (During the British Administration, all cases involving a native and a European were tried in Italian courts rather than in native courts, which caused Eritreans much frustration.)

From its inception, the E.L.P.P. was continually harassed by pro-unionists, who frequently resorted to violence, often directed at the

⁶² These tribes had been divided by the convention of Mar. 1890.

⁶³ E.P.C., Appendix 20, 7.

⁶⁴ Taxation had been light under both the Italian and British administrations, although it should be noted that during the Italian administration (which had abolished the Nabitsh title system), the Tigray were forced to contribute both the annual tribute (payable by the Beni Amer tribe to the Italian administration) and the tithes.

party's most ardent and articulate leader, Woldeab Woldemariam, who by April 1950 had suffered at least five assassination attempts. Through continued intimidation and bribery, the party began to lose its following. A political sentiment turned toward the Unionists. Throughout 1948 and 1949, highland Christians, as well as Italians, opposing the Unionist cause, were threatened with violence in letters and pamphlets if they continued to support the Independence Bloc. Moreover, the Orthodox Church warned in the columns of *Ethiopia*, a Unionist publication appearing first in 1948, that 'the Church would not grant facilities as regards baptism, marriage, burial, communion, and absolution to members [sic] of the Bloc or to their families'.⁶⁸ In addition, Muslim Tigrai of the Western Province, not having Unionist Party membership cards, were now ejected by the Ethiopian authorities when they attempted to cross the Ethiopian border in search of grazing during the dry months of winter and spring. Under such pressures, the Liberal Progressive Party eventually split. By mid-1949, Seium Maaseio, leader of one of the factions, continued to favour independence, but only after a 20-year Anglo-Ethiopian trusteeship.⁶⁹

Once the Council of Foreign Ministers had decided on 23 September 1946 that Rome must renounce all claims to her former colonies, the Italian community in Eritrea recognized a need to ally themselves with a group either espousing independence or trusteeship, if they were to retain any of their former influence. In July 1946, the Italian Government declared that it intended to send a commission to Eritrea to examine the claims of Eritrean ex-soldiers.⁷⁰ Shortly after this announcement, the Veterans' Association, which had been established in the spring of 1944 to press the Italian Government to honour its obligations to pay Eritrean ex-soldiers their back wages and others their gratuities and pensions, declared itself in favour of Italian trusteeship. The association, to some extent a front for the Italian community's efforts to re-establish control over Eritrea, applied for permission to become a political organization, the Pro-Italy Party. Both the Unionists and Moslem League objected to the existence of any group that favoured the return of Italian rule to Eritrea and protested so strongly to the British Administration that a month passed before the Pro-Italy Party received official sanction on 29 September 1947.

Not all members of the association became members of the Pro-Italy Party. Of the approximately 35,000 members of the Veterans' Association, about 30,000 were active members of the Pro-Italy Party and favoured an Italian trusteeship.⁷¹ Both the association and the party continued to exist side by side, the latter acting as the political arm of the former in its attempt to recover unpaid wages for Eritrean ex-soldiers.

⁶⁸ Trevaskis, *Eritrea*, 66.

⁶⁹ Merrill to Sec. of State, 29 Aug. 1949, U.S. Archives, 84.00 8-2049.

⁷⁰ Trevaskis, *Eritrea*, 79.

⁷¹ F.P.C., Appendix 136.

Because of the party's strong Italian elements, the B.M.A. insisted that its headquarters be in Asmara rather than Keren as originally requested. Its membership, including women and children, was estimated at 219,000 (72 per cent from the Western Province), approximately the same number later claimed by the Veterans' Association to the commission.⁷² The party's president and official representative, Idris Hassen, was the 'Na'ib' of Massawa. Although it claimed to be solely financed by its members, the Unionists, Moslem League, and the British Administration believed that the party received most of its operating funds from the Italian community, borne out by the party's extravagant praise of the Italian legacy. The party's platform called for an Italian trusteeship, leading to independence 'as soon as possible' under the strict control of the United Nations. It advocated the establishment of a parliament and 'equality of rights for all persons residing in the territory'.⁷³ The political impact of this group was negligible.

After the commission left Eritrea, the Pro-Italy Party came under the influence of the Italo-Eritrean Association (composed of 11,000 Italians born in Eritrea, 1,300 long-term Italian settlers, nearly 15,000 half-castes, and about 17,000 Eritrean women, the wives or mothers of Italians and half-castes). The party realized that after the failure of the Bevin-Sforza proposals⁷⁴ in the United Nations, on 17 May 1949, it could no longer hope for an Italian trusteeship and so had no other choice but to support a program which would create a nominally independent Eritrea under Italian political and economic domination. The Pro-Italy Party, therefore, added the word Eritrean to its name, becoming the New Eritrean Pro-Italy Party, hoping this designation would attract more Eritreans, especially those who had only nominal economic ties with the Italian community.

In 1949, during the spring session of the United Nations, a delegation from the New Eritrean Pro-Italy Party joined with representatives from the Moslem League and Italo-Eritrean Association to form a coalition that was later augmented by the Liberal Progressive Party, the National Party of Massawa, and the Veterans' Association. In combination, they opposed union with Ethiopia and thus became known as the Independence Bloc led by Ibrahim Sultan. Two other groups, the Independent Eritrea Party (c. 23,000 adherents, mostly former Unionists from the Keren District), led by Woldeab Woldemariam, and the Intellectual Association of Eritreans (composed of a small number of educated Eritreans) joined the Bloc in a collective effort to secure independence for Eritrea.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ 'Na'ib, or agent, is a Turkish title given to the family in Massawa who administered the Samhar and, later, only Massawa.

⁷⁴ F.P.C., Appendix 20, 9.

⁷⁵ As regards Eritrea, the proposals stated 'that Eritrea, except for the Western Province, be incorporated into Ethiopia and that the Western Province be incorporated into the Sudan'. G.A.O.R., 3rd session, pt. 2, 1st Committee Annexes A/c. 1/466.

The decision of Ibrahim Sultan to join forces with the Italians in the New Eritrean Association led to disunity within the Independence Bloc. Sultan countered Ethiopian Government accusations that he had received Italian bribes by saying he favoured Eritrean-European co-operation and would willingly accept money from the Italian community to further that aim while avowing that he had made no real commitments to Rome.⁷⁶ But when he admitted that he had promised Addis Ababa such economic advantages as transit rights and customs concessions, he was irreparably tainted in the eyes of his religious compatriots, and his political following rapidly disintegrated.

Early in 1949 the Independence Bloc received renewed support from former Unionist Muslims, who had been bribed by Count Di Gropello, the Italian Government's liaison officer in Eritrea, who 'took little pains to conceal his activities ... of disbursing very considerable sums of money in the cause of independence'.⁷⁷ Unionist support in the predominantly Muslim lowlands in the west had been reduced to about 23,000.⁷⁸

From the end of 1949 to the beginning of 1950, Ibrahim Sultan began to lose his core support, who feared they were supporting an independence guided by Rome. By August 1949, three factions emerged in the Muslim west: an Italo-phile, anti-partition group; an Italo-phobe group, favouring independence, but willing to accept partition to avoid Rome's domination; and a group who, although by and large undecided, would probably oppose partition.⁷⁹ Both the United States and Great Britain had indicated to Sultan their support for partition and for cession of at least the eastern portion of Eritrea to Ethiopia, but only the British Government, through the Canadian Government's communications with the commission, had suggested a trusteeship for the Western Province. This solution, however, was opposed by most of its inhabitants and, furthermore, would have meant an end to Sultan's political career.⁸⁰

Between October 1949 and February 1950, violence caused further disunity among members of the Independence Bloc. During this period, nine Italians, one Indian, one Greek, three Christian supporters of the Bloc, and four Muslim tribesmen were assassinated; Italian cafés were attacked; hand-grenades were thrown at Italian and Eritrean supporters of the Bloc; Italian farms were raided and ransacked; and an open assault was made on a village whose district chief favoured the Bloc.⁸¹ In Asmara, these disturbances culminated in a massacre of at least fifty people from a bomb thrown into a funeral procession, resulting in three days of rioting

⁷⁶ Merrell to Secretary of State, 29 Aug. 1949, U.S. Archives, 884.00,8-2949.

⁷⁷ Trevaskis, *Eritrea*, 95.

⁷⁸ In Aug. 1948, more than 300 Ethiopian flags were displayed in the largely Muslim Western Province to celebrate the emperor's birthday; a year later only 13 flags were counted. See Merrell to Sec. of State, 29 Aug. 1949, U.S. Archives, 884.00,8-2949.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ Trevaskis, *Eritrea*, 91.

between 21-23 February 1950.⁴² Many rioters fled to the safety of Ethiopia.⁴³

Threats and continued violence, coupled with the distrust of Ibrahim Sultan's Italian connexions by the unofficial leader of the Tigray tribes, Sheikh Ali Musz Radai, brought final disintegration to the Bloc and the unity necessary to bring about an independent Eritrea. The first group to break away from the Bloc called itself the Independent Moslem League, most of whose adherents from central and eastern Eritrea had been members of the Moslem League. After receiving guarantees from the Ethiopian Government that it would respect Muslim institutions and that Arabic would be taught in the schools along with Amharic, they were persuaded to favour union with Ethiopia.

Shortly after the arrival of the U.N. Commission in February 1950, three more parties developed out of the Independence Bloc.⁴⁴ The first was the Liberal Unionist Party (composed of former members of the Liberal Progressive Party), looking for a compromise with the Unionist Party rather than an Italian-sponsored independence. Drawing most of its support from eastern Eritrea, it was led by Dejazmatch Abraha Tesemma. After visiting Addis Ababa and being assured that after union the management of Eritrea's affairs would be left to Eritreans,⁴⁵ Tesemma and his party pledged their support for a conditional union. The second, the Independent Eritrea United to Ethiopia Party (composed of former members of the Independent Eritrea Party), drawing its main support from Keren and the west, withdrew from the Bloc; it advocated union with Ethiopia but was agreeable to independence, provided that union with Ethiopia followed. The third group to leave the Bloc was the Moslem League of the Western Province (composed of former members of the Moslem League), the creation of Sheikh Radai of the Tigray tribes, who had become suspicious of Italian influence in the Moslem League. Further, it did not want the Western Province to be annexed to the Sudan because of the Beni Amer-Hadendowa quarrel⁴⁶; it therefore advocated, at least for the Western Province, the continuance of the British Condominium for a period of 10 years, leaving the rest of the territory to decide its own future. The Unionist Party came to terms with this group by suggesting

⁴² Report of the United Nations Commission for Eritrea, G.A.O.R., 5th Session, Supplement No. 3 (A/1235), 29.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ G.A.O.R., 5th Session, Supplement 3, 17-21.

⁴⁵ *Trevelyan, Eritrea*, 38.

⁴⁶ Since the border had been fixed between Sudan and Eritrea on 18 Feb. 1907, there had been periodic raids across the border mainly for cattle. When the British occupied Eritrea in 1941, the Hadendows in the Sudan assumed that grazing lands in the Barka lowlands, which they used annually, would soon become theirs. Early in 1942, a tribal war was set off by a Beni Amer raiding party, in reprisal for a camel theft by the Hadendows. Fighting continued off and on for more than three years until in Dec. 1945 a peace settlement was reached. As a result of this long-standing feud, the Western Province, led by the Beni Amer chiefs, opposed partition. See *Trevelyan, Eritrea*, 70-1.

a separate solution for the Western Province, but only if its inhabitants did not wish to join Ethiopia, in which case the Unionists would demand the unconditional annexation of the rest of Eritrea.

The Independence Bloc continued to receive support from the New Eritrea Party, the Independent Eritrea Party, the Liberal Progressive Party, the National Party of Massawa, the Veterans' Association, the Intellectual Association, and the Italo-Eritrean Association, all of whom still advocated immediate independence for the whole of Eritrea. The Bloc at this point comprised mainly Ibrahim Sultan and his loyal following. The New Eritrea Party and the Italo-Eritrean Association both advocated a United Nations' trusteeship if independence should prove unworkable. The Intellectual Association of Eritreans did not object to union with Ethiopia, if after independence an elected Eritrean parliament approved such a union.⁹⁷

The Italo-Eritrean Association sought to appease those who had left the Independence Bloc and favoured a conditional union by suggesting a union with Ethiopia based upon free harbour zones at Massawa and Assab. The association continued to stress the important 'civilizing' role Italians had played in Eritrea and argued that annexation or federation with Ethiopia would be a step backward. Its efforts at compromise were in vain, for on 2 December 1950, the U.N. General Assembly adopted a resolution which stated that 'Eritrea shall constitute an autonomous unit federated with Ethiopia under the sovereignty of the Ethiopian crown'.⁹⁸ The only work left for the U.N. was to appoint another commission to implement the resolution.

By the time the U.N. Commissioner had held his consultations of 11-20 July 1951 with the political parties, the Independence Bloc had changed its name to the Eritrean Democratic Front (composed of the Modern League of Eritrea, the Liberal Progressive Party, the New Eritrean Party, the Independent Party, the Italo-Eritrean Association, and the War Veterans' Association). Their main concern was to prevent the emperor from having a representative in the Eritrean Assembly at all. The Liberal Unionist Party was willing to allow the emperor a representative in the Executive, provided that he was strictly an observer without powers. The Independent Party thought the emperor should have a representative with only an advisory capacity, while the Eritrean Party felt that the stronger the Federal link between Eritrea and Ethiopia the better. The efforts of the Eritrean Democratic Front failed, and the emperor secured a representative who acted as a second executive, able to thwart any degree of independence of the Eritrean Assembly.

⁹⁷ This, today, has been considered by some a viable solution to the Eritrean question: some members of the Eritrean Liberation Front and the Eritrean Peoples' Liberation Forces have suggested that union with Ethiopia may be possible but only after independence has been achieved.

⁹⁸ Final Report of the United Nations Commissioner in Eritrea, G.A.O.R., 5th Session, Supplement 15 (A. 2155), 1952, 75-6.

The disastrous turning point in the progress of those parties advocating independence or trusteeship came with the close association of the Independence Bloc with the Italian community. Native Eritreans distrusted the motives of the Italian community in supporting independence but were equally skeptical about joining hands with Ethiopia. The resulting disunity among the anti-unionists helped the Ethiopian Government to convince the U.N. that Eritrea's best hopes for the future lay with the Solomonian Crown. With the U.N.'s resolution in effect, Eritrea's political and economic future had been firmly linked with that of Ethiopia. Nonetheless, thousands of Eritreans had been involved in the political process, and political consciousness had been raised considerably, an experience that ultimately made it more difficult for Ethiopia to govern Eritrea. Some of Eritrea's political leaders, such as Dejach Tedla Bairu, attained high positions in the new government, which was formed with the help of the British Administration and the United Nations' commissioner. Others, such as Woldeab Woldemariam, Ibrahim Sultan, and Abraha Tesenuma, were eventually forced to flee Eritrea and seek political asylum. Woldeab Woldemariam and Ibrahim Sultan did not abandon their opposition to the U.N.'s solution of Eritrea's political future, and in the late 1950s in Cairo they began to organize anew. As time passed, Eritrea came more closely under the control of the Ethiopian Government, and many Eritreans, even many of those who had espoused union, became increasingly disenchanted.

Dissatisfaction developed into overt protest. With the gradual usurpation of Eritrea's independent federal status by the Ethiopian Government, especially through the emperor's representative in the Eritrean Assembly, many Eritreans began to realize that the country would soon become a mere pawn of Addis Ababa. When on 14 November 1962, the assembly voted 'unanimously' to change Eritrea's status to that of a province,⁸⁸ thus abrogating the U.N.'s resolution that had created Eritrea as a federal state within the limited jurisdiction of the Ethiopian Government, protest grew and eventually developed into a fully-fledged movement for the complete independence of Eritrea. This movement became known as the Eritrean Liberation Front, aspiring to do what the Independence Bloc had failed to accomplish.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ The following day, the emperor unilaterally, without consulting the U.N., proclaimed (Order No. 27) the termination of Eritrea's federal status. 'Unanimity' in the Eritrean Assembly was obtained through intimidation by Ethiopian Government troops parading outside the parliament building. See interview with Tedla Bairu, *Dagnew Nyakter*, 14 July 1967: 42. In the proclamation, such provisions as Article 5 that 'All rights, powers, duties and obligations of the former Administration of Eritrea become, . . . the rights, powers, duties and obligations of the Imperial Ethiopian Government', stood in direct opposition to the fundamental precept of the Ethiopian Constitution that all power ultimately emanated from the emperor. See *Ethiopia Observer*, VI, 4 (1963), 310-12.

⁸⁹ In preparing this article, I unfortunately did not have an opportunity to consult the Trevelyan papers in the Library of Rhodes House, Oxford (Ms. Br. Emp. a. 367).

SUMMARY

In May 1941, after the Italians' capitulation, the British immediately took over the administration of Eritrea for the duration of the war and until an international body could decide the former colony's future. From 1941 to 1950, the political direction of Eritrea remained uncertain until the U.N. commission reached its compromise solution. Ultimately, the Ethiopian Government contravened the U.N. agreement and unilaterally annexed Eritrea in 1952, which set in motion the present struggle for independence.

The British Military Administration, acting as an interim government, attempted with moderate success to create an atmosphere in which all people of Eritrea might have the maximum voice in determining their political future. From the end of the war through the arrival of the U.N. commission in February 1950, there was a flurry of political activity. Although initially five political parties were formed, which in time became spin-offs and re-formations, the parties, two main groups could be distinguished along geographical boundaries, the lowlands versus the highlands, separatist Muslims versus Unionist Christians. The historical suspicion and animosity between Orthodox and Muslims continued to divide Eritrean loyalties. Affiliation, however, with one or another political party was not observed strictly on geographical or religious grounds. A small number of educated Orthodox saw no advantage in Eritrea's incorporation into Ethiopia and thus formed a pocket of Christian separatists who would have undoubtedly obtained greater allegiance had not the Orthodox priesthood threatened excommunication for anyone not espousing the Unionist cause. On the other hand a small nucleus of Muslims, mostly chiefs and landed aristocracy, favored union with the government in Addis Ababa, for their feudalistic hold on the large number of Tigray serfs (numbering three-fifths of all Muslims in Eritrea) would have been retained under Ethiopian rule.

By the end of 1946, there was widespread but unorganized anti-Unionist sentiment; elections held in 1947 by the Four Power Commission showed that a small majority of all Eritreans opposed union. The anti-Unionist cause profited from Ethiopia's intimidation and terrorist interference, which was largely counter-productive; moreover, the irredentist argument failed to convince most Muslims and some Orthodox that Eritrea would prosper under the aegis of one of Africa's least developed countries. It seems clear that terrorism and intimidation were largely Unionist tactics and that the anti-Unionist campaign became popular not so much because of Italian contributions (which were far less than those of the Ethiopian Government to its irredentist cause) but rather because of the grass-roots nature of the Muslim movement.

Unfortunately, the future of Eritrea after two commissions and voluminous reports was decided in the international arena which failed to satisfy either side, but rather planted the seeds for future conflict.

the Unionist Party in Eritrea did not, in 1944, favour constitutional union with the Solomonian Crown.²

Two years later, the lines were more sharply drawn. True, this does not seem to have been appreciated by G. K. N. Trevaskis, another British administrator and also the author of the only substantial study in English of modern Eritrean politics. According to Trevaskis, 'at the close of 1946 ... the Unionist Party ... appeared to be unchallengeable'.³ This judgment, however, now seems wide of the mark. For by this time separatists opposed to Eritrea's union with Ethiopia had begun to organize. In December, one such group met at Keren, forming what became known as the Moslem League, drawing its membership from the heavily Islamic areas of the Western Province, Massawa and the Red Sea districts, with a small following of Christians from the predominantly Christian highlands. Later, in the spring of 1947, a splinter-group from the Moslem League withdrew to establish the National Moslem Party of Massawa. A third predominantly Muslim group, the New Eritrean Pro-Italy Party, emerged late in September 1947, on the eve of the arrival of the Four Power Commission (F.P.C.). Its members, largely supported by the Italian community, hoped that if they supported Rome's desire to recover Eritrea, Italy would help it to achieve independence. The party felt that the economic and educational opportunities it had enjoyed under the Italian Administration would be lost if Eritrea were to come under the Ethiopian Crown. The predominantly Christian party, the Eritrean Liberal Progressive Party, which opposed the union of Eritrea with Ethiopia, was established in February 1948.

The three predominantly Muslim parties and the Eritrean Liberal Progressive Party shared one common interest: to avoid being incorporated into Ethiopia, whose government's motives many Eritreans (Christian and Muslim alike, but especially the latter) quite rightly suspected were not altruistic.⁴ Each major party (the Unionists and the Moslem League)

² Longrigg to H.M. Minister, British Legation, Addis Ababa, 7 June 1944, F.O. 371/41499/2344, and United States, National Archives, Department of State, Papers Relating to the Internal Affairs of Ethiopia [hereafter, U.S. Archives], J. K. Caldwell, American Legation, Addis Ababa, to Secretary of State, 28 Nov. 1944, 865D.01, 11-2041.

³ G. K. N. Trevaskis, *Eritrea: a Colony in Transition* (Oxford, 1962), 49. Between 1903 and 1931 Trevaskis held various administrative posts in Asseb, Sera and Western Province; he was a member of the British Delegation to the Four Power Commission and acted as British Liaison Officer to the U.N. Commission in Eritrea, 1950. See footnote 90, p. 280.

⁴ Longrigg to Minister, Addis Ababa, 7 June 1944, para. 4, F.O. 371/41499/2344; S. H. Longrigg, 'Some Problems of Administration in Eritrea', Mar. 1944, paras. 31 and 34, F.O. 371/45116/745; Four Power Commission for the Investigation of the Former Italian Colonies: Report on Eritrea, Appendix 101: 4 and 6 (Memo by Eritrean Liberal Progressive Party), Appendix 103: 4-5 (Memo by the Moslem League), unpub. report, London and New York (available in New York at the United Nations Library, and in London in the State Papers Room of the British Library); for a brief discussion of the historical relationships between Eritrea and Ethiopia, see: S. F. Nadel, 'Eritrea and Her Neighbours', F.O. 371/35658/4110; Savell, H.M. Chargé d'Affaires to E.

claimed the support of an overwhelming majority of the population. The total number of adherents claimed by all parties amounted to 1.2 million according to hearings of the F.P.C. (1.8 million according to documents submitted by each party). The British Administration in 1952 estimated Eritrea's population at slightly more than one million while the estimate of the F.P.C. was 930,847. The most exaggerated claims came from the Unionist Party.

As the political parties organized themselves during 1952, through meetings and public demonstrations, the British Military Administration (B.M.A.) prepared for the 'election' of representatives in the families and clans to facilitate the F.P.C.'s job of ascertaining the wishes of the people.⁴ There is great doubt whether the people of the various clans and families actually participated in an election process in the Western sense. Just how over 3,000 representatives were 'elected' was not made clear in the commission reports. It is quite likely that village chiefs, clan heads, and elders were approached by the B.M.A. just prior to the arrival of the commission and requested to 'elect' representatives who would appear before it. The difficulty of estimating the exact number represented by each elected deputy was further complicated by the fact that some deputies claimed to speak only for male adults while others stated they spoke for their entire constituency. In regard to voting procedures, the Delegation from Pakistan found that 'the Commission was not able to verify whether the persons presenting themselves to it had really been chosen by their villages or community', . . . and that 'a comparison with the census figures revealed that the representatives had greatly exaggerated the size of their communities'.⁵ Such lack of distinct, consistent criteria for representation caused the commission a good deal of uncertainty in formulating their final opinions.

It is clear from the commission's summary reports that the division of opinion about the future of Eritrea among the representatives was along political, religious, and, to a lesser degree, geographic lines.⁶ Many delegates appeared to have no idea just whom or what they were supposed to be representing. Some of their responses to the commission were parrot-like, especially among those who favoured the Unionist cause, as

Bevin, M.P., 12 Sept. 1945, British Legation, A.A., F.O. 371/4614/2/1, and name containing the important articles of the Hewitt Treaty (so called), which Ethiopia wrongly advanced as Great Britain's recognition of her claim to Eritrea, F.O. 371/4603/2/3649; and M. Perham, *The Government of Ethiopia* (London, 2nd ed., 1964), Appendix G.

⁴ The commission heard 3,336 representatives from 23 Nov. to 14 Dec. 1947, each of whom was affiliated with a political party (Unionist—1,339 or 42%; Modern League—1,033 or 31%; Pro-Italy—358 or 11%; Liberal Progressive—113 or 3%; and the National Party of Massawa—33 or 1%), see F.P.C., Report on Eritrea, 1948.

⁵ Council of Foreign Ministers (Deputies), *Former Italian Colonies, Supplementary Views of Other Interested Governments*, United Nations, C.F.M./D/L/48, IC/166, 5 Aug. 1948.

⁶ Four Power Commission Report, Appendices 159-73.

