

The Anti-colonial political and military struggle Part X

Written by Million Eyob

In the second meeting, the German authorities retreated from their previous opinion, informed the EPLF delegates of the presence of a Dergue delegation in Berlin and stated that it has assured them of its readiness to meet with the EPLF delegation. The EPLF delegation proposed that since the East German authorities were aware of EPLF position, they should also get the opinion of the Dergue's delegation and act as mediators between the two groups. The EPLF put forward this suggestion because it wanted to find out if the Dergue really had a new proposal as the East German had claimed. On their part the Germans proposed face to face talks, and the EPLF agreed. But contrary to the assurance and statement of the Germans, the Dergue did not have a new proposal. In the meeting the delegation of the Dergue launched into a spiel on the 3000 year old history of Ethiopia, the place of Eritrea in that history, the role of the Eritrean revolution in the downfall of Haile Selassie, the Dergue's "program of Democratic Revolution" and the purported gains achieved by the people on basis of the program. The EPLF delegation stated that the myth of a 3000 year old history was specious and baseless, elaborated on the history and the just and legitimate struggle of the Eritrean people and expressed the EPLF's rejection of the Dergue's case. In addition it asked the Dergue's delegation to present its proposal if it had any.

In the third meeting as well, no new proposal was submitted. The EPLF delegation declared that it would present its overall views on the issues. The German representatives presented a four point proposal dealing, in general terms, with continuation of the dialogue and proposed that this should be studied by the two parties, the EPLF and the Dergue. The meeting was concluded after it set a date meeting.

In the fourth meeting, the EPLF delegation handed to the East German authorities a memorandum clarifying historical facts and outlining its clear position on a peaceful solution. It declared that there was nothing to warrant a meeting with the Dergue delegation. However, as the German representatives suggested that the EPLF delegation also hand the document to the Dergue delegation and listen to what ever opinion it may have, a meeting was held and the memorandum given to the representative of the Dergue. When the delegation of the Dergue made a speech with a new and threatening tone, the EPLF delegation declared that the EPLF would, under no circumstance submit to threats and intimidations. The Germans too changed their tone and instead of their usual assurance, warned that the Dergue which had already defeated Somalia, had made massive military preparations, and advised that there would be dire and terrible consequence unless the EPLF changes its stand. They also stated that they would give their opinion on the EPLF memorandum after studying it and would set and announce the date for the next meeting. A month later, the Dergue started its large-scale offensive.

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The Berlin meeting were taken by many parties as an opportunity to conduct a propaganda campaign against the EPLF and exploit the difference inside the Eritrean revolution, particularly that between the EPLF and ELF. Although the EPLF had every right to independently initiate, conduct or engage in contacts, it decided to act in coordination with the ELF, because it was determined to ensure that the contacts would not be exploited as a pretext for worsening the internal conflict.

But the EPLF's proposal for a joint and coordinated move was not accepted by the ELF, which was only too eager to misconstrue the talks as having been prompted by the EPLF weakness and intensify the old defamation campaign of EPLF "collusion with the enemy". The Soviet Union too attempted to exploit the Berlin meetings, by directing through various means, an anti-EPLF propaganda campaign and more importantly by making numerous approaches and showing favor to the ELF in an effort in winning the organization.