

The African Student Union's View: On The Oromo Issue

The political map of Africa changes at a bewildering rate. Since 1946, colonies and protectorates have become independent states, boundaries have been drawn and redrawn, federations formed and failed. African leaders have risen to power and international prominence, and the "African Bloc" in the United Nations is a force to be reckoned with. No signs appear that the current wave of political activity in Africa is soon to abate. The "wind of change" as former British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan has called the urge to African independence, will prevail for years to come. Like the trade winds above the equator, the wind of change is driving a path into Africa's oldest Empire - Ethiopia. The past and present struggles of the various nationalities including the Oromos, Eriterians, Somalis, etc against Amhara domination is a case in point. The various nationalities of the Empire of Ethiopia were brought together by the imperialistic and colonialist principle of "might is right." The Amharas saw the conquest of the Oromos as involving simply "the visible entry of the Oromos into the Empire of civilization." To them it was a messianic duty to pacify the

Oromos long detained in barbarism. But this was the Amhara's view of Oromo society not the Oromo's.

The ultimate explanation for the ineffectiveness of Oromo resistance to Amhara conquest lay in the fact:

1. the superiority of the Amhara colonial armies in arms, experience and strategy;
2. the means of coercion (security forces), as in most African states, were monopolized by the colonial governments and,
3. at the time of colonialization the people of Oromia were not united.

But the struggle between the Addis Ababa government and the Oromo Liberation Front for control of the land of the Oromos has been going on for the last 90 years. The point of departure is the reign of the Emperor Menelik who captured the Ogaden in 1891 and went on to conquer to the land of the Oromos in the south in 189. When Menelik died in 1913, Haile Selassie emerged as the new ruler in 1928 and simply colonial rule. But from the early 1960s when Oromo resistance began to take shape, the super powers began to take a hand in the Horn of Africa. This area is close to the West's oil supply

route which pass through the Indian Ocean and the Red Sea. From the time of Somali independence, the super powers were fairly balanced in the Horn of Africa. While the U.S. virtually controlled Ethiopia and the Russians dominated Somalia, the Oromos and other nationalities could not hope to be given their independence. For the super powers, the status quo was too important. 1974 was a crucial year in the Horn of Africa as all the alignments were turned upside down. The old Emperor was pushed out and a Marxist government took over in Ethiopia.

However, when the nationalists started to make heavy inroads into what was officially under Ethiopian control, the Ethiopians started to get massive Russian and Cuban support to neutralize nationalist Oromo Liberation Front forces.

If, therefore the Organization

of African Unity calls for the eradication of all forms of colonialism on the Continent of Africa, should we apply double standards on the Oromo issue? Should colonialism be called colonialism only when the colonial master is a white? To me and lots of other people, it makes no difference whether the colonial master is black or white, colonialism is colonialism.

We the undersigned were asked by the above association to investigate and present a report on the question of the Oromos in Ethiopia. Though our primary concern is Article 2 (1a) of The Charter of the Organization of African Unity which provides for promoting the unity and solidarity of the African States and peoples, we cannot overlook realities in the continent of Africa.

After consulting with all the available material in the library and information ob-

tained from interviews, we are of the opinion that:-

- (1) a problem exists in Ethiopia.
- (2) the Oromos are a people in the state of Ethiopia.
- (3) the regime in Ethiopia is to a large extent not representative of all the people of Ethiopia because:-
 - i. the regime was not popularly elected.
 - ii. the regime systematically excludes the majority Oromo people from government.
 - iii. the government is largely controlled by the minority Amharas;
 - (4) the Ethiopian government aims at the systematic physical elimination of the majority Oromos.
 - (5) the presence of over 20,000 Cuban and other Soviet proxy forces in Ethiopia to maintain the

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