

# ERITREA NOW



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## THE PRESENT SITUATION

(Text of a press conference given in Rome, March 3, 1979)

### INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY CELEBRATED THROUGHOUT ERITREA

International Women's Day, March 8th, was celebrated by the Eritrean masses and the EPLA fighters in the liberated areas and the battle Fronts, by EPLF branches in enemy occupied areas and by EPLF mass organizations abroad. The revolutionary significance of March 8, this day of solidarity with the oppressed and fighting women of the world, carries additional weight for the Eritrean people since the on-going EPLF led armed struggle situates the social emancipation of Eritrean women as one of its central and democratic tasks.

The event was celebrated this year with revolutionary zeal in many parts of the country, in spite of the existing difficulties. Mass rallies, public meetings, demonstrations invigorated with revolutionary songs, cultural shows and public speeches were held in all the liberated areas.

In this meetings, the Eritrean masses and EPLF combatants exchanged views, displayed posters depicting their revolutionary gains and forwarded timely slogans summing up their revolutionary experiences and convictions. The slogans read: "The Aggression of the Dergue and its supporters cannot stemm the Eritrean Women's struggle!!" "Correct Strategic Withdrawal guarrantees our Victory!!" etc.

In particular, a big festival took place in Semenawi Bahri in which members of the Association of Eritrean Peasants and the Association of Women, Youth, Students and the Red Flowers from the whole administrative zone participated. Members of the Central Committee of the EPLF and representatives of the mass organizations gave speeches elucidating the class con-

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While the greater part of the international public opinion is maintaining its silence on the sufferings of the Eritrean people and while the Ethiopian aggressors and their allies are vainly trying to give the impression that the armed resistance in Eritrea has been crushed, the Eritrean people are almost single-handedly fighting the most fierce battles in their 18-year armed struggle and scoring new victories.

The Ethiopian offensive which began in mid-June 1978 has since the middle of January 1979 entered its third phase and is being escalated. The first phase of the offensive totally frustrated, the involvement and direct participation of the Soviet Union in the war became more and pronounced. The huge army conscripted by the Ethiopian fascist junta and the quantity and sophistication of the arms supplied to the enemy by the Soviet Union, necessitated for a change of tactic on our part. For in order to change the balance of forces in our favour and be able to pass to the counter-offensive, it was imperative, as much as possible, to avoid positional (defensive) warfare, for such a strategy would have

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### EDITORIAL NOTE.

Mekalih Sewrana will henceforth be called **ERITREA NOW**. The change in name does not imply any change in line or perspective. **ERITREA NOW** will thus carry over the numerical sequence and periodicity of Mekalih, and in the footsteps of the latter, will feature developments in the Eritrean revolution. Needless to mention, annual subscription arrangements already made for Mekalih will automatically pass to **ERITREA NOW**.

## THE PRESENT SITUATION...

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meant the weakening of our human and material potential. Thus, after inflicting heavy losses on the enemy, the EPLF withdrew from Keren as well as from the towns in the eastern front, changing its tactic from one of positional defense into mobile and guerrilla activity in those areas. The correctness of the tactics adopted by the EPLF to cope up with the new situation are being proved daily. Contrary to the propaganda of the enemy, the Eritrean people's struggle, far from being crushed militarily, is gaining momentum everyday and the enemy is being smashed in all the fronts. True, the recapture of some of our liberated areas by the enemy has caused a temporary disruption on the important political and social transformations that had been in the process there. But on the other hand, changing our tactics to cope up with the new situation has enabled us to preserve our military strength intact and hit the enemy ever harder. Presently our forces are actively engaging the enemy in the south, east and northern part of the country. The enemy's objective of effectively using the Asmara-Massawa, Asmara-Addis Abeba roads and those linking other Eritrean towns have been frustrated by laying ambushes and planting land mines.

The following summary of military operations refute the enemy's false propaganda on the reality of the war in Eritrea:

■ Since January 1st-February 18th alone, 26 military trucks, 6 lorries loaded with soldiers, arms and supplies as well as 9 Soviet-made tanks were destroyed by landmines planted by our engineering units.

■ On 22/1/79 our units entered Asmara and destroyed two enemy camps in Acria and Hazhaz.

■ On the 1st of February, 1979 - in northern Sahel - our forces launched a three-pronged attack on the enemy forces that landed from the sea and killed 900 enemy troops, wounded over 1000, captured 491 heavy and light arms as well as destroying 5 military trucks and 4 tanks.

■ 4/2/79. Our forces attacked enemy forces that were concentrating on the northern part of Sahel killing hundreds of the enemy troops and destroying 4 trucks loaded with supplies. In this battles one Soviet and two Ethiopian colonels were killed.

■ 6/2/79. Hundreds of Ethiopian troops were killed while the rest fled to Asmara when our forces made a surprise attack on the enemy camp at Adi Nefas (situated 5 kms. north of Asmara).

■ 8/2/79. 35 Ethiopian troops were killed and 3 taken prisoners of war as well as 84 AK-47s and other items captured in an ambush laid by our forces in Kuazien - 16 kms north of Asmara.

■ 15/2/79. In a surprise attack launched by our forces against the enemy garrison at Zegheb - 1 kms. on the Asmara-Addis road, over a hundred enemy troops and 70 taken prisoners-of-war.

■ 15/2/79. EPLA forces launched a counter-attack on enemy concentration around Afabet and annihilated "operational unit 508", killing 2000 and wounding 3000 soldiers. In three days of intense fighting 14 T-54 Soviet tanks were destroyed while 3 T-54 tanks and 4 military trucks, 944 light weapons, 34 heavy weapons, 200,000 rounds of ammunition and other items were captured from the enemy.

■ 22/2/79. EPLA units on the Eastern Front attacked and annihilated enemy troops stationed in the two most important garrisons on the Asmara-Massawa road Ghinda and Dongollo. In the simultaneous attack

launched against the enemy garrisons 2000 troops were either killed or taken prisoners of war. Our forces withdrew safely after occupying the two towns for six hours, destroyed the power plant in Ghinda. All enemy property and arms were taken.

■ 25/2/79. EPLA forces in Adi Ugri area engaged the enemy 6 kms. east of the city, killing about a hundred and wounding over 300 troops of the enemy troops.

The continued escalation of the war of aggression against our people has caused the death of thousands of innocent civilians and the displacement of hundreds of thousands. The silence prevailing on the international level about the Eritrean question has taken by the enemy and its collaborators to mean complicity and encourage them to intensify their aggression. It is our responsibility to alert all peace loving peoples of the dangers that this war bears on the stability and peace of the Horn of Africa and the Middle-East region and the world at large.

It is our firm conviction that despite temporary setbacks, the Ethiopian and Soviet aggression against our people is bound to fail. This aggression has so far cost the enemy incalculable human and material losses. The contradictions within the armed forces fighting in Eritrea - who have been mobilized and the slogan of fighting "Arab invasion in Eritrea" and who have been promised that the war would be finished in one-two months period is becoming more and more evident. At a time when millions of people in Ethiopia are facing starvation the regime is spending 550 million dollars in its war of aggression against Eritrea. The deficit in the budget for fiscal year is calculated at 614,2 million. Such a war is sharpening the contradictions between the oppressed Ethiopian people and the fascist regime.

Convinced of the justness of our cause and not perturbed by the propaganda and defamations of the Dergue and its allies we will resolutely fight until the demands of the Eritrean people for self-determination are met.

VICTORY TO THE MASSES!!!

## PRESS RELEASE

The fourth phase of the Ethiopian offensive, launched on April 2, 1979, is on the verge of total failure under the stiff resistance of the Eritrean People's Liberation Army.

The offensive is being launched on two fronts:

1. From Mersa-Teklai southwards and;
2. From Afabet northwards; towards Nacfa. The objective of these attacks is to capture Nacfa and the strategic positions in the area under our control.

The enemy has employed around 40,000 troops heavily equipped with Soviet T-54 tanks and supported by Migs and Antonov bombers. Soviet involvement continues. Soviet warships are giving logistic support to the enemy detachment in Mersa-Teklai.

There have been four big attacks so far. All have been completely frustrated. Our forces have inflicted heavy losses on the enemy and downed three Mig-21 planes. Two of the planes have fallen in Sahel while the third's exact position has not been identified. Fighting is still going on.

In another positive development, the Unity talks between the EPLF and the ELF in Khartoum have been concluded with tangible results. These talks were held in order to iron out the practicalities of the Unity agreement reached last January. The January Unity agreement improvises, among other things, the joining of the armed forces of both liberation fronts under a joint command.

## HUMANITARIAN AID. FOR WHOM ?

In March 1978, the United Nations Commission on Human rights listed the Ethiopian regime among the nine countries on which it had decided to take measures relating to allegations of gross violations of human rights submitted to it. In November 1978, Amnesty International officially released a 17-page document, describing the mass-killings, torture and arbitrary imprisonment of the civilian people perpetrated by the regime. A.I. also appealed to the Ethiopian regime against, quote, "the consistent pattern of flagrant violations of fundamental Human rights". Yet, and particularly in the last six months, material aid from Humanitarian Organizations to the Ethiopian regime has continued to flow and even proportionately increased.

The Ethiopian regime is infact waging its war of aggression and perpetuating internal repression not only with Soviet interventionist military support and western imperialist financial and moral support (there is a deafening complicity of silence in the war of aggression), but also as mentioned above with considerable humanitarian aid. This is the bitter reality, however ironic or paradoxical it may sound, that the Eritrean people and the oppressed Ethiopian peoples are having to live with.

We will not deal here with the different political motivations, or the temporarily coincidental convergence of interests of the countries supporting the Ethiopian regime in its war of aggression. Our concern is, rather, with the humanitarian Organizations who are still giving aid to the Ethiopian regime inspite of its reported crimes and the existence of ample evidence showing that such aid granted does not reach the intended target but is rechanneled by the regime for its war efforts. We believe that such aberrations on the part of these humanitarian organizations are not only in contradiction with their platforms but more gravely, objectively work to aggravate the situation of the very people they are in the first place designed to help. Let us briefly present first however, an overview of the Amnesty International report.

### 30,000 killed

The Amnesty International findings indicate that an estimated 30,000 people were killed by the regime's security forces in Addis Abeba alone until December 1977. Arrests were made on the flimsiest suspicions and the torture techniques applied were excessively brutal. Methods of torture included (quote):

- "dipping the body in hot oil and splashing hot oil in the face;
- raping of women, including young girls;
- inserting a bottle or heated iron bar into the vagina or anus;
- tying a bottle of water to the testicles;
- pulling out of the nails of fingers and toes;
- severe beating on the soles of the feet;
- tying in a contorted position".

Mass repression further escalated in the so-called Red-terror campaign begining in Mid-November '77, and involving (quote) "mass arrest of young people, the systematic use of torture and the summary killing of large numbers of those arrested." The report continues, "...In the case of those 'condemned', the executiions

followed immediately. It took place at night, the victim's body being left until morning with a warning placard attached to it, stating 'this was a counterrevolutionary', 'the Red-terror will flourish', or some slogan. After this executions, victims relative were either forbidden to mourn and ordered to join in public condemnation of those who had been killed or were allowed to buy back the bodies for burial - 'paying for the bullet' - as it was called".

Those who escaped death were forced to undergo (quote) "rehabilitation". The report adds, "One feature of this process is said to have been the Command to ill-treat or torture other detainees as a proof of 'rehabilitation'. ...It is estimated that about 5,000 young people aged between 12 and 25 were killed in this way in Addis Abeba, particularly during December 1977, January and Febraury 1978, when imprisonment reached a peak and an average of about 100 people were killed eache night".

### Eritreans Major target

It is important to stress here that the AI report, important as it is far from complete. To begin with, the investigation covers the regime's crimes in Addis Abeba only although the report contains some passing references indicating that the regime's repressive methods have been more brutal in areas of armed conflict. But even in Ethiopia, there are many places where popular opposition to the regime is more pronounced and where there exist armed democratic movements leading the struggle. The scale and methods of repression perpetuated by the regime in these areas is of such magnitude and character that the above generalization or any simple projection fails to give a representative picture and risks of grossly underrating the Dergue's crimes in Ethiopia.

What is more, the AI report has not dealt the Dergue's crimes in its colonial war of aggression in Eritrea. Here again, there are but only two casual references:

1) on Eritreans in Addis Abeba the report says, "Eritreans continued to be the major target for political arrests, because of their suspected support for the armed struggle for the region's independence"

2) in another section, the report says: "the same practice (repression) had been continuing, virtually unabated since 1970, in Eritrea, both in the towns still under Ethiopian government control and in areas of armed conflict, where widespread atrocities are alleged to have been committed against civilian noncombatants by the Ethiopian army".

However indicative, these descriptions come nowhere near adequately portraying the war crimes, the genocide, committed by the Ethiopian regime. The use of internationally banned anti-personnel bombs, the raining of Napalm B and cluster bombs on civilian centers, wanton massacre of the people, the spraying of defoliants which do not only destroy vegetation but also deaden the earth and sow the seeds of human mutations for generations, have indeed become the hall mark, the daily practice of the Ethiopian regime in Eritrea. The Ethiopian regime has even liquidated, on several instances, those of its own troops who pleaded for restraint in these fascistic practices. It has disowned, something unheard-of in our times, the more than 8,000 Ethiopian

prisoners of war captured by the EPLF. In brief, Pinochet, Shah, Smith, Vorster; these ugly names of our time echoing ghastly scenes of massacre and or symbols of racial dehumanization are dwarfed, fail to measure up to the Dergue's Criminal Stature.

### 1000 Children Massacred

What is surprising though, and there are those who clamour with it, is that the Derg unabashedly attempts to justify its crimes in the name of a "socialist revolution", invariably labelling its victims as "anti-people", as "counter-revolutionary".

These accusations, however, ring hollow. As seen above, both in Ethiopia and Eritrea, it is the workers, the peasants, the students, the democratic forces in short, who had struggled so much to topple the autocratic Haileselassie regime who have become the targets of repression. Even children have not escaped this ordeal and in this regard the AI report has the following to say: "on 17 May 1977, the Secretary General of the Swedish Save the Children Fund stated that one thousand children have been massacred in Addis Abeba and their bodies, lying in the streets, are ravaged by roving hyenas.... the bodies of murdered children mostly aged from eleven to thirteen years can be seen heaped on the roadside when one leaves Addis Abeba..... between 100 and 150 young people were being killed each night".

### 30, Million In Aid

The irony of the whole situation further unfolds when seen against the background of continued international support to this murderous regime. A regime of such a huge proportion of criminal records manages to enlist not only the support, active or tacit, of many countries of both left and right political colorings, but even aid from non-governmental humanitarian organizations.

Documents available show (and they are not comprehensive) that the Derg obtained relief aid, in cash and kind, to the value of 30 million U.S. dollars from humanitarian organizations between November 78 - February 79 alone. These figures do not include developmental aid the Derg obtained through bilateral governmental basis. An assortment of humanitarian organizations including the Christian Relief and Development Association, UNICEF, UNHCR, World Food Programme, the League of Red Cross societies and governmental Relief Agencies are involved. Even the Maronite Church shipped 10,000 blankets, 90 tons of skimmed milk and 60 tons of clothing, soap and oil on 8th January 1979 to the regime (reportedly at a time when the Lebanese Red Cross was appealing for humanitarian supplies of the same articles).

The Central question here is relief aid for whom? Apparently, the Dergue is skillfully exploiting the existing grave natural calamities (draught, locust problem) and even the refugee situation in order to claim and obtain aid. The Dergue has even submitted requests for funding "rehabilitation programmes" in Massawa, although the whole population has long fled the city and are under the care of the EPLF. Moreover, there is ample evidence which shows that the Dergue has used such aid obtained for war purposes. The Guardian, (19 January, 1978) for instance carried the following (report by Mike Wells who had been to the field): "As Eritrean guerrillas stormed into the Ethiopian army camp at Dogali on the second day of the assault on Massawa, 25 kms. to the east, the routed

Ethiopians left behind crates of Russian mortar shells and small arms ammunition. In the abandoned arsenal, boxes of Danish milk powder were stacked alongside sacks of wheat flour marked 'Gift of the European Economic Community Action of the International Committee of the Red Cross. For free distribution'. The flour was given to Ethiopia's ruling Dergue for relief in the Ogaden famine".

It is also interesting to note that a substantial amount of the aid given is either in cash or consists of materials (blankets, canned milk etc.) that can be used for war purposes. We must also add, if only to widen the perspective, that the fascist regime has spent around 2 billion dollars for the purchase of arms in the last two years alone. It's primary pre-occupation being the continuation of the colonial war in Eritrea, it has conscripted, mostly under coercion, thousands of peasants to the army offsetting normal production and aggravating the overall situation of the poor. □

### ERITREAN MASSES CELEBRATE FIRST ANNIVERSARY OF THE CONGRESS OF THE ASSOCIATION OF ERITREAN PEASANTS

On March 11, the Eritrean masses celebrated the First Anniversary of the First Congress of the Association of Eritrean Peasants. On the occasion of this historic day the Central Committee of the Association of Eritrean Peasants passed the following resolutions, and, recommendations.

1. Calls upon all Eritrean peasants to raise the slogan of "Victory or death under the leadership of the EPLF" recognising that the EPLF is the only organization that truly represents their interests, and to continue their struggle with higher vigour and revolutionary zeal.

2. The peasant organizations that are being set up in Ethiopia by the fascist Dergue are only meant to instrumentalize its predatory wars and do not represent the interests of the peasant masses. The Eritrean peasants should raise their vigilance not to fall victim to the Dergue's treacherous practice in Ethiopia of moving peasants under the pretext of education and then forcibly recruiting them into its reactionary army; and should strongly oppose such moves.

3. Commends the indomitable struggle that is being waged by the EPLF and our heroic masses and warns the Eritrean youth not to fall into the trap of the Dergue's recruitment, and calls upon them to join the ranks of the EPLA.

4. Warns sternly all those feudalists and reactionaries who, because of the loss of their selfish interests in our liberated areas are collaborating with the Dergue and perpetrating untold crimes against our revolution and our people; and calls upon them to retrieve their errors before the peasant masses along with our vanguard take count on them.

5. Realising that, at the moment, the EPLA alone is facing the huge army of aggression, calls upon the ELF on the basis of the 20th October Agreement to join hands with the EPLA in routing the enemy.

6. Extends its solidarity to all progressive and democratic organizations in general, and to the Tigray Peoples Liberation Front (TPLF) which recently concluded its first organizational congress in particular.

7. Expresses its gratitude to all friends of the Eritrean revolution in general and to the peoples and government of the Sudan in particular for the support they extend to our just struggle and calls on them to accelerate their support. □



## INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY...

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tent of the woman question, its methodology of solution and relation to the other democratic questions and the specific Eritrean experience as well as the concrete reality of women's movement to-day in the whole world. In the ensuing discussions it was repeatedly pointed out by the comrades that the toiling Eritrean women will achieve national independence and realize their social rights by fighting side by side with their male comrades in the on-going armed struggle against Ethiopian aggression and its supporters. Another scene of exemplary revolutionary activity was the refugee camp set up by the EPLF where thousands of refugees and EPLF combatants in the Area took part in the celebrations. Abroad, EPLF mass organizations took part in joint demonstrations and public meetings with local womens and progressive movements. □

## E.P.L.F. MESSAGE

On the occasion of International Women's Day, the EPLF conveyed this message to the fighting Eritrean people.

"International Women's day, March 8, commemorates the unity and struggle of all women for peace, national independence, democracy and socialism. Since the woman question is an integral part of the general question of Socialism, the women's movement is closely intertwined with the general mass movement and plays a significant role in the national liberation and socialist revolutions. Departing from these organic links of these movements, all the forces of peace, democracy and progress celebrate this day with utmost revolutionary zeal.

The social conditions of Eritrean women in colonial and feudo-capitalist Eritrea is, of course, not different

from their women comrades in other colonized and/or feudo-capitalist countries. The class and sex oppression of Eritrean women cannot be abolished so long as the colonial and feudo-capitalist social formation prevails in Eritrea. Hence the struggle of Eritrean women for equality and liberation can not be realized in isolation from the on-going national democratic revolution aimed at creating a new society by crushing colonialism and effecting social changes. Departing from these analysis, the EPLF has waged a consistent struggle to encourage and ensure the participation of women in the revolution, to organize and raise the political consciousness of the toiling women.

On the occasion of International Women's Day the Central Committee of the EPLF calls on all women in general and Eritrean women in particular to step up and co-ordinate their struggle departing from a scientific appraisal of the woman question and its correct solution. The EPLF extends its revolutionary greetings to all oppressed women and in particular to Eritrean women combatants in the EPLA who are heroically fighting against the enemy, and, to women members of EPLF mass organizations who are playing an important and active role in the political and economic fields. The EPLF commemorates the heroic women martyrs who sacrificed their lives fighting side by side with their male comrades against the enemy for the sake of our people and re-asserts its determination to persist in struggle for the equality and emancipation of women which the EPLF considers as an important task of the national democratic programme. The EPLF expresses its support to all women in the world struggling for independence, democracy and women's rights".

Long Live March 8, Women's Day!  
Victory to the Struggle of the oppressed Eritrean Women!

Eternal Glory to our Martyrs!!

□

# THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATIONS IN LIBERATED ERITREA AND ITS IMPACT ON PEASANT WOMEN

The total emancipation of Eritrean women requires a long struggle since this presupposes and is closely intertwined with the victory of the anti-colonial struggle and the assumption of state power by the exploited classes. And even then, although the existing material basis for the exploitation and oppression of women will be abolished, the ideological and cultural emancipation at grass root level will require, as the experience of other revolutions show, further struggle. Nonetheless women in the EPLF and the liberated areas under the EPLF have made tremendous advances, laying and consolidating the foundations for the targeted revolutionary changes. We will briefly deal here with the salient aspects of these transformations if only to better clarify the path and struggle ahead. So here we will briefly deal with the political significance and impact on women of the revolutionary land changes in the liberated rural areas under the EPLF, with a typical case study which brings to light the actual struggle involved in effecting the changes, and with extracts of interviews with women EPLF combatants (from Vanguard).

In order to correctly comprehend the short and long-term impact of the Socio-economic transformation that is being carried out in the liberated areas in Eritrea by the Eritrean People's Liberation Front on Eritrean peasant women, it becomes imperative first to understand the political framework and the existing socio-economic context within which such changes are taking place.

## The Socio-economic context

Eritrea has been ruled by successive colonizers since the last century consequently its Socio-economic structure and development has been tailored in the interests of the various intruders. And in colonial Eritrea, there obtains to-day an articulation of the capitalist and feudal modes of production, the latter being the predominant. More than 80% of the population is composed of peasants engaged in subsistence agricultural production and nomadism.

There are, however, certain particularities to the feudal mode of production which make the classical bi-polar class division of the rural (feudal) society into landlord and tenant untenable. Moreover since the feudal relations of production had crystallized over the years without entailing structural changes, as we shall see later, in the traditional land holding system, a brief description of the land holding system becomes necessary.

It is important to underline, however, the fact that land owning within the peasantry here denotes to its male members only. The peasant women has access to land ownership in so far as she is a wife. This would be clarified later.

## Forms of land-ownership

### 1. *Diesa (communal or village ownership).*

This is the prevalent system of land tenure. Every

member of the village community has the same rights to use the land. The *Diesa* land is divided into different categories, according to its fertility. Land from each quality is thus, at least theoretically distributed among the *Ghebars* (members of the village) periodically (generally within 5 to 8 years).

### 2. *Meriet Resti (family ownership).*

Here only the members of the extended family have the rights of user in the *Meriet Resti*. This land is not subject to sale without the consent of all the members of the family.

### 3. *State Lands.*

This comprise large tracts of fertile lands confiscated by the colonial regimes from the people. They are not subject to sale and are leased to agricultural capitalists and rich farmers, and at times, mainly to landless peasants.

### 4. *Tribal ownership.*

In the lowland areas where nomadism prevails we find more pronounced feudal relations. The land is theoretically owned by the entire tribe, but an aristocratic class of dominant families, the *Shumagle* and *Diglals* exact heavy dues and services from the pastoral people. In the semi-nomadic areas they have appropriated sizeable amounts of land and a serf-landlord relation exist between them and the land-less peasants.

The feudal relations of production are not to be found in the latter only. In the *Diesa* and *Meriet Resti* too, we have landless and poor peasants forced into feudal relations with a handful of village dignitaries and political appointees of the colonial regimes. The process has evolved over the years. Since a detailed analysis is beyond the scope of this article we will only cite few cases. It had involved, among other things, delaying or freezing by village chiefs of land redistribution in the *Diesa*, for as many as 40 years in some areas, thus preventing the eligible newly wed members of the village from land holding. The phenomena of absentee land-ownership had also developed since those who had migrated to the cities still retained their portion and leased them to either the landless or poor peasants within a feudal relationship.

Those who for many reasons, do not possess the basic farm implements also hire farm implements from the feudalists in exchange for their labour. Another big landowner in the *Diesa* and *Meriet Resti* is also the church. The church owns a substantial part of the fertile village land, which has been greatly enlarged since Ethiopia's colonization of Eritrea.

These processes had accentuated the class cleavage of the rural society into a handful feudalists and the peasantry/nomads as well as stratifying the peasantry. The peasantry is in fact composed of four social groups: the landless; the poor peasants (the majority), the middle and rich peasants. The first two do not own all the means of production while the latter own land and farm implements with varying quantities. We must also add the poor rural (mostly seasonal peasant workers) farm-labourers who work in the big agricultural enterprises owned mainly by foreign capitalists. Women

working as farm labourers in capitalist agriculture are the most exploited. They are paid less than half of their male counterparts for the same job.

### Women in traditional society

As pointed out earlier, the peasant woman is not entitled to land ownership in all forms of the land tenure system. She does not have the right to participate in the redistribution of land in the *Diesa* and no right of consultation in the sale of the *Meriet Resti* land. In the case of divorce, she is not entitled to use the communal or family land if without children. She also does not get any of the family property in divorce and in some areas half of the dowry her own parents had initially paid.

In addition, the sexual division of labour within the family relegates her to the most arduous jobs. She spends the whole day working heavily in the farms amongst her husband. By the end of the day she goes home ahead of her husband and begins, another cycle of domestic work. Besides, women peasants engage in small scale supplementary activities such as weaving of cotton and making clothing for the household. In some places in the semi-nomadic areas, women are confined to the innermost places in the house so that no stranger (passer-by) can see them.

To this should be added the humiliation she is forced to suffer under the patriarchal culture. She is literally seen as a subordinate and subservient to man. In patriarchal and semi-feudal society, marriage which is influenced by economic reasons, is arranged without consulting the future bride what-soever. Besides, in rural areas, child marriage is still prevalent. As for divorce it is totally the man's prerogative.

Having briefly seen the socio-economic status and the double oppression of women in colonial and feudal Eritrea, we will now address ourselves to the ideological line of the EPLF on the woman question and the concrete steps, particularly in the context of the land question, taken to realize it.

### EPLF's position on the Woman question

The EPLF believes that the social emancipation of women can not be seen separately from the question of the emancipation of the entire society from class oppression. Thus great emphasis is given to their

participation in the on-going national democratic revolution in all spheres. For participation of women in the armed struggle in all fields i.e. combat role, social production, etc. would not only guarantee equality of women but also deal heavy blows to male prejudices and woman denigrating feudalist myths.

To realize this, however, favourable ground had to be prepared, the political consciousness of women raised so that they would be able to surmount backward ideological barriers cemented by ages of patriarchal and feudal culture. The EPLF accordingly exerted a lot of effort along this lines. This has met with considerable success. Women are to-day participating in the struggle and have formed their own organizations at home and abroad.

### Women in the EPLF

To-day no less than about 30% of the EPLF fighters are women. Women fighters are involved in all aspects of social production. They are engaged in agricultural and handicraft industry, they work in machine shops, electrical workshops, weapons repair etc. They participate actively in military operations. In the EPLF, there is no work that is reserved for men only. The EPLF also expends much effort to increase the political consciousness of women fighters taking into account their disadvantageous social background. Hence they are given priority to go to the Front's Cadre School.

### Women in the liberated areas

The main point that needs to be emphasised here is that the equitable redistribution of land is one of the central themes of the EPLF. And the social emancipation of the exploited masses cannot be isolated from the question of ownership of means of production (land and farm implements in this case) directly affecting their lives. The confiscation of the land owned by the colonial state and the eradication of feudalism, the distribution of land to the landless peasants, the political participation of the overwhelming masses (i.e. the poor and landless peasants) in running their own village affairs assumes therefore a primary importance.



And what must be underlined here is that the Eritrean woman is no longer considered as subordinate to the man, but has an equal right, equal say in land redistribution and in the newly set up people's assemblies. Infact, in the land reform that is being carried out, distribution of land is made no more on household but on an individual basis. Because of such a modification in the rules of land redistribution, women have been able to receive an equal share of land. Women are also not only allowed to attend but actually do participate actively in the village assemblies and in all the social and political activities (land reform, overthrow of feudal political power... etc.) of the village communities.

In addition the EPLF has promulgated a marriage law as of 1978 abolishing forced and child marriages. Divorce no longer depends only on the will and whims of the man and upholds equal division of family property with protection rights for children.

Women have further formed their own organizations in the liberated areas in Eritrea as well as abroad. This organizations are proving as valuable vehicles for drawing many more women into the revolutionary stream, for combatting illiteracy among their ranks, for

raising the political consciousness of women members, developing their leadership abilities... etc., which would ultimately guarantee the consolidation and advance of the above gains.

### **The struggle of the peasant men and women in Afabet**

In 1977 the poor peasant organizations in Afabet and its surroundings where the tribal type of land holding theoretically existed but a few feudalists have appropriated large lands, began to struggle for land reform under the slogan of "land to the tiller".

The front directly intervened in taking the feudal lands and distributing them to the landless serfs in collaboration with the People's Assembly there. One feudal lord, who had 45 serfs working on his land, began to organize the other feudalists, the rich merchants and religious leaders to fight against the mass organizations.

*continue on pag. 12*

## **EXTRACTS FROM INTERVIEWS TO VANGUARD (OCTOBER 1978 ISSUE) CONDUCTED WITH YOUNG WOMEN IN TRAINING**

**Could you describe to us the struggles that you were waging in your home village or town and why you decided to come to the field at this time?**

I am from Zager (25 kms. north of Asmara). Before the liberation of my village, I jointed one of the EPLF's under-ground cells. After Zager's liberation the mass organizations began to function openly and waged vigorous struggles in the political, economic social and cultural fields. We - the youth - played an indispensable propaganda and agitation role in the struggle for land reform and the establishment of the people's assembly in Zager. In 1977, when the important battle for the liberation of Massawa started, we sent a contingent of youth to assist our fighters in the frontlines. We played the same role during the battle on the northern environs of Asmara.

I am from Keren. You are aware that the face of Keren, where the feudo-capitalist yoke was extremely burdensome, has undergone radical change since its liberation just over a year ago. In the bitter struggle to transform the old Keren, the youth were in the forefront. We waged a tireless struggle to mobilize and organize our parents, smash the old order and boost production. We sent three contingents of youth to the battle-fronts in Massawa and Barentu to assist our people's army. Today, our parents have become organized, politicized and armed. An indication of this is provided by the fact that parents went along with their children to assist the EPLA during the battle for Barentu, while 6 months earlier - during the battle for Massawa only the youth participated in this revolutionary activity of tremendous significance. Our parents are today capable of carrying through the struggle in our liberated city. Thus at this crucial time when the Dergue armed to the teeth is feverishly conducting a war of aggression to usurp the fruits of our struggle, the youth who are in the prime of life, must replace the heroes and heroines who shed their youthful blood for the liberation of the masses. This is why I have come to the field.

**Most of you walked 12 days on foot to come here. You probably had not expected such a long march with its attendant fatigue and other problems. Could you describe to us your feelings about this tough march?**

As you know, we oppressed women had grown up confined to the four corners of the kitchen deprived of the opportunity to exercise and strengthen our bodies. Since women are not free from the old society's male supremacist prejudices, we had doubts as to whether we could successfully complete the march. Now, however, we have proved in practice that as long as women are conscious and determined they can perform physical feats which they had never thought possible. Thanks to the EPLF, our "weak and fragile" bodies have become strengthened and we have been able to stand on our own feet side by side with our male comrades. Our 12 days march is a manifestation of this profound change.

**You left your homes with a burning passion to "participate in the armed struggle and crush the enemy". The conditions in our training camps are not as comfortable as those at your homes, the food is not as good as you are used to and the training is rigorous. Have these conditions dampened your enthusiasm?**

Ours was not a fleeting passion but one rooted in principled convictions. Since we have come to give our youthful lives, minor problems cannot dampen our enthusiasm.

We realize that revolutionary struggle is bitter but its fruits are sweet. In China, during the epic "long march", the revolutionary fighters had to chew on the wooden soles of their sandals for lack of food. Our comrades too had to eat inedible leaves for weeks since no food was available. We were told these things by our Front's cadres while we were in our village. Here, however, conditions are far better than we expected. We have adequate food and medical care. Nevertheless we are prepared for the worst.

*Comrade Christien Sabatier is undoubtedly well-known to friends and those acquainted with the Eritrean revolution through his previous two films, and particularly the latter film, "Sawrana". He was inside*

*Eritrea during the November and January offensives unleashed by the Dergue with the active collaboration of the Soviet Union. ERITREA NOW interviewed Comrade Sabatier on the situation.*

## "THE PRESENT WAR IS A TECHNICAL WAR"

The enemy offensive since last June are characterized by the increasing, and particularly since Nov. 18, direct involvement of the Soviet Union on the side of the Ethiopian regime. Could you elaborate, as you were on the scene, on the extent of this involvement and the resulting changes in the face of the war in military terms; i.e. enemy methods of warfare etc...?

Perhaps I should first go a little back and note that there were stages in Soviet involvement. Initially, when Menghistu wooed the Soviet Union for support, it reacted favourably and extended him huge quantities of sophisticated weapons. With this help, the regime started the first offensive.

The first offensive proved very disastrous for Ethiopia. The Ethiopian soldiers were not in a position to efficiently man the new equipments and they had problems of logistics etc. And in the big battles in Ansaba and Adi Yacob in August, the Ethiopian army was virtually wiped out. The Ethiopians lost thousands of men and big quantities of war materials.

This was the turning point. After this experience, the Russians saw that there was no alternative to direct involvement if the offensives were to have any military significance at all. And so they intervened.

And at that time, the face of the war changed completely.

Infact, the EPLF was no more fighting against an Ethiopian army, an African army, but at that time it was fighting directly a super-power.

Now, the two distinct features of this second offensive were a high technical efficiency (as you know, around 500 Soviet experts were involved in the front lines alone) and, perhaps more importantly, the utilization of an appalling quantity of sophisticated armaments. i.e. large-scale use of bombers, tanks, 127 m.m., Katusha launchers, heavy artillery etc. One cannot imagine the quantity used. Only a super-power with such a big industrial capacity, can easily dispense, throw out, these materials.

Another important new element in the war was the tactic used. In addition to their capacity to destroy, because of their superior fire power, some soft point and breach EPLF front defence lines, a tactic they repeatedly resorted to was to elongate EPLF defence lines while simultaneously, again because of their logistic superiority, launching "blitzkreig" attacks.

To cite some examples: at the beginning of the second offensive, the attacks were launched on three different fronts, with the belt of Asmara extending some 50 kms. After the withdrawal from Keren and the EPLF stopped the offensive army at some 10 kms. outside Keren, the enemy opened at the same time a second front on the east of Afabet using warships for transport. Having to deal with two fronts at considerable distances, the EPLF had to withdraw from Afabet to Nakfa but then again, the enemy opened a third front on the far North-eastern sea coast with the logistic support of Soviet Warships.

At the time of the offensives and particularly after the seizure of Keren, the Ethiopian regime claimed that it had completely crushed the EPLF. This was reverberated, and the trend still continues, in the western press with typically sweeping

statements such as "the backbone of the guerrillas crushed" etc. What is your evaluation of the relative losses between the enemy and the EPLF in material and human terms?

Just the other day, a foreign comrade jokingly remarked of the implicit contradiction in the Ethiopian communiques and said "the Ethiopians long claimed that they have totally crushed the EPLF, but then, they are announcing fresh offensives one after the other. What is the target of this offensives now?" Well what is the actual situation? As I said earlier, the face of the war has changed. Before it was, if you like, a human war with the EPLF using small armaments. The present war is almost a technical war where machinery seems to play a predominant role.

The tactics used by the enemy were to continuously pound EPLF defence positions with rockets, long-range artillery and arial bombings and then advance with the mechanized detachment at the forefront.

Of course the EPLF saw this tactic in good time and decided on a strategic withdrawal. Infact the EPLF took the initiative only when it was possible i.e. at very favourable positions, when it could intercept the infantry from the mechanized detachment. And in such close-range confrontations, and they were not inconsiderable, the battles turned out decisively in the favour of the Front. The EPLF maintains the superiority in such battles and of course another important factor is that in close-range battles, the Ethiopians cannot use the rockets and planes. Consequently, every time the EPLF engaged the enemy in such confrontations, it was a great victory. You only need to read the communiques, for example, the battle of Elaberet, where they lost 42 tanks and thousands were killed.

So, as far as balancing goes, they have recaptured the cities but the EPLF also retreated in good order (shape). The EPLA is intact in material and human terms. The morale of the fighters has not been affected since the need of the strategic withdrawal was explained and widely discussed among the rank and file.

On the contrary, the Ethiopians have lost a lot in weapons as well as financially for sustaining the war.

The involvement of the Soviet Union and the subsequent change in the balance of forces had resulted in strategic withdrawals of the EPLF from key cities and towns. Certainly this poses many problems, not least, on the political and economic transformations the EPLF was carrying out in the liberated cities and rural areas. Could you elaborate on the difficulties encountered and the measures already taken to cope up with the new situation?

Perhaps the most sad thing about the withdrawals is that all the Front's realizations and the many developmental projects i.e. infrastructural, agricultural, all kinds of workshops in all the fields that were being launched and flowering were adversely affected. New long-term projects and they were many, had to be suspended or even abandoned.

For the mobilization and contact with the masses however, the EPLF has not lost much. As was the case with the fighters, the strategic withdrawals were explained to the people well-in advance of the actual process.

Infact before the first retreat from the Southern Front, a campaign on the need of strategic withdrawalls was conducted among the people in the region. As a result, the people have seen the withdrawalls not as irreversible defeat but in their true perspective, as a temporary process in the struggle. The people now understand that in all revolutionary developments, there is a time of offensives and a time of retreat.

In addition, the EPLA units now mobilized to guerrilla activity are maintaining contact with the people in the re-occupied areas. The other important factor is that the **Voice of the Eritrean Masses**, the EPLF radio programme, is now functioning six hours a day. People all over Eritrea listen to it (infact it was reported that some people were arrested in Asmara for listening to the radio programme). This is proving very valuable to enable the Front to have close contacts with the people in the re-occupied areas. These things combined have helped to keep up their confidence and morale.

**During the November offensive, the enemy had bombed more than 154 villages resulting in around 100,000 refugees. This fascistic practice is still continuing. What is the refugee situation now?**

First, to draw attention to the gravity of the situation, I must state that almost one million people were effected by the offensive at the time. Indeed, at the height of the offensive, almost in every village and in every city, people had to, at least temporarily, leave their homes and take refuge in the surrounding hills because of the large-scale blanket bombings.

The number you referred to, i.e. 100,000, are the hardest-hit, those who were displaced for a longer while. And at the moment there are around 5,000 people who could not stay with relatives in less affected areas and are totally dependent on the Front.

Of course, the overall situation is grave and very dramatic for these people. Their houses burned, crops destroyed and even being bombed on the way to places of refuge.

And yet one sensed a flicker of hope in them hard to imagine under the circumstances. I say this from personal experience. I went out one morning to film the people, (refugees from Keren), passing the night under the trees. I had already formed a stereotyped image in my mind of a people in agony; sad, bewildered and desperate. Well, what I found was different. As I said earlier, one sensed a certain measure of composure and courage in them.

I followed their retreat to Afabet and then Nakfa. It was very dramatic and full fo many unpleasant things. Except the few who were on critical condition, the bulk of them had to walk although the Front supplied them with two trucks; one carrying good and the other water. As you know, at one stage in the journey to Afabet, two planes spotted and bombed us for half an hour, killing tne andwounding 65 people among them a 1 year old child.

Another moving experience was the celebrations of March 8, International Women's Day. In this regard, I was present in the temporary refugee camp in Sahel. The camp could not, under the circumstances, be in a satisfactory condion. All the same, like in the other cities and villages, theses refugees - mostly women and numbering 2000 or more - celebrated the event with a big demonstration. They had placards, flags and they danced and sang. One song went: "Don't be in a burry we are coming back from Sahel". This I found very inspiring.

This episode, this march in the semi-desert signaled for us and for them as the begining of the, perhaps long

but sure, triumphant march bask to their villages and homes.

Then there was this telling example of the refugees in Dabaat. This was a long established refugee camp but because of the withdrawalls the camp too was being evacuated. The people were thus dismantling the camp to take the materials to a new, safer cite. But they kept on watering the gardens until the last moment. Perhaps this shows the people's conviction and confidence that all is not lost, that they will be coming back after a short time.

**How do you see the present trends and likely developments in the coming monthes?**

As I said earlier, the EPLA is intact and the moral of the fighters is high.

Now although it is conceivable that they may advance a little more further and the EPLF still retreat on the western front, there will certainly and shortly be limits to this process. The central point is that they have almost reached the maximum extension or what is the same the EPLF has almost finished the maximum withdrawalls.

This phase implies certain changes to the advantage of the Front. For one thing, the war will be fought in particularly advantageous terrain for the EPLF, the mountaneous area, where the superior war technology of the Ethiopians cannot be as efficient as before and where they would have to increase the infantry. This will be costly for them.

Another important point to note is that in the last monthes a substancial part of the EPLF combative force was engaged in the withdrawall process. The EPLF had to evacuate a lot of people, to dismantle and rebuild in safer areas, the schools, hospitals, workshops etc.; that is all the materials of the Front. So after organizing the new bases, a big part of the combative force will be released to go behind the enemy lines and harass it.

To this must be added the disastrous implication for the Ethiopian regime to maintain its war machinery for a long time. There are already indications that the morale of the Ethiopian soldiers, who were told that the war will end in a matter of days, is low. Now they are delving deeper and deeper into the war, they have to constantly reinforce their rear and they do not see any quick end. So with time the problems will aggravate and the advantages will be more in favour of the EPLF. The Front is ready to face a protracted people's war.

**You have made two films on Eritrea before, which I must add have contributed a lot to project the true nature of the Eritrean people's armed struggle to the outside. Can you briefly outline the content of the film you are making now?**

As I said earlier, each department of the EPLF was well-developed with long term programmes and projects. And of course in the Information and film departemnts we had our own projects too.

In addition to teaching and activities of technical development, there was a project to build a studio in Keren enabling the Front to produce black and white films inside. Our group was technically well - equipped and politically matured. And we had good materials. The Fronts tremendous development politically, economically and principally in mass mobilization and organization contributed greatly to our growth. And we had an ambitious project. Infact we already wrote a very interesting film on social and cultural life in Eritrea and the political feelings of the people. These aspects were notably superficial and schematic in, for example, SAWRANA, since military preoccupation was the main activity in 1977, at the time the film was made, and also

## FREETOWN SUMMIT FAILS

The meeting between Sudanese President Jaafar el Numeiri and Mengistu held in Freetown on 15 February 1979 failed to achieve its main objective.

The meeting, the third of its kind, was held on the basis of the resolutions of the O.A.U. 15th Summit held in Khartoum in July 1978 and also as a follow up, at a higher level, of the two previous preliminary meetings. It is to be recalled that meetings were held between the two countries at ministerial levels, under the auspices of the O.A.U. Ad-hoc Committee for the Mediation between the Sudan and Ethiopia twice in the past; the first on 13 December 1977 in Freetown, and the latter in June 19, 1978 in Dar-es-Salem.

The O.A.U. 15th Summit had resolved that the Mediation Committee between the Sudan and Ethiopia should study the Eritrean question as the root cause of the dispute between the two countries. This resolution also reflected the decision reached by the Ad-hoc Committee on the basis of the prevailing consensus between the parties concerned in the preliminary meetings.

In spite of this background, the 15th February meeting in Freetown could not start off the ground. The Ethiopian regime stubbornly insisted on "scraping" the Eritrean question from the agenda, alleging that the Ethio-Sudanese crisis and hence normalization of bilateral relations had nothing to do with the Eritrean question.

This position not only contravenes the O.A.U. 15th Summit resolution on the question but also the Accord reached in the preliminary meetings.

It was indeed acknowledged by both sides at the time that the Eritrean question was the root cause of the tension between them. In his address to the Ad-hoc Committee, the Sudanese foreign minister, Mr. Francis Deng had stated, "...the Eritrean problem is the root cause of the tension and deterioration in our relations with Ethiopia... of course, we are not here to speak on behalf of the Eritrean people. They are their own spokesmen. The conflict has however been thrust upon us... We tell our Ethiopian brothers that their domestic (sic) problems have gone out hand and have our country confronting us with a situation that threatens our own security and the economic and social well-being of our people. ...Though we desire the solution of our direct bilateral problems towards the normalization of our relations, we cannot confine our vision to exclude the broader Eritrean issue or else the root of our problems will continue their cancerous spread and undo whatever we might do today..."

For his part, the Ethiopian foreign minister admitted that much and stated "...the crisis in Ethio-Sudan relations has its genesis in issues associated with activities of the secessionist (sic) movement that has been going on for several years in the Northern region of Ethiopia", basically repeating what Mengistu had earlier said in Liberville, "...the present crisis has its genesis in the secessionist (sic) movement in the Northern Administrative region of Ethiopia commonly known as Eritrea".

It is thus, indisputable, from the foregoing brief exposition, that the Eritrean question was central, if not the basis and point of departure, to the Freetown Summit. Mengistu, however, refused to discuss the Eritrean question and rejected out-of-hand the proposals for discussion on the issue put forward by the Sudanese government. The six-point proposal put forward by the Sudanese government included the ques-

tion of seeking a peaceful solution to the Eritrean question with the mediation of a third African country.

The backtracking of the Ethiopian regime from its earlier position, its refusal to even discuss the Eritrean question in the meeting as recommended by the O.A.U. Summit, glaringly exposes its single-minded intransigence on a military solution of the question.

The fact of the matter is that the Dergue has never entertained a democratic and peaceful solution of the Eritrean question. If the Dergue had issued so-called peaceful declarations and proposals in the past, including its implicit acceptance of mediation by a third country, these were only tactical manoeuvres motivated by political expediency. A close analysis of the Dergue's so-called peaceful proposals had always revealed, and we have pointed this out several times before, that they were primarily designed to isolate internationally the Eritrean liberation fronts. It is also important to note that the Dergue's "peaceful calls" had invariably been accompanied by frantic war preparations and the launching of big offensives.

Though it may not have been brought home to the Ethiopian regime, the involvement of the Soviet Union let alone its own power-cannot militarily crush the Eritrean revolution. And its intransigence on continuing its war of aggression can only result in further aggravating the stability of the whole region and endangering peace in the African continent. It is high time, therefore, that the peaceloving African countries and the O.A.U. recognize the Ethiopian regime for the war-monger it is and take sides with the fighting Eritrean people. □

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### More on DERGUE's crimes

Four enemy planes continuously bombed civilian dwellings in Nacfa for half an hour. The enemy planes dropped big rockets and napalm and other bombs killing ten and wounding 15 of the civilian population.

The fascist Dergue has issued an order and is coercing Eritrean villagers, particularly in the neighborhood of Asmara, to raise funds for its war of aggression. The Dergue is also forcing the youth in Asmara and the other occupied cities to conscript as "city guards" and has prohibited them from moving out of the cities.

On the 10/2/79, enemy soldiers opened fire on villagers near Asmara celebrating a local wedding alleging that the songs in the celebrations had subversive content. The enemy soldiers cold-bloodedly murdered 2 innocent people and wounded 46.

Between March 8 and 13 alone, the Dergue executed 78 of its regular troops, including a colonel, stationed in Asmara for protesting against the war. In a related incident, a member of the Dergue's regular army executed four of the "volunteer militias". The latter had been out of their garrison in spite of the order imposed on the militias to stay within the garrison allegedly because of the continuing strike by Ethiopian Airline workers in Asmara. The workers are demanding wage increase and transfer to other secure areas.

**INTERVIEW***continued from pag. 10*

because of some technical shortages we have now solved. So this time the whole approach and trend was different.

Unfortunately, the overall withdrawals inevitably meant or implied departmental retreats for us as well. We had to retreat from this great films to other methods of faster and shorter films, like Newsreel in TV

to suit the new changed conditions. We came back to small cameras, small means, and we decided to follow all the current events in the best way possible. This would also enable us to produce, in pictures, the current situation and developments in relatively short time.

The next film will be short, covering the retreat from Keren, involving the dramatic side of the evacuation of the hospitals, schools, the refugees, etc., and, the last part of it concentrates on some of the actual fightings going on. □

**THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATIONS...***continued from pag. 8*

The People's Assembly which led the struggle against the feudalists, was composed of 37 poor peasants and serfs, 7 workers, 20 women of poor peasant origin, 7 representatives of the youth organization - 4 girls and 3 boys - and 2 middle peasants (73 in all).

Understanding the traditional and religious view against the equality of women (especially in Islam), the feudalists began to agitate against the participation of women in the People's Assembly in order to rally support against the People's Assembly, as a whole and its struggle for land redistribution.

On May 28th, 1978 they met at the local mosque and began to preach: "As if Afabet has no men, 24 women now sit in the People's Assembly. Abomination!! It is against the Sharia (the Islamic law) for women to talk

in public, to open their veils, to leave their families and go to work alone. Our culture is being destroyed, and our land is being given to people who have not worked for it!" In order to invoke tribal feelings, they shouted: "Our tribal land, our forefathers' land is being given to peasants from other tribes. Fight against this abominable People's Assembly".

This reactionary feudal demonstration united the poor men and women, and they fought together for their class interests under the slogans: "Equality of women in land distribution!... Our struggle is class based not tribal!... the People's Assembly is the guarantor of our rights!! etc.". At the end they totally isolated the feudalists who were humiliated. This clearly demonstrated to the poor peasants that the struggle for the emancipation of women is inseparable from the struggle for economic - class - emancipation against the feudal class. □

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