

Too undemocratic to split

By Tesfay Atsbeha

It is being disseminated that a certain group of the TPLF and Bereket are trying to purge some veteran members of the TPLF. Purges are not new in the TPLF, but it is a break from the tradition of the TPLF, if a group has really disclosed its intention before taking an irrevocable measure.

Ambush and pre-emptive attack

One aspect of the tradition of the TPLF, which is devoid of any transparency and accountability was that the perpetrators prepare their intrigues to harm their victims without informing the targeted victims and the rank-and-file-members of the TPLF and purge (as they did to Aregawi and Ghidey in 1985, to Seeye, Gebru Tewelde etc in 2001) or liquidate their victims (Abera Manka, Hagos Haileselassie etc...in 1977/78 and Teklu Hawaz in 1985). In all the cases mentioned, the victims did not get a fair chance to express their opinions and this practice of injustice applies to many others.

To put it in military terminologies, the protagonists behaved as if they had to ambush their victims. They launched surprise attacks against their victims whenever the latter list expected the attacks. Another aspect of the tradition pertains to the fact that the perpetrators used to go over to a pre-emptive attack, whenever they felt insecure and feared being held accountable for crimes or feared losing power. Accusing Kinnjit was for instance a pre-emptive attack. Those who ordered the massacre and those who executed the order after the election should have been accused, but the killer framed the accusation to pre-empt his exposition and the mobilization of the people against him. This also shows that conflict resolutions in the TPLF have always been zero-sum-games. On the surface, the perpetrators seem to achieve their aims with dishonest accusations. In reality, it is the use and threat of physical force (the control of the army) which enables them to implement deceptive measures which they try to sell as sophistication and smartness.

During the armed struggle, they (the perpetrators) used to inform others after the fait accompli to justify their measures and silence any potential expression of any grievances in the case of purges. They kept liquidations secret with the exception of that of Teklu. With the murders they committed in 1977/78, the perpetrators succeeded in making the none-CC members of the TPLF as apolitical as the weapons the latter carry by destroying mutual trust and instilling a feeling of suspicion and fear amongst the fighters of the TPLF. The evaluations (Gmgemas) are mainly meant to maintain the atmosphere of insecurity by forcing everybody control everybody else reciprocally.

A few individuals in the TPLF have been exploiting the lack of a democratic culture and consciousness amongst the members to maintain their repressive rule. Such individuals are perpetuating the undemocratic culture. In this connection, most members of the TPLF are victims, objects of experiment for tyranny and tools of the oppressors at the same time. The few who are in charge of the TPLF have the key (an organized and armed force) to control Ethiopia. They are controlling almost all key positions in Ethiopia that their dominance is too unjust to be tolerable and sustainable. As this lopsided ethnic relationship is the objective reality, exposing and

opposing it should be the duty of any democrat. Objectively exposing the repressive and corrupt practices of the Tigrayan elite is not an attack on the people of Tigray. But there are also people who generalize. On both sides, some generalize deliberately, others innocently or due to their inability to differentiate.

Now, coming back to the alleged split, Sebhat Nega, in an interview with Dawit Solomon of Fnote Democracy (posted on 31 January 2013 in zehabesha) has said part of the truth, in saying that the TPLF has never experienced a split. The whole truth is that there were splits in the leadership, but no splits of the whole organization, because the none-CC-members have neither the right to make decisions nor the right to get information on the issues prior to the decisions. Generally, armed undemocratic organisations (like fascists, Stalinists and religious fanatics), do not split, because the leaders do not inform their members about their differences of opinion and let the members freely discuss as well as take sides on the issues. What the perpetrators do always is take measures on the dissidents and spread lies about them. And this was what the leadership of the TPLF has been doing so far.

Sebhat is trying to hide the fact that the TPLF is too undemocratic even to split. The clique which controls the TPLF cannot tolerate any differences of opinion even within itself and that is why it subordinated itself to a single tyrant. Of course, a split would certainly have entailed war, since no independent groups would have tolerated each other. If the Sebhat clique were sincere and had confidence in the correctness of the decisions it arrived at, it would allowed the members of the Front to participate in the process of decision making. Since the clique is used to depriving its own members of their rights, it is depriving all Ethiopians of an alternative and harassing the opposition.

After speaking a single sentence with a partial truth, Sebhat resorted to his lies. He claimed that he and his cohorts are used to discussing as long as it takes, to iron out their differences. Meles gave a similar disinformation in the summer of 1998 while he, in violation of the regulations of the organization, was preparing to purge almost half of the members of the CC of the TPLF. The example Sebhat gave about a long discussion with Ghidey Zeratsion is utter nonsense. Ghidey and Aregawi, while expressing their opinions within the CC, were not aware that the Meles/Sebhat clique was preparing to get rid of them and there were no formal discussions amongst members not belonging to the CC on the issue before the purges. One of the reasons for the expulsion of Ghidey was his mild opposition to the Marxist rhetoric (the tactic not the strategy) so that the aid from the West may not be affected. The whole rhetorical jargon and the aim were totally abandoned after his expulsion.

In a similar manner, the claim by Sebhat that incompetent members are expelled does not correspond to the truth. The victims are mainly those who express their opinions. By the way, why should incompetence, if that were the case, be a crime? Why are individuals who served the TPLF suddenly treated as enemies? The truth is, while incompetent people can be marginalized without being incriminated through elections in a democratic organization, those who control the TPLF are interested in blind loyalty so that they can maintain their power and their economic advantages.

Differences of opinion within an armed organization and differences between armed organizations in Ethiopia are resolved eventually by intrigues and force and/or the threat of it. No major organization waging an armed struggle has restrained itself from going to war against any other in the recent past in Ethiopia. Therefore there is no

basic difference between the feudal lords of the era of the princes and the present war mongers when it comes to attempts at monopolizing power by force. In spite of the similarities in intolerance, the present politicians are more hypocritical than the feudal lords of the past; because the present ones understand the concept of democracy and pay only lip service to it unlike those of the past who lived in an era in which democracy was unknown in the region. Even in the absence of modernity, Emperor Yohannes and King (later Emperor) Menilik were unique in their tolerance of each other and in avoiding war between them. Those who are agitating ethnic enmity should learn from the responsible behaviour of both emperors.¹

Who are the contending groups, if there are any?

We can talk about the groups, irrespective of whether or not the individuals have formed groups. One alleged group is supposed to include Sebhat, Abay, Seyoum, Tsegay and Qedusan. The first three (they will henceforth be called the trio.) are the most veteran, but also responsible for many cases of crimes against humanity and corruption. They were the individuals along with Meles who started their career in the armed struggle with an anti-Ethiopian and undemocratic obsession. They wrote a manifesto for the secession of Tigray from Ethiopia and undemocratically kept other members of the TPLF in the dark about the content. Despite their manifesto, they ironically became the rulers of Ethiopia and continued committing crimes.

If the other group includes Bereket, he is a liability to his group. Azeb can get sympathy from some Meles Voodoo (spirit) worshipers. For critical minds, Azeb is a negative symbol of corruption linking her husband, the trio and a few others. The fact that Azeb, without a corresponding qualification controls EFFORT, such a business conglomerate worth billions of dollars and the fact that she is the only female member of the politburo of the TPLF is an evidence of nepotism. Since Azeb got her position by virtue of being the wife of Meles, Meles was involved in this act of corruption. Pardon! He was involved in his own words, in acts of pervasive rent seeking and patronage, as is also the case with his political corruption of claiming an election victory exceeding 99% of the seats. EFFORT, which came into being with stolen (withheld) aid money, is basically a colossal evidence of the corruption of the TPLF mafia clique. (A propos aid, the best way for a fair distribution of aid under the rule of the EPRDF is to make an arrangement for the opposition and the EPRDF to mutually control each other. It is impossible for the donors to control the abuse of aid by the EPRF).

Several people have proposed that EFFORT should be controlled by external auditors. But I think any attempt at controlling is useless as long as our people are not free. It is only with the prevalence of freedom that any control can make sense.

Notwithstanding the facts mentioned above, it is worth pointing out that many young Ethiopians have been so indoctrinated by the monopolized media outlets that they don't perceive the evilness of the incumbent.

¹ : In my opinion, those who attack emperors Yohannes and Menilik – the former mostly muslim extremists the latter narrow ethnic nationalists - belong to the most destructive elements amongst Ethiopians. I was shocked when I heard a person in the current Affairs pal talk room, on 13 February 2013, expressing his Schadenfreude at the barbaric beheading of emperor Yohannes by the dervishes. The attack on emperor Menilik revolves around his alleged policy of dividing Tigrayans. This accusation should have been buried at least after the Tigrayans on both sides of the Mereb came to power and consolidated the division.

Possible results of the conflict

Abay woldu, in an angry speech after the death of Meles, had implied some sort of a conflict. If his anger was provoked by the suggestion that the loyal dissidents like Tsadkan should be readmitted into the TPLF, it does not make sense. His fear could not have been caused by the reintegration of the dissidents, but rather by the danger that someone would manipulate and dominate the TPLF to his disadvantage.

Some latecomers in the TPLF leadership positions cannot, with the presumption of innocence, be considered as criminals (by commission). A single tyrant is not controlling Ethiopia for the first time in our modern history and that is in itself a welcome development; although the whole system has yet to be changed for the better. The new initiative of an open conflict may be resolved in several ways and entail different outcomes or it may bring nothing. The best solution would be for all members of the EPRDF, as a whole, to eventually participate in free discussions, get rid of the criminal and corrupt elements and democratically elect a new leadership. Is this a wishful thinking? That may be the case, but it is worth wishing, provided those who can make the change, especially the unprivileged members who make up an overwhelming majority of the army share the wish of abolishing the totalitarian regime and respecting the rights of all Ethiopians.