

Meles Zenawi's War Against the Nation's Brain

When security forces use excessive force against people who peacefully demonstrate, strike or boycott, it is a gross human rights violation. When, but, the regime lets loose its security forces with the order 'shoot to kill' it is barbaric. The use of live ammunition by the regime during students demonstrations in 1993 was blamed on 'lack of rubber bullets' and the excuse for the present carnage was the need 'to enforce law and order'. This is to add insult to injury. All this indicates that all semblance of its legitimacy has already disappeared. These indiscriminate mass killings in Addis Ababa in April is again a proof that the Meles-Sebhat clique's interests are diametrically opposed to the well-being of the people and their unity and dignity.

The Meles-Sebhat clique knows very well that the university community can at one time spear-head the people's struggle for democracy, peace and development. At the beginning of the 1990s Meles Zenawi systematically pushed many democratic organisations out of the scene and he put trade unions, organised on a national level, under ethnic sword. Only politicians who were blinded by immediate prospects of power sharing with the TPLF collaborated. It was the Addis Ababa University community that openly opposed the fragmentation of the nation in ethnic enclaves. It advocated the nation's strategic interests including its legitimate rights to its coastal territories.

The Addis Ababa University students staged a historic demonstration on 4 January 1993, to bring the cause of the nation to the attention of the world community and the United Nations. Meles unleashed his security forces on the peaceful demonstrators and killed and wounded several students. It was also the university representatives at the July Conference of 1991 that voiced against the scheme of Meles to fragment the nation. On 9 April 1993, the Meles clique fired about 42 university professors. The negative implication for the university and the nation was immense. Donald N. Levine, asked, "Is Ethiopia cutting off its head again?".

Meles Zenawi replaced the expelled professors by people loyal to him. The university campuses were put under the control of the police force. The academic quality worsened and academic freedoms were curtailed. The university community was under the permanent and close surveillance of the special police force stationed in the campus. The demands of the university students were to address these undemocratic policies of the regime. The riots and vandalising have nothing to do with the students. They were provoked by the arrogant actions of the regime. Attempts by the students and the university administration to resolve the problems peacefully and legally were disrupted by the police and the minister for education.

The police smuggled two agents provocateurs into the students rally inside the university campus to lure the students to defy the law and take to the streets. The infiltrators were identified by the students and the police admitted that they belong to the police personnel. Police overran the campus and injured and killed many students. Despite the provocation the students pursued their goals within the bounds of law and order for a week.

Subsequently the minister for education succumbed to the regime's sinister strategy. She forced the students to evacuate the campuses and drove them to the police who were ready to crack down on the student's movement. Once evicted from their campuses, the students' activists could have neither the responsibility nor the possibility to keep the demonstration peaceful.

The questions raised by the students were legal and by themselves harmless. Improvements of teaching staff and academic freedom are campus demands. The development in the country before and after the Addis Ababa university strikes and the reaction of the people and of the political organisations at home and abroad indicate that the students movements are part and parcel of the struggle of the nation to heal the injuries it sustained during the last ten years. The students' demands are part of this development. During and after the war with Eritrea, Ethiopia began to behave as a live organism.

In 1998 the Eritrean army invaded some territories in the Tigray and Afar regions. Hundreds of thousands of innocent people perished, were displaced or their property was looted or burnt down. Towns were bombed and school children massacred. Ethiopians from East to West and from South to North united to defend their people and regain their dignity. They paroled, "Ke'badme Mels Wede Meles". Several political groups raised their voices for democracy and peace.

The Addis Ababa university students' demands for democracy and the irresponsible fascistic response of the clique in power renewed the long-standing political question in Ethiopia - the formation of a legitimate representative government. Addis Ababa elementary and high school students took to the streets in support of the university students. The students of Mekelle university boycotted classes and staged a hunger strike in support of the causes raised by the Addis Ababa university students. The Jimma and other university students and high school students all over the country are supporting the cause of the Addis Ababa university students despite the mobilisation of troops into campuses by the regime.

Meles and his cohorts have been murdering defenceless people for the last 25 years. As long as the victims were buried in the bushes and valleys of Tigray in the absence of mass media, Meles could hide his atrocities from many Ethiopians and the world public. Now that his acts of barbarism are taking place in a metropolis in broad day-light, Meles is trying to justify the massacre by ordering the inhabitants of Mekelle to stage a shameless demonstration in support of his acts.

The Prime Minister is also shamelessly accusing Ethiopian political parties and human rights organisations of inciting the students. This accusation is nothing but part of the regime's strategy to contain the spread of the democratic and civic movement as a whole. The regime could not deny that the demands of the students were legal and legitimate. The tasks of political parties and human rights organisations are to educate and to mobilise the people for their constitutional rights. If some of the students demands are identical with what the parties or organisations stand for, it is because all of them are

working for the rights of citizens enshrined in the very constitution written by the incumbent regime as a show-piece.

Enough is enough! The young generation deserves, Ethiopia deserves peace, democracy and development after two reigns of terror.

We forward our condolence to the families of the victims and appreciate the courage of the students for their peaceful struggle.

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