

Force Never Disproves Truth

“The truth which we have recognized, the ideas in which we have faith, do not become invalidated by force. Might and reason exist on different planes, and force never disproves truth.” Eric Fromm

Ato Meles Zenawi's bizarre “Letter to the Editor” is as clumsy in form as it is incoherent in substance; and certainly unbecoming of a prime minister; and of an Ethiopian gentleman. It is given a heading of “Easy to remove the garbage that has covered lumps of truth.” On the side of this patched up letter the Editorial of the Ethiopian Herald reads: Fictitious testimony cannot bury the truth. The Editorial talks of what it calls “nepotistic patronage to the opposition” and about “heaps of fallacies” in the EUEOM report on the election. Since the Editorial is similar in content and spirit to what Ato Meles laboured on, it would have been wise for him to refrain from wasting his time on that diatribe.

For the last fourteen years one policy and one policy alone served the Ethiopian dictator and his clique: a policy of rather crude deception. It was crude because it was so obvious. In the case of the Ethiopian people they were subjected to deception by the monopoly of the media and the security forces. The diplomatic community was willingly deceived by the always imminent threat to their career. Some diplomats conceded their willingness to be deceived sourly. One European diplomat expressed the policy of deception by saying “I think the Prime Minister underestimates our intelligence considerably.” Only one European diplomat, a Swede, had the moral courage to break through the veil of deception and to uncover the pile of dirt behind it all, although his veracity and clean conscience did not ultimately serve his diplomatic career. Perhaps, veracity and clean conscience are not in the essence of diplomacy. The Swedish diplomat collected massive and impressive facts about EPRDF's Economic Empire and the nepotism associated with it. It hardly saw the light of day.

In recent months Mr. Tony Blair and Sir Bob Geldof have expressed their displeasure on the massacre in Addis Abeba in strong language. Perhaps the sense of shame felt by Mr. Blair about one of his African commissioners contributed to shortening the life of the ill-fated Commission for Africa. It is also significant that the Norwegian Company's award to Meles Zenawi fizzled out to a shameful end.

One was always hoping that it would be a maverick American diplomat or journalist that would shatter the naked policy of deception of the Ethiopian dictator. Alas! They were to be found nowhere. In fact, but for Congressman Smith American Government's relentless discourse on democracy, justice and the rule of law would have been empty rhetoric to serve only American

petroleum interests, which do not seem to include American ideals and values, the foundation for American dynamism. "Telling it like it is" is an American jargon unknown to almost all American diplomats in Ethiopia, who practice the contrary. Perhaps it is because they became acculturated.

Finally two European diplomats, Mr. Tim Clarks and Madame Gomes, enter into the Ethiopian election fiasco. As all diplomats they took all the twists and turns created by the collusion of Meles, Bereket, prime minister and minister of information respectively, and Kemal, chairman of the so-called election board and, incompatibly, president of the supreme court with supreme patience. Tim Clark lost his cool, as Americans would say, and wrote a letter to Bereket, telling him like it is in diplomatic language. How dare he? was the response of Bereket. Gomez read the summary of the report on the election 2005, which her team observed. How dare she? is the response of Meles.

Gomez's statement was the last straw that broke Meles's back and exposed the sham surrounding what he promised to be a "faultless election." The EUEOM represented by Gomez had the moral courage and the veracity to break away from the usual moral slumber of the diplomatic corps in Addis Abeba and call a spade a spade. Therefore the resentful ferocity and the rant expressed in the so-called "Letter to the Editor" were understandable. That this shameless piece of invective outburst was written in English is the most revealing and interesting part, because for the first time non-Ethiopians had the opportunity to suffer the uncouth gibberish and presumptuous pontification of Meles Zenawi. The Ethiopian people have suffered from that type of deafening and boring diatribe for fourteen years. It is good that the diplomatic community has a taste of it. It is quite clear from the so-called Letter to the Editor that the unquestionable source and standard for truth, justice, and freedom is the dictator. In his diatribes in Amharic he often makes his definitive and unalterable point with the English equivalent of "period" or "full stop." When he wants to make his point negatively he often says "over the grave of EPRDF." In his Letter most of his arguments end with "Nothing." Perhaps the psychologist would recognize it as delusion of grandeur.

One of the many revealing blind spots in his mind is his inability to relate his fury over the EUEOM's testimony to the predicament of the witnesses for the opposition during the investigations. Is it difficult to imagine that if he is that furious with EUEOM, how much more effectively furious he could be with the poor Ethiopians? He wrote so many paragraphs related to tension as he interpreted it and as EUEOM interpreted it. He was constantly arguing on tension in general ("tense political environment") while the EUEOM statement makes reference specifically to high tension ("on-going high tension"). The elementary logic that he referred to obviously does not take the two as being

identical. Again the blind spot is apparent when he says, "what has the ban on demonstrations got to do with the investigation?" For him the answer is "Nothing!" To EUEOM (and to me) a ban on demonstrations, especially an illegal one, is obviously a major constraint on political rights and it casts a serious atmosphere of suspicion and fear, which have adverse effects on witnesses for the opposition. This is particularly true after the massacre of 42 Ethiopians in Addis Abeba by a force that was directly under his command. Is there any reason to doubt that he could have sent that force to EUEOM if he could? The ban on demonstrations removed the climate of freedom that prevailed prior to it and replaced it by a climate of terror. Investigation under terror is not the same thing as investigation in a condition of freedom. Ato Meles says that the ban on demonstrations gave him "a breathing space to manage the tension, as almost everyone else including much of the diplomatic community in Addis, believes." Ato Meles's elementary logic does not of course include specifics like who is "everyone else"? As for the diplomatic community he is certain that they shall remain silent and diplomatically correct. Of course, we know, too, what he means by "managing tension"; he believes tension is managed by terror, by massacring innocent and helpless civilians.

With perfect ease and almost innocently Ato Meles states "the government was not and could not be part of negotiations on the code of conduct. The negotiations were between the parties." Ato Meles would say this is not a lie. In the introductory part of his Letter he says that the EUEOM statement on the election "created outrage across the nation" Certainly, he would not consider this a lie at all. One who has more time to waste fruitlessly will find many more indications of the blind spots in the Letter of Ato Meles. But there is one that needs mentioning. For fourteen years I have been under the correct impression that "guilty until proven innocent" was his staunch principle. In fact some fourteen years ago I wrote a letter to the Editor of the same newspaper challenging Ato Meles's requirements for visa (such as proof that one was not a member of the security apparatus of the previous regime, that one did not have an outstanding loan from the bank, and that one did not owe anything to the internal revenue). The response from his office was that that was the general practice in all civilized countries. Most importantly how about those persons who were jailed for ten to eleven years and were released because no charges could be brought against them? What about the thousands that still languish in jails for over ten years? This is when one needs to say: God save us!

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