

Students' Revolt in Adwa Awraja against the Imperial Regime (1960S-1974)

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ABSTRACT

This article attempts to show the nature of students strike in Adwa Awraja during the imperial regime. It aims at examining the extent to which the death of Tilahun Gizaw and Sibhatu Wubneh aggravated the anti-government political opposition in Adwa. The finding of this paper evinces that though the imperial government undertook several bloody measures to suppress the political opposition of Nigisite Saba Secondary School students, the latter were courage and committed enough to end the regime. Their readiness to pay any form of sacrifice for a better future of their community was worth mentioning.

KEY WORDS: Leaflets, boycott, demonstration, opposition, billboards

1. INTRODUCTION

The massive wave of student protest in Tigray during the imperial regime did not get due attention among researchers. There is no or little literature written regarding this issue. Despite its far reaching effects even after the fall of the imperial regime, this issue remained overlooked. To this end, this full length research aimed at filling this gap through conducting rigorous investigation. This article shows that the expansion of elementary and secondary schools in different provinces of Ethiopia during the imperial regime enabled students to get exposure to global and national politics. Even though the educational policy of the imperial regime in Tigray province was characterized by its "controlled expansion" nature, the opening of several modern schools in the province highly shaped the political consciousness of many students. Few students who joined university played a vital role in politicizing both elementary and secondary school students of different *awrajas* in Tigray. What was happening in Adwa was worth mentioning. After the establishment of Nigiste Saba Secondary School, many students from different *weredas* of Adwa *Awraja* joined the school. Like their friends in other *awrajas*, students of Adwa *Awraja* were active participants of the political movement challenging the imperial regime. Student revolt in the school was very strong between the late 1960s and early 1970s. The students were believed to have uncompromising stand in their struggle against the imperial government. Forceful actions underwent by security forces against them remained inadequate to stop the latter's illegal political activities in the *awraja*. The way how the opposition was started, its courses and consequences are discussed in this article briefly.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research paper is written based on both primary and secondary sources. The primary sources include archives and oral information. The researcher collected many archival sources from different offices and individual persons. These types of sources, on which the paper is heavily dependent, are exhaustively gathered through courage efforts. They are first hand information to the issue under discussion. The archival materials include leaflets, reports, declaration and revolutionary poems which were written by both conflicting parties (students and government officials). The researcher used purposeful sampling method to select informants. He met few but knowledgeable informants from whom he obtained crucial information due to the fact that they were active participants of the student anti-government movement in Adwa Awraja during the imperial regime and members of Tigray People's Liberation Front fighters during the Derg regime. The sample size was determined by the quality of information obtained from the informants. He also deployed structured and unstructured interviews and focused group discussion to acquire relevant information. Equally important, he used some secondary sources such as books, articles (published and unpublished) and theses. Huge data cannot speak by itself. Rather, collecting much information must be followed by critical and skeptical analysis and interpretation. To this end, the information obtained through various methods was critically and rationally analyzed, evaluated and interpreted. Each data was checked and counter-checked for its reliability and authenticity. The findings of this paper are discussed through narrative and explanatory approaches.

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3/ RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. The Death of Tilahun Gizaw and Sibhatu Wubneh Nexus Students Revolt in Adwa

During the imperial regime, the educational system was not adapted to the realities of Ethiopian rural life and it did not meet the needs of the society at large. No or very little attempt was made to amend the context of the system. All instructions in the primary schools were in Amharic language and this hampered the learning capacity of children whose first language was not Amharic. This discontent continued even after students joined secondary school. To this end, high school students in Tigray were engaged in anti-government political activities to protest the dismal condition in their areas (Aregawi, 2008), (Balsvik, 1985), (Atsbha, 2014 a). As far as political activities of secondary school students of Tigray is concerned, Adwa is not exceptional. As what was happening in different secondary and elementary schools of the province, students of Nigisite Saba Secondary School were reactionary for their engagement in the struggle against the Imperial regime. Their demand for a change in government was as uncompromising (Atsbha, 2014 b).

As usual, Tegar university students played a pivotal role in shaping the students revolt in Adwa. They prepared and dispatched several political pamphlets among the secondary school students in the town. Melese Tekle and Aregawi Berhe were good cases in point. They mostly met some activist secondary school students to whom they hand the prepared leaflets over around Alemeda and Endabagerim. As some secondary school students of Adwa received several pamphlets from university students, many other students in the town actively participated in reproducing several copies using hand writing. Teklay Gebreslasie, who was president of the student council at Nigisite Saba Secondary School, took lion's share in reproducing several pamphlets that were sent from Tegar university students. Most of the reproduced pamphlets were posted by some revolutionary students in the mid night. They usually posted it in places such a bus station and market where many people could access them early in the morning before it was noticed by the security forces in the town.¹

Parents were patrons of the anti-government political movement organized by students. However, there were few individuals who associated the students' involvement in the political opposition in the town with the latter's immaturity. It is stated that these individuals believed that students who were actively participating in the illegal political activities in the town were those who came from the neighboring *awrajas*.²

Nigisite Saba Secondary School was a melting spot of many students who came from different areas including Eritrea, Aksum, Shire, Enticho, Temben and Rama. Their anti-government political activities were very strong. For security purpose, they sometimes went to Endabarae'si, Endabagerima, Mai Midimar and Soloda, all places some kilometers far away from the center of Adwa Town.³

According to my informant, Teacher Brhane Tsegay, who is now the Head of Sponsorship Program of Dimtsi Weyane Tigray Office, the students' movement in Nigisite Saba Secondary School began to challenge the imperial government since the early 1960s. Through time, it took political form and organized manner. In the mean time, the student council of the respective school managed to create a united front among students. Some prominent students including Aregawi Berhe and Amanuel Weldegerima led the student council. Students of Nigisite Saba Secondary School strongly believed that the imperial regime was incapable of solving the multifaceted problems of the people of Tigray. They were conscious enough to oppose the heavy taxation policy of the feudal regime. Their opposition went to the extent of encouraging peasants not to pay different amounts and forms of taxes using microphone. This brought the students into conflict with government officials of the imperial government working in Adwa. The nature of measures that were undertaken by security forces against some reactionary Tegar university students urged the students of the school to determine to fight against the oppressive rule of Emperor Haileslasie.⁴

Since the late 1960s, students of Nigeste Saba Secondary School became non-tolerable towards the feudal regime which was oppressive in nature. They did not like to make any compromise let alone to the ruling government even for their friends who failed to cooperate with them. They invited every student to create a united front against the imperial regime which was needed to be toppled as soon as possible. All members of Nigeste Saba Secondary Students were required to be confident enough to struggle heart fully against the imperial regime. They had strong bid to strengthen their unity. It seems for this reason that posted a notice that warned the state and non cooperative students as well. As far as its warning to the government is concerned, it clearly underlines that students of the respective school and the people of Adwa *Awraja* as a whole were not treated as an Ethiopians but as an extraterrestrial. They strongly believed that, under the imperial government, their human rights were violated to large extent.⁵

The death of some influential Tegar university students such as Tilahun Gizaw and Sibhatu Wubneh intensified the student strike in Adwa. As the death of Tilahun was made public, students in Adwa became more revolutionary and committed enough to struggle for the cause of their community. Using exciting poems, they managed to agitate broad-based political opposition against the rule of Emperor Haileslasie.

¹ Informants: Teacher Aregawi Gebremariam; Atsbha G/Egziabher, "A Shift ...," p.133.; Idem, *Down to ...*, p.77.

² *Ibid*

³ *Ibid*.

⁴ Informant: Teacher Brhane Tsegay; Mulugéta Debalqew. *Galahti Seggi: Ye Hwehat Ye Tiñiq Tigil Tarik (1967-1983 E.C.)*. (Addis Ababa, 2010), p.43.

⁵ National Archives and Library Agency Archives (N.A.L.A.A). Box No.297/4, File No. 3/Tm13/24/6.

The death of Tilahun Gizaw was followed by the killing of his Tigirawai fellow, Sibhatu Wubneh. He was killed due to the confrontation between students of Haileslasie I University and security forces who were assigned to recapture the coffin of Tilahun Gizaw that was taken by the former. Sibhatu's coffin was taken to Enticho by his four relatives. His death was made public to the people of Enticho on 30 December 1970. His funeral ceremony took place at the Church of Mariam Debre Genet where no less than 1500 people attended the funeral ceremony. Not only the local people of Enticho Town and his close relatives and family but also students of Agazi, Aksum and Nigisite Saba Secondary Schools and university service teachers attended the funeral ceremony. Many of them put a piece of black cloth on their right arms as a means to show their deep sorrowfulness.⁶

Many students of the school, some of whom came from Mendefera, Adiquala and Aksum, participated in the funeral ceremony and they used this opportunity to meet the masses population of their *awrajas* and its environs and to reveal the repressive nature of the feudal rule of Emperor Haileslasie.⁷

In the mean time, his brother, Ato Gebreslasie Wubneh, delivered a speech regarding the evil nature of the feudal rule that claimed the lives of Sibhatu Wubneh and other influential Ethiopians. He underlined the extent to which such action discouraged many people not to send their children to school. After Ato Gebreslasie had finished his speech, Amanuel Woldegerima, president of the student council of Nigisite Saba Secondary School, continued to present his speech on behalf of his school.

Other students of Nigisite Saba Secondary School and their teachers boycotted classes and attended Sibhatu's funeral ceremony at Enticho Town. They carried bill boards which read, "We feel deep sorrow due the death of our many brothers. We, the students of Nigisite Saba Secondary School, strongly oppose the death of our brothers through deep sorrow."⁸

The time after the death of Sibgatu, students' opposition in Adwa became frequent. They began to raise several questions that needed urgent response among which the removal of American Peace Corps from the town was one. It is stated that students of the school argued "Why the Americans should not leave Ethiopia." This question was not raised arbitrarily. Rather, students first understood the influence of the Corps presence in Ethiopia on the culture and history of the peoples of the country and they developed sound experience regarding what happened in Libya in relation to the American Peace Corps. Initially, they read the history of Libya and they knew that the removal of King Endris and his replacement by Mohhamar Gadafi was followed by the expulsion of the American Peace Corps. Then after, students believed that the change in government in Libya freed the country from American domination and they argued that why the case was not true for Ethiopia. Students strongly rejected the American imperialism in Ethiopia. They claimed as if Ethiopia was considered as one of the several states of America. This caused hostile relationship between students and Peace Corps and the latter were reported to have been used racial insults against the former to wound their psychological makeup. This urged students to undertake severe measures against the Americans after which the latter were forced to leave Adwa for Asmara. This was followed by the coming of many police forces from different areas mainly from Addis Ababa and undertook retaliate measures against the students including torture and imprisonment. This situation aggravated students' political opposition against the imperial regime in the town.⁹

Parents involved in the movement on the side of their sons and daughters. Students of Nigisite Saba were not only active in Adwa *Awraja* but also in their neighboring *awrajas* including Axum. In time when students of Axum Junior Secondary School faced some difficulties, students of Nigisite Saba Secondary School visited Axum and opposed the imperial rule on the side of the students of Axum Town. For instance, in 1970, as a clash between students of Axum Junior Secondary School and security forces in the town was opened, students of Nigisite Saba Secondary School captured *Haji* Abdu's bus and went to Axum for the sake of helping their friends in the town. What is necessary to note here is that those who marched from Adwa to Axum include students who were born in Axum *Awraja* and went to Adwa in order to continue their secondary education due to the absence of secondary school in Axum and students originated from Adwa and other *awrajas* accompanied them. This cooperation between students of Axum and other *awrajas* including Adwa forced the *Nech Lebashoch* in Axum to stop their military measure against the students and to release the arrested students in the town.¹⁰

Students of the school used different pretexts in order to arrange demonstration. For instance, in 1971, an Indian physics teacher was transferred from Nigisite Saba Secondary School to Adigrat. This created disappointment among students of the former school. Due to this reason, they boycotted classes after which *Leul Ras* Mengesha Seyum was reported to have been visited Adwa and asked them why they did not attend their education peacefully. In the mean time, not only students of the respective school but also their parents were not happy by the speech of the *Leul Ras*. It is stated that there were even some individuals including *Ayte* Gebremedhin Araya, who openly insulted the *Leul Ras* for his failure

⁶ Informants: Teacher Brhane Tsegay; Teacher Aregawi Gebremariam; Atsbha G/Egziabher, "Education Nexus Politics in Agame Awraja during the Imperial Regime," (An article in process for publication in African Journal of History and Culture.)

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ N.A.L.A.A. Box No.297/4, File No. 111/144/24. Tahisas 24/1962 E.C

⁹ Informants: Teacher Brhane Tsegay; Teacher Aregawi Gebremariam

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

to understand the hardships of the people of Tigray. This provoked the *Leul Ras* to compel parents to stop the illegal political activities of their children unless the burden would be imposed on them.¹¹

It is also stated that a sort of misunderstanding was created among students and very few individuals. As the communication between *Leul Ras Mengesha* and the local people became unsympathetic, a certain person, *Ayte Teferi Teklehaimanot*, who was an owner of bakery shop, asserts that those who were disturbing were students who came out of Adwa and he requested their willingness to stop their disturbance. His speech disappointed many students and their parents who were reported to have been made an oath his bread. This was a mechanism used by students and their parents to discourage others who did not support their cause and to maintain their unity among each other so as to materialize their mission. From this onwards, students were reported to have been stopped buying bread from *Ato Teferi's* shop and began to buy *Himbash* (local bread) from a certain old woman, *Eney Tekle*.¹²

In 1972, students cautiously identified the major problems of their people and began to struggle to bring solutions. According to a letter they wrote to the head office of Adwa *Awraja*, students of Nigisite Saba Secondary School identified several problems which needed an immediate solution.

First, grade 10 students of the year, 1972, had no history teacher and the director of the school was reported to have been put zero (0) mark on their mark list. Second, grade 10 students of the same year were not given a certificate showing their academic status of the first semester. Third, a clinic which was opened due to the students' frequent appeal and the generosity of *Leul Ras Mengesha*, was closed with no adequate reasons told to the students. Fourth, the shortage of water supply and poorly handled toilet were not addressed. Fifth, the then weakening condition of sport activities in the school had to be improved through replacing the unqualified sport teacher with qualified and committed one. Sixth, a student who might misbehave in the school had not been punished by an independent decision of the director rather the decision of parent committee had to be taken in to consideration.¹³

Seventh, the students had to have their representatives who would protect their rights. Eighth, the director had to be expelled from the town for the fact that he was violating the rules and regulation of the Ministry of Education. Ninth, the director had to stop deciding the pass mark of students from one grade to the next grade based on his own personal interest and without the decision of subject teachers. Tenth, the director was blamed for his arrogant behavior mostly for his strict measures against absentee students including those who had medical evidence. Eleventh, Nigisite Saba Secondary School was delivering education for evening students from whom Eth \$ 15,000 was reported to have been collected and out of which Eth \$ 5000 was paid for the teachers who taught the evening students. However, according to students point of view, for what purpose the remaining income (Eth \$ 10,000 per year) was used remained unknown. Twelfth, despite its historical significance, Adwa Town showed no satisfactory progress because of lack of due attention and efforts to facilitate the development of the town.¹⁴

As stated in a letter wrote by Colonel Brhane Tefera, Commander-in-Chief of the police of the province, and sent to *Leul Ras Mengesha Seyum* on 04 May 1972, students of Nigisite Saba Secondary School stopped attending their education for unknown reason. Four days later, on 08 May 1972, students arranged a peaceful demonstration against the director of the school and they consulted the governor of Aksum *Awraja*. Despite his advice, students refused to attend their education. The security forces of the respective *awraja* were assigned to closely supervise students' daily activities and to send a report of the situation in the town without wasting time.¹⁵

3.2. The Strike at Adi Abun

On 12 May 1972, some influential students including Muluwork Abay, Hadush Gezahagn, Gebreslasse Gebreigziabher Kebede Negash, Gebremariam Teklemedhin, Amha Belay and Negash Seyum arranged a meeting which took place at 3:00 AM in Nigisite Saba Secondary School. Following this, more than 400 students boycotted classes and engaged in a demonstration. Those students who did not participate in the demonstration were tortured by their fellow students of the respective school. Due to this reason, some students were seriously wounded. Tetemke Kahsay and Yisshaq Gebru were good cases in point.¹⁶

In the same day, at 5:00 AM, students planned to go to a place called Congo Sefer at Adi Abun (5 kms away from Adwa), where they want to inflict a damage against an individual who possessed a bar opened after the closure of a church school. A group of police forces, under the leadership of deputy Commander of Hundred Gebremicael Ambika, consisted of five soldiers and one truck followed the students' footstep to the Congo Sefer. Four polices at AddiAbun joined the marching soldiers after which the forces increased into nine (9) among which only four were reported to have been

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ N.A.L.A.A. Box No.297/4, File No. 27/6/64. From Nigiste Saba Secondary School students to Head office of Adwa *Awraja*. Yekatit 27/1964 E.C.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ N.A.L.A.A. Box No.297/4, File No. 645/1474/16. From Colonel Brhane Tefera to *Leul Ras Mengesha Seyum*. Ginbot 3/1964 E.C

¹⁶ N.A.L.A.A. Box No.297/4, File No. 3/Tm13/5/18. April 9/1965 E.C.

equipped with guns. Despite the security forces attempt to disperse the students, the latter stoned the bar of *Ato Abera Mekonen* at *Addi Abun*. Even though the policemen and soldiers were ordered to suppress the student strike at *Adi Abun*, unfortunately, it was not an easy task to the police forces. Students' determination to pay any form of sacrifice proved to have been hardly possible for the police forces to disperse the students.¹⁷

However, archival sources contradict each other as far as the military weapons used by the rebelling students during their clash with the security forces at *Adi Abun* are concerned. An archival source reveals that the students managed to snatch guns from two soldiers: *Woldemicael Hailemariam* and *Yibenay Weldegebriel*, though recaptured soon by the remaining two armed soldiers.¹⁸ Another archival material evinces that during the confrontation between both parties, students were supported by some government workers who fired off their pistols against the police forces.¹⁹

Here, it is surprising and really impressive to note that the students were well equipped not only with pens and stones but also with military weapons mainly pistols as well. They were confident enough to fight against the security forces that followed their foot step to *Congo Sefer*. Despite the police forces attempt to negotiate with students of *Nigisite Saba Secondary School*, the latter refused to accept the advice of the former. Instead, they were determinant to fight against the oppressive feudal regime.²⁰

After the end of the skirmish, three (3) security forces namely *Worku Hailemariam*, *Asra Haleqa* (Commander of Ten) *Equbay Hailu* and *Mikitil Meto Haleqa* *Gebremicael Ambika* were reported to have been arrested.²¹ According to different archives, the way how *Brhane Amha* was killed remained another controversial issue. As per the above archival material, *Brhane Amha* was shot by his friends' pistol.²² Another archival contradicts this idea. It reveals that the clash between students of *Nigisite Saba Secondary School* and security forces at *Adi Abun* took place at 12:00 o'clock. As per this source, he was killed by a gun fired by the security force and while two other students were heavily mounded due to the same reason.²³

The head office of police force of *Tigray province* needed further investigation on the causes and consequences of the confrontation between students of *Nigisite Saba Secondary School* and police forces under the leadership of deputy Commander of Hundred *Gebre Micael*. The office was eager to know mainly why students went out of *Adwa Town* and inflicted such damage on *Congo Sefer*? Whose bullet killed *Brhane Amha*? and they want to estimate the average expense or cost of destroyed materials. The office was waiting for a report regarding the aforementioned issues from the police forces in the respective *awraja*.²⁴

After security forces found political pamphlets posted in different parts of *Adwa Town* on 28 May 1972, they sent its copy to the Imperial Government Ministry of Education and Fine Arts in order to give a clear image about the students' activities in the town. However, the supervision of security forces in the town proved inadequate to stop posting different exciting pamphlets provoking the mass for an armed struggle against the imperial regime of the Emperor of *Haileslasie I*.²⁵

On 29 May 1972, at 15:00 o'clock, school administrators and parent committee held a meeting to discuss on issues related to the illegal political activities of students of *Nigisite Saba Secondary School*. In the meeting, the participants discussed that eight (8) foreign teachers decided to stop teaching in the school due to the reason that they were warned by the rebelling students. Equally important, five (5) national service teachers too stopped teaching due to the life insecurity in the town. To this end, the thirteen (13) teachers refused to run their teaching and learning process. This added fire on the fuel in the town. This report was sent from the head office of *Tigray province* police force to *Tigray province* for the latter's decision on what would be the solution for that urgent problem.²⁶

A letter that was written by Colonel *Brhanu Demewez* and sent to *Ato Ermias Sahle* on 30 May 1972 shows that the situation after the clash between students of *Nigisite Saba secondary school* and government security forces and the death of student *Brhane Amha* became a big deal among the provincial, *awraja*, *woreda* and *kebele* governors of *Tigray*. The colonel argues that, firstly, students of the respective school who went to *Adi Abun*, 5 kilo meters away from *Adwa town* and stoned the bar of *Ato Abera Mekonen*, were initiated by somebody unknown at the moment. The students refused to obey the order of the security forces that followed them immediately after the latter left *Adwa Town* and began to go to *Adi Abun*, to give up their illegal measures of raining couple of stones over the houses and the security forces in the area. This brought them in to a violent conflict with security forces due to which student *Brhane Amha* was killed, two soldiers: *Woldemicael Hailemariam* and *Yibeyin Woldegebriel* wounded and a certain person, whose name and address was unknown at the moment heavily damaged and taken in to hospital for a medical treatment.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ N.A.L.A.A. Box No.297/4, File No. 3/Tm13/160/64. From Colonel *Brhanu Demewez* to the governor of *Adwa Awraja*. Ginbot 22/1964 E.C.

²⁰ N.A.L.A.A. Box No.297/4, File No. 3/Tm13/170/64. From *Tibebu Mandefro* to the Ministry of Interior. Ginbot 12/1964 E.C.

²¹ N.A.L.A.A. Box No.297/4, File No. 3/Tm13/5/18. April 9/1965 E.C.

²² N.A.L.A.A. Box No.297/4, File No. 3/Tm13/170/64. From *Tibebu Mandefro* to the Ministry of Interior. Ginbot 12/1964 E.C.

²³ N.A.L.A.A. Box No.297/4, File No. 3/Tm13/37/90. From *Tibebu Mandefro* to the Ministry of Interior. Ginbot 7/1964 E.C.

²⁴ N.A.L.A.A. Box No.297/4, File No. 3/Tm13/170/64. From *Tibebu Mandefro* to the Ministry of Interior. Ginbot 12/1964 E.C.

²⁵ N.A.L.A.A. Box No.297/4, File No. 3/Tm13/38/10. From *Tibebu Mandefro* to the Ministry of Interior. Ginbot 20/1964 E.C.

²⁶ N.A.L.A.A. Box No.297/4, File No. 14960. From *Tibebu Mandefro* to the Ministry of Interior. Ginbot 22/1964 E.C.

Secondly, he further argues, during the confrontation between both parties, students were supported by some government workers who fired their pistol. But he denied that the police forces did not fire their guns to punish the students and to counter attack against those who fired off towards the security forces using pistol. According to Colonel Brhanu Demewez, what the security forces did was firing their guns to the sky in order to show that they did not like to shade blood and they wanted to indicate that they needed reinforcing forces from Adwa town. He underlines that no less than twenty two (22) bullets were fired off from both sides. Thirdly, he underpins that Brhane Amha was passed away due to a bullet fired from either of the two parties but unknown which party definitely killed the student. Generally, the colonel concludes that though students were involved in illegal political activities for a poorly justified reason, security forces were cautioned to their actions that would lead to a sudden life loss and costly material destruction.²⁷

Students of Nigisite Saba Secondary School used different tactics to post their political pamphlets so as to agitate mass-based political opposition against the feudal regime. The security forces close supervision during the day time urged the latter to post their notices and pamphlets at the night time. However, the security forces were aware of this fact.²⁸

Immediately after Awetahegn Bitewlign was caught by security forces at the night time, he was interrogated to tell those who participated in the preparation of the pamphlet being posted by him. Unfortunately, he mentioned some names of his friends who helped him in the preparation of the written material. These include Abrrha Gebre Slasie, Tewodros Abay and Kidane Gebre Meskel. The report of such happen was immediately dispatched to the head offices of the province and police force at Mekelle Town after which the latter office asked for a timely report on the forms of investigation and passed punishment on the students accused of preparing, dispatching and posting the pamphlet.²⁹

Students of Nigisite Saba Secondary School continued posting several impressive political pamphlets which agitated the mass for an armed struggle against the imperial regime. On the mid night of 14 December 1973, they posted pamphlets written both in Tigrigna and Amharic languages.³⁰

According to a letter wrote on 25 December 1973 and sent to the Ministry of Interior, the teaching and learning process in Nigisite Saba Secondary School was stopped between 12 and 25 December 1973. The head offices of Tigray province and police force assured the Ministry of Interior that security forces in the town were cautiously controlling the day-to day activities of students of Nigisite Saba Secondary School. They, the provincial offices, also promised that they would send a timely report about the further political activities of students under tight supervision.³¹

On February 1973, students of Nigisite Saba Secondary School posted a pamphlet having a central message to students that every student of the respective school had to agree to close school and to make him/her self ready for an armed struggle against the imperial regime. It reveals that they frequently asked many questions that require urgent responses. However, the state gave them deaf ears after which they decided to stop their education as what students of other secondary schools in Tigray did. The posted pamphlet warned students of the respective school that it was hardly possible to attend their education peacefully while many Ethiopians were being killed. Anyone who ignored this warning would be subjected to severe punishment including physical damage. The pamphlet informed everyone that the 1973 academic year was closed and he/she had to go to the rural area and learn how their fathers fought for the well-being of their country and society. This lesson was believed to have been better than the classroom teaching-leering process.³²

3.3. A Dramatized Opposition in the town

In 1974, students of the school became sure that unless they cooperated with the local people and waged armed struggle against the imperial regime, they would not able to achieve their goal. As a result, they invited their community for such purpose and the latter's response was positive. They had got an impressive support from university and college students of Adwa origin in particular and Tigray in general. The governor of Adwa *Awraja*, *Dejazmach* Haileslasie Gebremedhin of Shire, had no an acceptance among the people of the *awraja*. For this reason, both students and the local people of Adwa *Awraja* needed his removal from his position. He was criticized for his failure to bring tangible improvements in the living condition of the people of the respective *awraja*.³³

The activities of students of Nigisite Saba Secondary School show the extent to which he was considered as a puppet. They put a big pot decorated with suit in the center of the town. This was used to show that the *awraja* governor was not more than the pot that was put in the centre of the town. In the same year, everything was politicized. Students were digging out a history of some Tegarū patriots and began to teach their community. Investigating life story of *Bashay* Awalom Haregot, who played a pivotal role during the Battle of Adwa in 1896, was good case in point.³⁴

²⁷ N.A.L.A.A. Box No.297/4, File No. 3/Tm13/160/64. From Colonel Brhanu Demewez to the governor of Adwa *Awraja*. Ginbot 22/1964 E.C.

²⁸ N.A.L.A.A. Box No.297/4, File No. 16631. From Colonel Brhanu Demewez to the governor of Adwa *Awraja*. Sene 12/1964 E.C.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ N.A.L.A.A. Box No.297/4, File No. 3303/20/118. Tahisas 19/1965 E.C.

³¹ N.A.L.A.A. Box No.297/4, File No. 16631. From Colonel Hailegiorgis Debela to the Ministry of Interior. Tahisas 17/1964 E.C.

³² N.A.L.A.A. Box No.297/4, File No. 3/Tm/13/63. 13/06/65 E.C

³³ Informants: Teacher Brhane Tsegay; Teacher Aregawi Gebremariam

³⁴ *Ibid.*

Fiseha Abay, one of the students of the respective school, produced a monument having the image of the aforementioned patriot and put in the head office of Adwa *Awraja*. Unfortunately, the state officials in the town destroyed the monument and took its ruins to the compound of Nigisite Saba Secondary School. This created deep resentment among students of the school. The hostility between both parties was further intensified. They asked why their *awraja* was not given due attention. They also criticized the sale of electric power generating motor that the Italians had left in Enticho and large amount of big trees under the pretext of collecting money to construct all weather roads, which was not really planned. The exploitation of local resources was great worry of many students of the school. What was impressive is that to show the exploitative nature of the feudal regime of Emperor Haileslasie, *Fiqir Eske Mekabir* (Love up to Grave) of Addis Alemayehu was converted into drama, exercised by students of the respective school for a long period of time and they finally presented it to a considerable number of audiences. This helped people to develop clear image and better understanding about the imperial regime.³⁵

As the time rings close to the fall of the imperial regime, students of Nigisite Saba Secondary School did their best to realize the situation. On 28 August 1974, at 14:00 o'clock, many teachers and students accompanied by some residents of Adwa Town flocked to the streets and voiced "Down to Mengesha". This situation was coincided with Brigadier General Getachew Nadew's visit of the town. The demonstrators asked the Brigadier General to hear their complaints. However, he was not in a position to hear their grievances and what his response for the moment was that he did not go to the town to hear the problem of the people and to give solution to their problems. He told them that the reason behind his journey to the town was for an academic observation. Having told that he would take their written appeal to the imperial government in Addis Ababa, he ordered the disperse of the people using police forces.³⁶

Two days later, on 30 August 1974, many teachers and students of Adwa *Awraja* and few urban dwellers met together and arranged a peaceful demonstration. They called for the removal of *Leul Ras* Mengesha Seyum and *Nibure'd* Gebreslasie, governor of Axum *Awraja* from their power.³⁷ Around the last days of the imperial regime, students of Nigisite Saba Secondary School became very persistent to acquire an experience from their fellow Eritreans and used different pretexts to boycott classes. On 9 October 1974, they used the delay of grade 8 exam result as a reason to stop their education. They were supported by many students of various grades ranging from grade one to grade twelve.³⁸

CONCLUSION

Students strike in Adwa highly challenged the imperial government. Even though the movement was begun in the 1960s, it became beyond the state's control following the death of several influential Tegar university students mainly Tilahun Gizaw and Sibhatu Wubneh. After these Tegar students were killed by government forces in December 1970, many students, teachers and parents in Adwa *Awraja* began to actively involve in anti-government political activities. Particularly, secondary school students in Adwa Town used several leaflets and billboards to agitate mass-based political opposition against the feudal regime.

The strike of May 1972 at Congo Sefer of Adi Abun witnessed the state's failure to suppress the political opposition in the town. Students cautiously maintained their unity at any cost. They managed to win the support of teachers and parents by clearly showing the evil nature of the imperial regime. Students of Nigisite Saba Secondary School strongly criticized the maladministration and corruption of the ruling government officials. They were effective enough to take good lessons from their neighboring provinces mainly Eritreans to show the masses that it was hardly possible to achieve their mission without paying different forms of sacrifices.

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³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ N.A.L.A.A. Box No.297/4, File No. 3/Tm13/10/89. From Colonel Shiwaredged Desta to the Ministry of Interior. 28/12/1966 E.C.

³⁷ N.A.L.A.A. Box No.297/4, File No. 30749/2708/58. From Fitawrari Meharene Minim to Socialist Ethiopia ad hoc committee. Meskerem 10/1966 E.C

³⁸ N.A.L.A.A. Box No.297/4, File No. 3/Tm13/39/1. Tikimt 5/1966 E.C

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