

A Local Opposition against the Imperial Regime in Aksum Town (1960s-1974)

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ABSTRACT

Several reasons such as and linguistic oppression, maladministration and lack of adequate social institutions created very strong dissatisfaction among the people of Tigray province. This paper deal with the students' revolt in Aksum Awraja against Emperor Haileslasie's regime. It covers the period between 1960s and 1974. Since the late 1960s, strike, demonstration, fighting against the police and breaking government vehicles became common political activities in the town. Students (including elementary, secondary and university) begun to challenge the imperial government. It reveals the extent to which students paid different forms of sacrifices for the well-being of their community. This paper also gives due attention to why both teachers and parents actively participated in the anti-government political movement in the town.

KEY WORDS: strike, opposition, class boycott, clash

1/ INTRODUCTION

Local opposition in different parts of Tigray was not a new phenomenon. Following the death of Emperor Yohanis IV at the battle of Metema in 1889, people of Tigray began to struggle against their cultural, economic and political marginalization under non-Tegaru governors. Particularly in Aksum, the opposition against their feudal governors reached its zenith during the government of Emperor Haileslasie. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Students (elementary, secondary and university), teachers and the local people begun to exchange different ideas about the evil nature of the imperial rule in Aksum *Awraja*. They also managed to gather information regarding the nature and aims of political oppositions took place in other *awrajas* of Tigray. Elementary and secondary school students were more active in the political movement in Aksum. They raised several questions that needed urgent response from the imperial government. The former warned the latter that its failure to give immediate solution to their requests would subject it to pay costly sacrifice. They prepared and distributed several political leaflets and distributed them among the masses in the *awraja*. The participation of parents, teachers and students in the political opposition against the imperial regime, the major questions of the local people, and the nature of the clash between the rebels and government security forces and its effects are the major concern of this research work. An attempt is made to discuss these issues clearly and 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

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was checked and counter-checked for its reliability and authenticity. The findings of this paper are discussed through narrative and explanatory approaches.

3/ RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. The Participation of Elementary School Students in the Revolt

The history of Tigray after the death of Emperor Yohannis IV was full of dismal and instability. More than other things, during the reign of Emperor Haileslasie, cultural and linguistic oppression wounded the pride of Tegar. Tegar was prohibited to use their mother tongue language at schools, courts, markets and anywhere else. During the imperial regime, two Tegar could not speak in Tigrigna unless they were alone. Publishing a piece of material in Tigrigna was unthinkable.¹

Tegar teachers and students were conscious enough to struggle against the cultural marginalization of Tegar. They arranged cultural events in which Tigrigna songs, poems, dances and arts were entertained. As the cultural oppression was intensified from time to time, they began to raise their voices against the defunct feudal regime. Since the late 1960s, schools in Tigray became centers of dissent. The junior secondary school in Aksum was good example.²

Since they were in their early twenties, most of the secondary school students were politically active. Many of them went to cities in order to pursue their education and met university students and other young workers. Their active involvement in political activities appeared to have been a “real threat” to urban stability.³

The students of Aksum Junior Secondary School were influential not only in Aksum *Awraja* but also in other parts of Tigray province. A letter sent on 6 September 1972 to the Ministry of Interior reveals this. Accordingly, in 1969, Brhane Tesfay, a grade 12 student, was found in Maichew Town. After he was caught walking in the streets of the town by security forces, the latter asked the former to tell them about his identity. Brhane Tesfay replied that he was a student from Axum. It seems his being newcomer to the area that it became a serious agenda among the security forces who wanted to investigate the reason behind his coming to Maichew Town. In the moment, he was found with an impressive political pamphlet which strongly criticizes the imperial government for its cultural, political and other forms of suppression over the people of Tigray.⁴

According to John Young, the influence of university students in the opposition in Aksum against the imperial government was very pervasive. During their vacations, the university students managed to meet many teachers, students and peasants with whom they discussed about the dismal lives of the local people. Since the 1970, the high school students of Aksum took part in anti-government movement in the town.⁵ Tewelde Weldemariam, Amha (Abay) Tsehaye, Yohannis (Walta) Gebremedhin, Aw’alom Woldu, Meresa Reda and Alemseged Einch were some of the influential Tegar university students who played a vital role in politicizing the young students and teachers in Aksum *Awraja*.⁶

Both elementary and secondary school students highly involved in the anti-government political movement in Aksum. On 3 November 1972, grade six students of Abrha-We-Atsbha Primary School stopped their education and they requested that teacher Regasa Gameda was incapable of teaching them the necessary lesson they expected of a teacher assigned to teacher grade six.⁷

On 20 Nov 1972, there was also a conflict in Aksum Town between secondary school students, the main focus of this paper, and the director of the secondary school, Ato Rezene Kidane. Even though the director tried to solve the problem through discussion, students were not in a position to accept his request. His subsequent action was not wise for the fact that the director refuted the students going to their homes at 11:00 PM using the school guards. It is possible to note here is that there was some sort of misunderstanding among students and their teachers. They agreed that they had to ask the state to provide them with a clean drinking water. All had the same stand in this issue. Even this question was shared with the elementary school student of the town. However, how to help the elementary school students to keep secrets led to unnecessary confusion and even conflict among secondary school students and their teachers. They proposed two options of ensuring the elementary school students faithfulness to them: advice or intimidation? Some preferred the former option while others proposed the latter one. This disagreement disturbed the unity of the students. The conflict was more

¹ Solomon Inquai. *Agony and the Ecstasy* (2007), p. 37.; Aregawi Berhe. “The Origins of the Tigray People’s Liberation Front.” *African Affairs*, 103/413(2004), p. 583

² John Young, *Peasant revolution in Ethiopia: The Tigray People’s Liberation Front, 1975-1991*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp.76-77.; Mulugeta Debalqew. 2010. *Galahti Seggi: Ye Hwehat Ye Tifiq Tigil Tarik (1967-1983 E.C.)*. (Addis Ababa, 2010), p.43. ; Atsbha G/Egziabher, *Down to Feudal Regime in Ethiopia: Education Nexus Politics during the Imperial Regime (1960s-1974)*, (Deutschland: LAMBERT Academic Publishing, 2014), p.22.; Idem, “A Shift from Peasant to Intellectual-Led Political Opposition in Tigray during the Imperial Regime (up to 1974),” *African Journal of History and Culture*. Vo.6, No.8 (2014), p.132.

³ Colin Darch. “The Ethiopian Student Movement in the Struggle against Imperialism, 1960-1974.” *Paper Presented to the Annual Social Science Conference of the East African Universities*. (Dar es Salaam: 20-22 December, 1976), p. 4.

⁴ National Archives and Library Agency Archives (N.A.L.A.A.) Box No. 297/4, File No. 3/TM13/39/137. From Colonel Nibabu Mandefro to Ministry of Interior. Pagumie 2/ 1964 E.C

⁵ John Young, p. 78. ; Atsbha, Down to..., p.34.; Idem, “A Shift ...,”p.133.

⁶ Mulugeta, p.50. ; Hailay Hadgu. Tsin’at: Ewneteña Tarik. (Mäqällä: np, 2002 E.C.), p.14.

⁷ N.A.L.A.A. Box No. 297/4, File No. 70/144/24/4. 5/3/1964 E.C

individualized. For instance, the disagreement was more intense between student Alemayehu Tesfay and teacher Tsehaye Abay.⁸

Commander of Hundred Amare Gebregiorgis sent a letter to *Nibure'd* Ermias Kebede, Governor of Aksum *Awraja* on 14 December 1972. According to this source, the disagreement between students (both primary and secondary school students) and administrative organs of the schools was intensified from time to time. Six (6) grade seventh students were suspended from the school and were ordered to bring their parents. These students refused to accept the order and they claimed that they did nothing wrong that would subject them to punishment. Their classmates agreed to boycott classes unless the suspended students were returned to their education. Grade eight students joined the movement. They refused to go to the school under the pretext of the absence of mathematics teacher. Due to this reason, the school was closed for some days. The students of Abrha-We-Atsbha Primary School on their part, boycotted class having a pretext the transfer of their English teacher, Elala Tefera, to the secondary school. They asked the return of the already transferred teacher unless they would not attend their education. The cooperation of the primary and secondary school students created great confusion among the government officials. The Commander of Hundred urged *Nibure'd* Ermias Kebede, governor of Aksum *Awraja*, to take necessary measure before the situation was further aggravated.⁹

Primary school students became very active participants of the student-run opposition against the state actions in the town. On 18 December 1972, grade six (6) students of Abrha-We-Atsbha Primary School strongly oppose the transfer of teacher Elalu to the secondary school. On the same day, they boycotted class and prohibited grade one to grade five students to enter to their classrooms for education purpose. This opposition, however, was interrupted by the director of the school who managed to convince them to reason why the teacher was transferred and he begged them to attend their teaching learning process peacefully.¹⁰ After some times, many elementary and secondary school teachers became active participants of the student's movement in Aksum Town. On 30 December 1972, teachers of primary and secondary schools in the town stopped their teaching-learning process due to the failure of the state to pay their salary of November month on time. This created a strong anxiety among the government officials in the town.¹¹

3.2. Teachers Opposition in the town

In the late 1972, teachers' grievance in Aksum *Awraja* had its own pervasive impact on the students' political activities in the town. The reason behind for teachers' grievance in the town was that some teachers including Elala Tefera, Asmelash Gebreigziabher, Michael Tafere, Bereket Yohannis, Tilahun Abebe, Tadese Dufera and Sintayehu Demisie were disappointed for the fact that they were punished for their absentee during school days. As they were penalized from their salaries, the aforementioned teachers came in to conflict with the states officials in the town. There were also other teachers who were reported to have been added fire on the feel in the town. These include Tekle Belay, Tekle Haimanot Mebrahtu, Mekuria Feleke, Hadis Mulugeta and Haregeweini Kifle who directly participated in the students' demonstration. This situation appeared to be a serious challenge to the ruling government. To this end, many concerned bodies including the secretariat of Aksum *Awraja* and parent committee were assigned to assess the situation in the town, teachers' involvement in the political instability in the town and to propose possible solutions in order to tackle the problem.

The above mentioned bodies, who were entrusted with the task to assess the cause, reached on a conclusion that the teachers of Aksum Junior Secondary School were not serving effectively the community Particularly, as per the investigation committee, the teachers were blamed for being late comers and going out of class very soon. Their unpunctuality and unwise use of time was reported to have been violated the rules and regulations of the school. Even though attendance book was prepared to control the punctuality of the school community, it was believed to have been abused. As indicated in an archival material, even some teachers were using their figures instead of pens to sign and others were signing at a time for many days: both for the past and the coming days as well.¹²

According to Commander of Hundred (*Meto Halqa*) Amare Gebregiorgis, Commander-in-Chief of the police force of Aksum *Awraja*, despite the director of the school attempt to intimidate such teachers by writing warning letters, he was unable to shape their behaviors. Because, some of these who were given warning letter were reported to have been thrown the letters to the face of the director. Such action of the teachers was considered as a bad implication to students who were, at the moment, well-equipped with strong political consciousness to struggle against the imperial regime. Instead of becoming role models, teachers' attitude towards the imperial government inspired their students to involve in anti-imperial government activities in the town. For this reason, state officials were told to give due attention to this situation and to take appropriate measures against teachers and their students in the school.¹³ According to a telegram sent from Aksum to the

⁸ N.A.L.A.A. Box No. 297/4, File No. 3/Tm13/39/17. 22/3/1964 E.C

⁹ N.A.L.A.A. Box No. 297/4, File No. 111/100/4. 6/4/1964 E.C

¹⁰ N.A.L.A.A. Box No. 297/4, File No. 3/Tm13/39/21. 22/4/1964 E.C

¹¹ N.A.L.A.A. Box No. 297/4, File No. 3/Tm13/39/19. 22/4/1964 E.C

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ N.A.L.A.A. Box No. 297/4, File No. 3337/57/197. From Commander of Hundred Amare G/giorgis to police head office of Aksum *Awraja*. 25/6/1964 E.C

Ministry of Interior, some months later, on 15 May 1972, the teachers once again stopped their teaching and learning activities. This condition continued until the end of the imperial regime.¹⁴

3.2. Secondary School Students' Political Opposition in the Town

The students of Aksum *Awraja* were strong enough to struggle for their rights to education and against corruption in their areas as well. They were uncompromising for their struggle against maladministration in the *awraja* in particular and Tigray province in general. On 7 November 1973, they talked to the administrative organs of Aksum Town and parent committee that their school had acute shortage of books and teachers. Not only they wanted to make clear their questions to the concerned bodies in the respective town but also they needed to inform their problems to the imperial government in Addis Ababa by sending their delegates. Under a long lasting meeting held in the town between secondary school students of Aksum and the state officials in the town, the former were asked to attend their education peacefully in return latter would address the problem. Even though students were considered to have been agreed for a while to accept the state officials' decision, they wasted no time to change their mind. They refused to accept the time consuming bureaucracies or delaying tactics of the state officials and they asked for an immediate solution to their problems. They made it more explicit that unless a delegation was sent to Addis Ababa to present their appeal they would not attend their education peacefully. This created great anxiety among state officials and security forces in the town that were order to give serious attention to the students' political activities. They were also told to provide the imperial government with prompt reports about the situation in the town.¹⁵

According to a letter sent to the Ministry of Interior on 8 December 1973, secondary school students of Aksum stopped their education on 07 December 1973 for the fact that money collected in the name of the school was taken by illegal persons. As a result, on 8 December 1973, police force who were assigned to keep the peace and stability of Aksum Town were ordered to follow up the activities of students in the town and to stop students attempt to inflict any damage in the town. The police forces were also told to send timely reports of the situation in the town for every concerned body including to the Ministry of Interior.¹⁶

On 08 December 1973, Secondary school students of Aksum boycotted classes. In the morning, they gathered together and decided to arrange a peaceful demonstration. They requested the transfer of *Ato* Bekele Tadese, who was a chairman of school offices in Aksum *Awraja*, from the town to another place. News about their engagements in peaceful demonstration reached the ears of government officials. Then after, government officials including the deputy *awraja* governor of Aksum, *Ato* Tadese Kahsay, tried to interrupt students demonstration and their flocking to the streets. A meeting was arranged between both parties during which students were asked why they boycotted classes and they were requested to continue their education peacefully. During the meeting, the students claimed that *Ato* Bekele Tadese and his colleagues had used money collected from late comer students for their ends. Students argued that though the money collected using receipts was proposed to be used for the expansion of Abreha-We-Atsbha Primary School; the government officials including *Ato* Bekele Tadese used the money for their personal purposes.¹⁷

In the mean time, the governor of Aksum *Awraja* and his colleagues assured the students that their problem was seriously taken in to consideration. The former told the later that they had underwent some measures against the accused persons and they promised that the investigation process would continue. Students were requested not to stop their education due to such and other similar issues. They were also asked to present their complaint in written form through their representatives. The students were believed to have been agreed on the procedures they were told and the meeting was completed. However, the student did not trust the government officials and they called meeting among themselves on the same day, afternoon, at a place called Dae'ro Ela (*Woreda Kalo*). It is stated that students had two reasons why they ignored the government officials request to attend their education peacefully and arranged a meeting soon after the former meeting was completed. First, the situation in their school environment highly influenced them. They called state officials in the town to answer their question unless the students' movement in the area would be aggravated. The money stolen by some officials had to be returned and corruption had to be ended. Besides, *Ato* Bekele Tadese had to be expelled from Aksum. Secondly, students' activities in other secondary schools of Tigray province including Meqeale, Adwa and Eritrea had a pervasive impact on their activities.

Students of Aksum Junior Secondary School reached on an agreement that they had to follow the footsteps of their friends in Meqeale, Adwa, Asmara and other areas. Government officials including the Commander-in-Chief of police force of Aksum *Awraja* were ordered to supervise the students' political activities very seriously and to send a timely report to the Ministry of Interior.¹⁸

¹⁴ N.A.L.A.A. Box No. 297/4, File No. 13820. From Shaleqa Tibebu Mandefro to the Ministry of Interior. 7/9/1964 E.C.

¹⁵ N.A.L.A.A. Box No. 297/4, File No. 3/Tm13/39/9. From Colonel Hailegiorgis Debela to the Ministry of Interior. 15/3/1965 E.C.

¹⁶ N.A.L.A.A. Box No. 297/4, File No. 6649. From Shaleqa Tibebu Mandefro to the Ministry of Interior. 19/3/1965 E.C.

¹⁷ N.A.L.A.A. Box No. 297/4, File No. 1847/64/393. From Shaleqa Tibebu Mandefro to the head office of Tigray province. 3/3/1965 E.C.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

According to a telegram message dispatched on 11 December 1973, secondary school students in Aksum claimed that unless government officials accused of corruption were presented to the court and subjected to appropriate measures they would not continue attending their education. Having recognized the effect of the class boycott, the deputy governor of Aksum *Awraja* and other government officials called students for a meeting in which the former promised the latter that every necessary measure would be taken against the accused corrupted official in return the students should continue their education peacefully. Even though students initially accepted the promise made by the deputy *awraja* governor and his fellowmen and agreed to continue the teaching-learning process peacefully, they later changed their mind and refused to attend their education. They were reported to have argued that they had to wait the final decision of the *awraja* court against the accused officials after which they would either continue to attend their education or to boycott classes. In addition to this, they also once again requested the transfer of *Ato* Bekele Tadesse from the respective *awraja* to somewhere else. Because, he was suspected of his collaboration with the corrupted ones.¹⁹

The cooperation between primary and secondary students in Aksum continued. Students of Abrha-We-Atsbha Primary School boycotted classes and began to raise their voice against the imperial regime. They were highly influenced by the secondary school students in Aksum Town. Archival materials reveal that the latter urged the former to stop attending their education and to stand on their side against the imperial government. Even though the government officials in Aksum Town tried their best to persuade the students to attend their education peacefully, their attempt was ended in vain. The government officials faced strong resistance not only from the primary and secondary school students in Aksum town but also from some teachers in the town. On 13 December 1973, using students refusal to attend their education as a pretext, some teachers in the town rejected the measures undertaken by the government officials to ensure the prevalence of smooth or peaceful teaching-learning process. The police commissioner of the *awraja* and the director of the school arranged a meeting so as to investigate the reason why students and teachers of Aksum Town stopped the teaching-learning process. In the meeting, its participants were assigned to closely supervise the day-to-day activities of the students and teachers in the town. It was taken to be a very serious assignment.²⁰ This might not be special to Aksum. Because, it was believed to have been common throughout the country.²¹

3.4. The Participation of Parents

The students of Aksum Junior Secondary School were successful to agitate a mass-base opposition against the imperial regime. They managed to provoke the mass population of the *awraja* who began to raise their voice against the feudal regime. They heart fully supported the objective of their sons and daughters.²² In 1973, a query, which was owned by the governor general of Tigray province, *Leul Ras Mengesha*, was extracting marble from Aksum and its environs and shipped it to Asmara and eventually to Italy. In the mean time, students and parents in Aksum tried to destroy the query. During the protest, they raised several slogans among which “Down with the regime”, “Down with Amhara Domination” and “Tigrean Self Determination” was the major ones. This protest was followed by another demonstration around the Aksum Mariam Tsion Church, where an old woman was shot and died.²³

They presented many complains which were quite clear to know their feelings and attitude towards the regime. According to a letter that was written on 11 April 1974, they raised several issues which are discussed below. First, the people of Aksum *Awraja* accused the governor of the *awraja*, *Nibur'ed* Gebreslasie Tsehay, that he was confiscating land from poor peasants using his power. He was also accused that he spent two and three months in Addis Ababa and the people of the respective *awraja* lacked responsible body that would hear their complaints and give an immediate solution to their problems. As per the people of Aksum *Awraja*, he was incompetent administrator incapable to bring peace and stability to the area. To this end, they called his substitution by an educated and effective administrator.²⁴

Second, *Meto Aleqa* (Commander of Hundred) Amare was made responsible for the lives and material lost happened on 02 September 1973, when a conflict broke out among a number of people who were attending a meeting in the churchyard of Aksum Tsion Mariam. During the moment, many people were reported to have been killed using guns and others were tortured. The people of the respective *awraja* requested that *Meto Aleqa* Amare had to be presented to the court and punished. Third, *Grazmach* Abelogyn Ayana, Municipal head and *Ato* Tesema Kassa, Chief Secretariat, were accused of using public money for their purposes and their absentee from their offices during the working hours. Due to such reasons, the people of Aksum *Awraja* called for an expel of these officials within twenty four (24) hours from the town. Fourth, *Mikitiil Asra Aleqa* (deputy Commander of Ten) Mulat Molla, who was a member of the soldiers stationed in Aksum Town, many times inflicted damages on the local people so that he had to leave the town within 24 (twenty four hours).²⁵

¹⁹ N.A.L.A.A. Box No. 297/4, File No. 7623. From Colonel Hailegiorgis Debela to the Ministry of Interior. 17/3/1965 E.C.

²⁰ N.A.L.A.A. Box No. 297/4, File No. 1455/64/237. From Colonel Brhane Demewez to the head office of Tigray province. 7/3/1965 E.C

²¹ Robert Daniel Grey. “Education and Politics in Ethiopia.” Ph.D Dissertation in Political Science, (New Haven: Yale University, 1970), p.163.

²² Weldegebriel Tadesse. Merti'o, (Mekele, 2004), pp. 42-43

²³ John Young, p.78; Mulugeta, p.44.

²⁴ N.A.L.A.A. Box No. 297/4, File No. 1847/64/393. From Shaleqa Tibebe Mandefro to Leul Ras Mengesha Seyum. Miaziya 3/1966 E.C

²⁵ *Ibid.*

Fifth, Gonafir Bus Association was using a code of Axum. So, it had to pay for what it did use until that time and it had to be submitted to the people of the *awraja*. Sixth, different historical and cultural heritages which were found and that were going to be explored had to be put on the Museum in Aksum and those which were already taken to somewhere else had to be returned to their rightful place (Aksum museum). Seventh, the income generated from the tourist attraction sites in Aksum had to be used for the development of the town instead of sending it to the tourism office in Addis Ababa. Eighth, Aksum TSION Church had to be given its traditional privilege and power to administer its affair without the intervention of the imperial government.²⁶

Ninth, the acute shortage of medical doctors and nurses in the St. Marry Hospital in the town had to be solved as soon as possible. Tenth, the lack of teachers and books in the Aksum Junior Secondary School had to be addressed. Eleventh, a compensation land had to be given to the public land which was taken for the construction of airport and priority had to be given to the people of Aksum during the man power recruitment needed to participate in the construction of the airport. The last, but not the least, the food aid came from abroad was giving to wealthy people. Therefore, it had to be given to the poor or needy people instead of giving to the rich people who faced little or no food insecurity as compared to the poor ones.²⁷

On 01 May 1974, the situation in Aksum was intensified. In the same day, at 13:20 o'clock, students of Aksum Junior Secondary School went some distance away from the town and blocked the road from the town to Adwa using big stones. They were also blamed to take keys of no less than fifty (50) trucks and broken windows of two trucks. This brought them into conflict with security forces. According to an archival source, what is surprising here is that students used guns during their confrontation with the security forces. For instance, Kidane Mariam Arafayne, who was one of the security forces confronted with the students at the moment, was reported to have been narrowly escaped from a bullet fired from the students. The road between Shire and Adwa was blocked by the students. This was a serious challenge that the government had to address unless its opportunity to stay in power was questionable. To this end, on 02 May 1974, government officials in Aksum *Awraja* summoned parent committee to discuss on the illegal activities of students in the *awraja*.²⁸

In the meeting, committee consisted of 5(five) member elected from the participants was formed. The newly established committee was assigned to distinguish the most disturbing students and to hand them over to the court. Since the students' determination to challenge the regime was very strong, many security forces including soldiers and policemen were stationed along the road where students were blocking it using very big stones.²⁹ It was mandatory to organize security forces to put down students political activities in the town.³⁰

The political activities of Aksum Junior Secondary School students were not confined to the Aksum Town or their school and its environs. Rather, they were committed enough to go to the rural areas for guerrilla war against the oppressive regime. According to an archival material, many students of the school left their school and their parents and went out of the town for an armed struggle. As some of the students began to return back to Aksum, soldiers, who were sent to reinforce the security forces that were confronting with students blocking the road between Shire and Adwa, came back to Aksum Town starting on 04 May 1974.³¹

Students who were arrested during the clash with security forces were released shortly. One day before they were get release, on 03 May 1974, a group of elder persons of Aksum Town and parents held a meeting at the compound of Ahrha-We-Atsbha Primary School. The participants of the meeting agreed to advice students to continue their education peacefully from 05 May 1974 onwards and they planned to bring students who already went to the countryside by moving in person to distant areas no matter how far it was from Aksum Town.³²

After some times, on 12 May 1974, a meeting attended by some parents and students was held in which students were reported to have been agreed to attend their education peacefully. A day after the meeting, on 13 May 1974, the head office of Aksum *Awraja* police reported to the Ministry of Interior that the students of Aksum Junior Secondary School were attending their education in a smooth manner.³³

The political opposition of Aksum Junior Secondary School students and teachers was highly intensified in 1974. They began to openly criticize top government officials including the *Nibur'ed* Gebreslasie, governor of Aksum *Awraja* and *Leul Ras Mengesha Seyum*. When Brigadier General Getachew Nadew visited Aksum on 30 August 1974, at 11:00 o'clock, both teachers and students flocked to the street and arranged a peaceful demonstration in which they sung different songs calling for the removal of *Leul Ras Mengesha Seyum* and *Nibur'ed Gebreslasie*.³⁴

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ N.A.L.A.A. Box No. 297/4, File No. 3/Tm13/16/56. From Colonel Shiwaredged Desta to the Ministry of Interior. Ginbot 9/1966 E.C.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Colin, p.10

³¹ N.A.L.A.A. Box No. 297/4, File No. 3/Tm13/11/64. From Colonel Shiwaredged Desta to the Ministry of Interior. Ginbot 12/1966 E.C.

³² N.A.L.A.A. Box No. 297/4, File No. 3/Tm13/16/30. From Skaleka Hailegiorgis Debela to the Ministry of Interior. 17/8/1966 E.C.

³³ N.A.L.A.A. Box No. 297/4, File No. 3/Tm13/16/30. From Skaleka Hailegiorgis Debela to the Ministry of Interior. 17/8/1966 E.C.

³⁴ N.A.L.A.A. Box No. 297/4, File No. 3/Tm13/16/60. From Skaleka Hailegiorgis Debela to the Ministry of Interior. 27/12/1966 E.C.

The students' political activity in Aksum Town was persistent. They produced and posted different pamphlets. For instance, on 21 December 1974, they posted a pamphlet which invites all students to strength their unity against the imperial government.³⁵

CONCLUSION

Due to the failure of the imperial government to solve the dismal lives in Tigray province, schools became centers of anti-government political activities. The participation of university, high school and elementary school students, parents and teachers accelerated the fall of the imperial regime. Despite of several measures undertook by the ruling government, the political movement in Aksum *Awraja* was transformed from clandestine to open nature. It became day-to-day activities of the people of the *awraja*. The local people raised various vital questions. They requested the end of cultural, economic and political discrimination under the government of Emperor Haileslasie. They also strongly opposed the exploitation of their cultural and historical heritages of Aksum by the imperial regime. Popular participation of students, teachers and parents became serious anxiety to the ruling government. The finding of this paper shows that the imperial government was incapable of giving timely and appropriate solutions to the problems raised by the local people. As can be seen from this research work, the ruling government failed to suppress the local political opposition in Aksum. The distribution of many political pamphlets, composition of revolutionary songs and poems agitated the mass for an armed struggle against the imperial regime. Finally, not only this played a pivotal role to the fall of the feudal regime but also it paved the way for the armed struggle against the Derg regime.

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³⁵ N.A.L.A.A. Box No. 297/4, File No. 3/Tm13/39/16. From Skaleka Hailegiorgis Debela to the Ministry of Interior. Tir 16/1966 E.C.