

## **The Second Election to Choose Members of the Assembly**

Written by Winta Woldeyesus

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On the first election to choose members of the Eritrean Assembly, Asfaha Weldemicheal was elected as the governor of the country, but after one year a second election was held to choose additional members of the assembly. Collaborators of the Ethiopian government made it impossible for the nationals to get elected; they even fired former members of the assembly like Sheikh Ibrahim Sultan and Omer Hakito and imprisoned others who opposed the intervention of the Ethiopian government in the country's affairs. Later, Omer Hakito was returned to the assembly by the verdict passed in the Eritrean court. As a result of the oppression and devious actions of the collaborators of the Ethiopian Government, majority of the elected members of the assembly were from the Unionist Party. This was mainly done by Dimetros and the help of the then Police Commander, Tedla Oqbit.

### **The Student Movement Of 1957**

In the year 1957, many Eritreans were imprisoned without any cause or reason especially anyone asking about the rights of the people and the country seemed like a huge prison. The youth of the country especially the students couldn't tolerate this unjust action of the colonial power and start opposing in public.

In one of the government schools in the country, Kedamawi Haileselassie Secondary School, the students were not allowed to talk in their mother tongue and the flag raised in the school was the national flag of Ethiopia so was the national anthem. One day the students organized themselves and began protesting under the pretext to change the principle of the school.

On May 1957, these students went to the center of the capital and requested to meet the officials of the country. Later their peaceful demonstration was met by police force which leads to the students' claim that they don't want to learn in Amharic.

This protest stayed for days where the students organized themselves from various places of the city, even Asfaha, governor of the country, tried to meet and convince the leaders of the students to return to their classes but it all ended in a complete failure. The Police tried to force them to return to school but the students faced the police by throwing stones and continued their opposition. The student opposition spread to other parts of the country. Even though there were few who returned to their classes, the opposing students learned the betrayal of the fellow students and attacked the students slipping to the school. After this incident the police imprisoned leaders of the students, Seyoum Tareke, Eyob Gebreamlak, Belay Giorgio and Berhe Tesfamaram. The students asked for the pardon of their leaders and the government rejected their request which lead to other forceful demonstration by the students where they

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destroyed the school's equipments and property. Here, the leaders were Gelya Tesfamariam, Tekue Yehdego and Daniel Haile and after this last incident hundreds of students were sent to prisons in Adi Quala and Kedamawi Hailseselassie Secondary School was closed for a year.

The students' protest abated but it had greater effect on whole the country, parents started to request for the freedom of their children and opposed the oppression and cruelty committed by the police. This protest creates huge hatred among the youth of the country towards the colonizers.

## The 1958s Workers Protest



The Workers Union established in 1953 was working under the supervision of the Ethiopian government and in 1958 the Union ratified a law that would enable it to work freely and proposed this law to the government. Asfaha Weldemicheal, the Governor, rejected the Union's proposal and declared another law which would make the union the puppet of the Ethiopian government.

On March 10, 1958 all the workers in the country began a protest. They gathered in the capital were 20,000 member of the Union resided and all service rendering institutes were closed and all workers gathered in St. Mary Coptic Orthodox Church, and the city was abandoned for the whole day.

Asfha Wedemicheal with Tedla Oqbit went to the protestors and delivered a speech that demand the people to go back to their jobs and houses but the people were angered by the speech and continued the protests. After this incident the protestors went to the center of the

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capital, and started a riot where the police opened fire to block the protestors and chaos was created in the whole city.

In the following morning the workers followed by other residents of the city and children gathered in the church and continued to protest, which eventually spread to the rest of the country. Police opened fire on the civilians killing and wounding many while others were imprisoned including the leaders of the Workers Union.

The chaos, protest and instability in the country continued for six days. In those six days police with weapons were faced by angry citizens with stick and stone. World media began writing and broadcasting about the riot in the country, then the Ethiopian Government threatened the people to use further force, including the army. The People halted the protest for the sake of women and children but the incident proved that the independence of Eritrea could not be gained through peaceful protest. Leaders of the Worker's Union stayed in the prisons of the country for months and the Union was officially banned by the governor.

After this protest, the people of Eritrea began gathering in secret to create a stronger opposition movement for the liberation of the country.

Source: "Tarik Hizbi Eritrea"