

Crisis in the Wake of The Paris Peace Conference

The Southern Ethiopian Peoples Democratic Union (SEPDU), which is composed of fifteen ethnic-based organizations, became the latest political organization to come into conflict with the EPRDF and be forced to leave the Transitional Government (TG). As a result of the conflict, two vice-ministers and several representatives in the Council of Representatives who belonged to the SEPDU member organizations were expelled. The cause for this conflict arose when the SEPDU endorsed the resolution of the Paris Peace and Reconciliation Conference of March 13-15. President Meles Zenawi said that he doesn't see how member organizations of the SEPDU can continue to function in the TG while at the same time advocating its downfall.

Shortly after President Meles voiced this in a press conference, the ten member organizations of the SEPDU were asked to clarify their position. Nine of them issued a joint statement

plain its position. It stated that it doesn't recognize the SEPDU. Each member organization signed on the joint statement and presented to the Council. This was followed by a swift decision to expel five of the ten organizations whose representatives took firm stands in the Council by supporting the Paris Conference. These organizations are the Gedeo People Democratic Organization (GPDO), Hadya People Democratic Organization (HPDO), Yem Nationality Democratic Movement (YNDM), and Omo Peoples Democratic Front (OPDF), and the Sidama Liberation Front (SLF). In late April, the Council announced that the YNDM is given back its seat after its representative dissociated himself from the joint statement.

It was reported on the state-run media that the other four organizations were allowed to remain in the Council of Representatives because of their opposition to the Paris Conference. However, the leaders of these four organizations subsequently issued statements saying that they are behind the joint statement of the SEPDU and that their representatives in the council had acted individually without the consent of their respective organizations.

In order to obtain a clearer insight of this crisis, ER correspondent in Addis Abeba had talked to Dr. Beyene Petros, Chairman of the SEPDU, Ato Mulu Meja, Vice Chairman of the SEPDU and the Wolayita People's Democratic Front (WPDF), Fitawrari Mekonnen Dori, Chairman of the Omo Peoples Democratic Front (OPDF), Ato Getachew Mengesha, a member of the Executive Committee of the Yem National Democratic Organization, Ato Adinew Adam, Executive Committee Chairman of the Keffa Regional Peoples Democratic Unity (KRPD), and Ato Kedir Mohammed, Senior Vice Chairman of the Guraghe Peoples Democratic Front (GPDF).

Beyene Petros:

The SEPDU was created in order to achieve effective results in the political struggle and to defend the rights and freedom of

the Southern People. The primary reason for the initial creation of the union was, however, the irregularities in the June regional elections.

The ten organizations that make up SEPDU have seats of their own in the Council of Representatives. But the SEPDU as

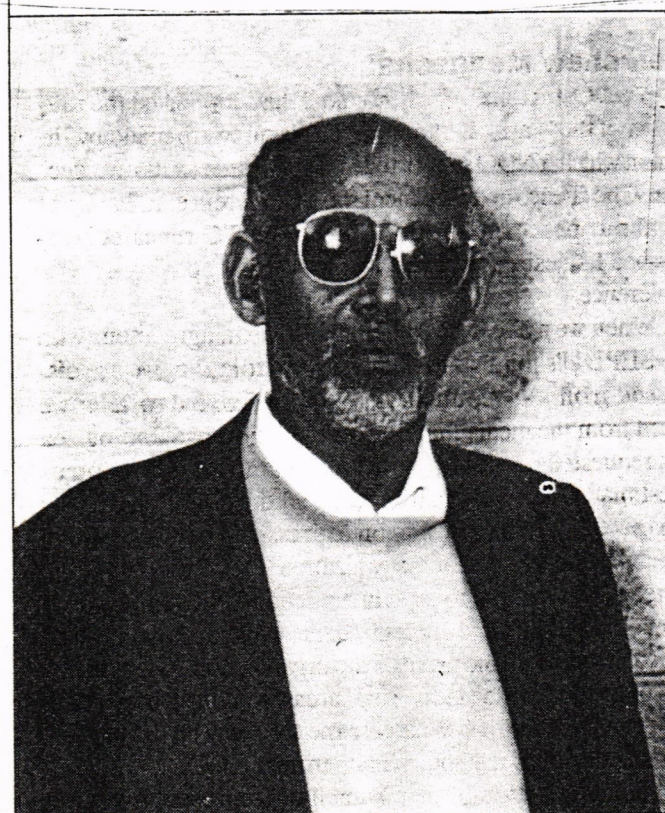


Leaders of the SEPDU member organizations
at a press conference in Addis Abeba Hilton

in support of the Paris Conference resolution (The Burji People Democratic Organization is the only one that did not sign the joint statement).

The EPRDF-dominated Council of Representatives refused to accept the joint statement and requested each member to ex-

Dr. Beyene Petros, Chairman of SEPDU (top)
Mulu Meja, Vice Chairman of SEPDU (bottom)



an organization has no seat. Political positions of SEPDU can be expressed through questions raised by member organizations. A member organization can accept the principles and programs of the Union as if they were its own for presentation to the Council of Representatives. This would not be compulsory and the Union does not impose any obligation on individual member organizations. The final decision would be that of the member organization on any issue.

If we look at the cause for dismissal following the "Paris Conference," first, all member organizations except "Burgi" had issued and signed on a joint statement. But we were told to present our decisions separately. We complied and presented separately the same joint statement of the 9 organizations. But some individuals took their own action contrary to the decisions of their organization and reported that they opposed the "Paris Conference." A confusion was ensued. The Council of Representatives voted to dismiss five member Organizations whose leaders stayed united and stood firm.

The Union is not threatened because of this incident. Surprisingly enough, it is getting stronger and the member organizations are working and cooperating even more closer.

SEPDU does not believe in armed struggle and is making an effort to achieve peace through discussions, providing there are people who can listen.

Mulu Meja:

The Coalition had participated in the "Paris Conference" through its official delegate. Significant points of the Conference resolution included democracy, human rights, the June regional elections and arms. We issued a joint statement declaring our endorsement of the resolution. I was delegated by the nine organizations to read and present the statement in the Council. I was not allowed to do so. Meetings were conducted three times in an effort to change the decision. In these meetings I explained to the Council of Representatives that no member organization of the Council has the authority to dismiss another member organization of the Council, and to do so would be considered illegal. I also explained that member organizations should be free to express their ideas in groups or separately.

I had the authority to express my organization's position in the Council of Representatives. Our chairman initially signed supporting the resolutions of the "Paris Conference" with the other member organizations of SEPDU. But later on, he said that his organization changed its initial decision after attending discussions in the Council. I believe that he is expressing only his own personal opinion.

On April 17 a press conference was organized in Hilton Hotel by those member organizations that were expelled from the Council. Three organizations that were not expelled also participated in the press conference to affirm their support to the Union's decision.

Fitawrari Mekonnen Dori, Chairman of OPDF (top)
Getachew Mengesha, YNDO Executive Committee



Mekonnen Dori:

An important aspect of the SEPDU is to assist the peoples of Southern Ethiopia to develop good relationships and mutual understanding among themselves, promote economic prosperity and the principles of democracy and human rights in the region. Also of significant importance is that the Union can create a political power balance in the country.

The Omo Peoples Democratic Front is an ardent supporter of peace and democracy. We had advocated this principle in the Council of Representatives as well as in the SEPDU. When the "Paris Conference" issue was discussed in the Union my organization endorsed the resolution.

It was strange that our support for peace was opposed by the majority members of the Council of Representatives who were saying they are also for peace. The primary objective of the Paris Conference resolution was to promote peace and democracy through discussions and cooperation among different political groups. It appears however that this was taken as a disadvantage by some political groups.

The Council of Representatives was supposed to constitute different political organizations with varied and different political outlook. There is no rule or procedure in the Charter authorizing one organization or political group to dismiss another organization from the Council of Representatives.

We always give the highest priority to peace and democracy as a means to achieve political success. That is why we supported the resolution of the Paris Peace and Reconciliation Conference.

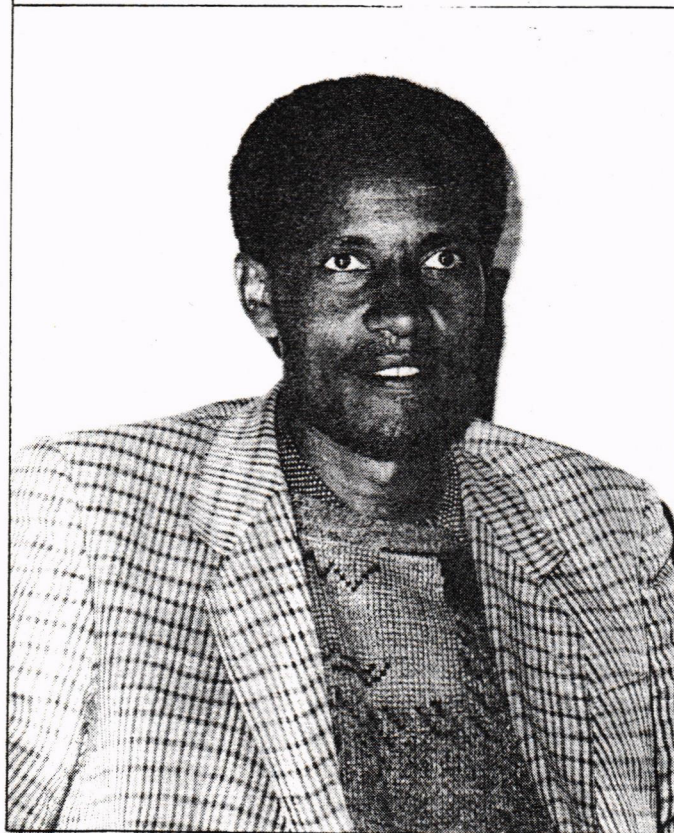
Getachew Mengesha:

YNDO was asked whether or not it had supported the resolution of the "Paris Conference." Decisions were made by the Union which YNDO supported and submitted as its own decision. The "Peace and Reconciliation Conference" in Paris was all about peace and nothing else. The TG repeatedly expressed its desire for peace. But now it is opposing a peace conference.

When we made it clear that YNDO is in agreement with the SEPDU's joint statement we were told that we are dismissed from the Council. And about 2 or 3 days later we heard from the media that our organization had apologized and requested reconsideration. Our organization did not request that. Our representative who had the official seal of the organization in his possession expressed his own personal opinion in the name of our organization. Our Executive Committee had asked him to explain his action. He admitted that he made a mistake and apologized. He explained that he submitted the report in the name of the organization so that members of the committee in the rural areas would get ample time for further discussions. Whatever the case may be the request for reconsideration did not emanate from YNDO.

I think the action of the Council of Representatives is a

Kedir Mohammed, Vice Chairman of GPDF (top)
Adinew Adam, Chairman of KRPD (bottom)



clear violation of our democratic right. By this we can judge if democracy exists in Ethiopia today. We cannot even travel freely to our region to discuss with our people.

Kedir Mohammed:

The Guraghe people is scattered all over the country. We benefit most out of the unity of the country. The GPDF and the Guraghe people take the front line in the struggle for the unity of Ethiopia. We had endorsed the "Paris Peace and Reconciliation Conference." This is still our stand.

We have two seats in the Council of Representatives. We appointed Dr. Fekade Gedamu and Dr. Haile Woldemichael to represent us in the Council. Dr. Haile was not representing us well. He was repeatedly advised to correct his mistakes. He was not willing to do so. We finally had to discharge him and made announcements on the news media to that effect.

Our organization was not dismissed from the Council because of Dr. Haile's own personal action. Although we informed the Council in writing that he was discharged as of July 1992 and does not represent us anymore, he refused to leave the seat. Our delegate who was supposed to have replaced him, Ato Mubarek Shure, participated in the Council meeting only once. The second time Ato Mubarek was denied entrance to the Council by the Secretary of the Council, Ato Tesfaye Habisso.

Dr. Haile, whom we ousted 8 months ago, submitted a report on the "Paris issue" contrary to the decisions of our organization, and also he made use of the seal which is still in his possession. Dr. Haile, who is not legally entitled to sit in the Council, is among those who voted to dismiss the five organizations. It should be noted that the Council of Representatives was organized by organizations and not by individuals.

The member organizations of SEPDU have once again assured their strong unity and their desire to work together in their meeting and press conference of April 17th 1993 in the Hilton Hotel.

Adinew Adam:

Because we had taken the same political stand with the other organizations in the Union we were expelled from the Council. The democratic right of the people we represent is violated by this action. The TG is a coalition of several member organizations of equal status. There is no special regulation in the Charter which authorizes one organization to dismiss another.

It has been over eight months since problematic questions requiring consultations and solutions were raised in the Council. The "Paris Peace Conference" issue is only a cause for the explosion of the problem.

Prepared by ER Correspondent in Addis Abeba.