

NOTE TO THE READERS:

This article was originally posted on May 23, 2020. It is re-posted now because of its relevance to the consequential and exciting developments currently evolving both in the country and the region at large.

ERITREAN PEOPLE UNITE TO BREAK FREE OF THE BRUTAL DICTATORSHIP: YOU HAVE NOTHING TO LOSE BUT YOUR CHAINS

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“What is the source of our first suffering? It lies in the fact that we hesitated to speak. It was born in the moment when we accumulated silent things within us.” (French philosopher, Gaston Bachelard: June 27, 1884-October 16, 1962, <https://citatis.com/a1797/31cb60/>)

Nobody needs any special talent to see that the life of our people in Eritrea has become impossible to bear. Taking this truth as the point of departure, no one would escape the conclusion that this reality has made the price for silence on injustice, oppression and indignity exceed the possible cost of confronting the criminal ruling gang. Put differently, the life of our people has already being an extraordinary misery anyway, reaching a stage in which there is nothing they could lose but everything to gain, if they rise up against the dictatorship. It is for this reason that we formulated the title of this piece borrowing the rallying cry “Unite” and the phrase “Nothing to lose but their chains” from the Manifesto of the Communist Party (simply known as Communist Manifesto), written by Marx and Engels, and published in 1848.

As Marx and Engels used these words to urge the working people of the mid-nineteenth century Europe to unite in a revolt against the social order, which kept them in chains, we are more justified to use the same rationale, calling on our people to act collectively to end the brutal dictatorship in Eritrea, and establish a

better social system upon its ashes. If the call was relevant to the working class of 1848 Europe, it is more relevant to the current Eritrea of the PFDJ, a country as a whole (not a single class), whose miserable political, social, and economic situation has reached a stage unprecedented in the history of human society.

Of course, we cannot deny that the control mechanisms capitalism had used against the working class of the mid-nineteenth century Europe, are different from those the primitive ruling gang in Eritrea has been using against our people. Nonetheless, there is one strikingly interesting thread common in both cases. The control mechanisms capitalism used against the workers had opened new possibilities to develop consciousness for the workers to see themselves as a class; not as individuals. By the same token, the control mechanisms Eritrea's ruling gang has been using to tighten its grip on all Eritrean citizens, regardless of their ethnicity, religious, regional, cultural or socio-economic backgrounds, have opened wider possibilities than we expect for all Eritreans to develop the consciousness that enables them to see themselves as an oppressed, humiliated, and betrayed single people by the criminal gang, that has hijacked the post-independence Eritrea, established by the martyrdom of their sons and daughters, representing all social distinctions, including ethnicity, religion, region, culture, gender, age, and socio-economic standing. This way, we could vividly see the coherent thinking that should enable our people to see themselves as one people with a common fate, not diverse groups with divergent interests.

It is not news to any Eritrean that the roots of this coherent thinking among our people go back to 1940s and 1950s (targeting the foreign occupation as the common enemy of the time), and developed during the armed struggle for national liberation, though remarkably weakened during the post-independence period by the home-grown fascist regime to prolong its life and implement its dishonourable, corrupt, and unholy design. The brutal regime and its foot soldiers are still aggressively fighting to put barriers to weaken the unity of the Eritrean people, they fear like a sword. It would be our strength, determination, and the way we handle the secondary contradictions among all Eritrean stakeholders (the primary contradiction being the one all stakeholders collectively have with the regime) to foil the conspiracy of the regime to divide us on ethnic, religious, regional, cultural, and economic lines, that will decide the final outcome of the confrontation.

In a desperate attempt to show that any Eritrean, who is against the “government”, or the criminal ruling gang, to be more exact, is against the Eritrean state, the supporters of the PFDJ criminal gang have been creating confusion, blurring the distinction between the ruling gang and the state. To address this confusion, we need to make it clear that a regime (the ruling gang) is a group of people, tied by a number of interests, coming to power and wanting to hold on it at any cost, using that power to eliminate all who stand against it, by all means, including violence. This is different from a state which consists of the society, the territory, and the government. The state is dear to us, as Eritrean citizens, and we protect it like the apple of our eye, while we fight any dictatorial regime, or a ruling gang, in principle, no matter who is in power, because we know the pride and dignity of the citizens will be at stake. This is the position of the majority of Eritreans, whether they speak out or not, and will continue to be so, even if the ruling gang turns Eritrea into a great power (as Dr. Alaa Al Aswani of Egypt says about the dictatorship in his country), like the US or Russia (though this is impossible). Another bizarre argument by some PFDJ supporters that causes confusion among the people or misleads the naïve and the uninformed, necessitates that we raise the question: ***Does the presence of a party mean the existence of Good Governance?***

Before we see whether PFDJ is “People’s”, and whether it stands for justice and democracy, as the name falsely denotes, we need to show that this argument stems from the ignorance about what Good Governance means, and what its concrete outcomes would be. According to ***Promoting Good Governance: Principles, Practices and Perspectives*** (A material published by Commonwealth Secretariat, Marlborough House, London, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/332977173_Promoting_Good_Governance_as_an_Anti-Corruption_Tool), Good Governance is: “...the highest state of development and management of a nation’s affairs.” In this connection, one would be tempted to ask some questions to trigger critical thinking, the first being: ***What is good in “Good Governance”?***

The same source, cited above, details the characteristics of Good Governance. Here we would list the characteristics, for the convenience of the readers to judge for themselves, if PFDJ Eritrea really meets any of the following:

- A democratic government is in place.

- People participate in decision-making.
- Services are delivered efficiently.
- Human rights are protected.
- The government is transparent, accountable, and productive.

Irrefutably, none of the five characteristics above exists in the PFDJ rule. ***Could anybody show us otherwise?***

The second relevant question in this regard is: ***Is Good Governance an end by itself?*** According to the above-cited source, Good Governance is a means to an end, namely: contribution to economic growth, human development, and social justice. Here we would ask: ***Could anybody identify any of these outcomes in the Eritrea we know (not the imaginary Eritrea supporters of the ruling see)?***

Finally, to put cold water into the argument PFDJ supporters present, we can sum up the horrible governance (I could not find a better adjective, though this word may not describe it fully) we see in PFDJ dictatorship as follows:

- There is no clear distinction between what is public and what is private, which shows the existence of a tendency to divert public resources to private gain. Any Eritrean should at least loudly ask: ***Where is the income from the mineral resources, port services, rent from the Port of Assab to the UAE, taxation, and many other sources we hear about, going? Is there a Parliament and an Auditor General to control and practice financial oversight over government, following where each and every single cent is going?*** Candidly put, a clear distinction between public property and private property constitutes one of the basic characters of a modern state.
- There is nothing we could identify as predictable framework of law, government behavior, and the rule of law, or anything close to that. Worst of all, there is no constitution, which is universally considered to be the basic law of any country. One would ask here: ***Does running a country without a constitution differ from turning it into a jungle?***
- We see excessive rules and regulations abruptly made by the dictator to impede the function of markets.

As PFDJ is the abbreviation for People's Front for Democracy and Justice, there are many questions that could be raised here. Among them we enumerate the following, with some remarks about the situation on the ground, hoping the naïve and the uninformed supporters of the PFDJ would wake up when they know the truth:

- ***Is PFDJ really "People's" or belong to the people?*** To begin with, the word "People's" in the misleading PFDJ context means a party ruling on behalf of the people. Such claim is not new in human history. The earliest examples of the claim, that some ruling bodies governed on behalf of the people, were the rulers of the Roman Republic (509 BC-27 BC) and the Roman Empire (According to tradition begins with Augustus in 27 BC). In both cases, it was practically a one-man rule, often hereditary. In the modern times, the word "People's" became a typical Marxist or Socialist claim of a single party that is governing on behalf of the people, but in practice it turns out to be a dictatorship. PFDJ, which is the issue at hand, is not an exception.

- ***How about the words "For democracy"?*** This is a false claim that it is a democratic party. Here we ask: ***Is the PFDJ a true adherent of democracy?*** When we say a party is democratic, it means it came to power through elections in which all parties had to compete in order to participate constructively in government. Here we need to see the minimum criteria to call it democratic. If we take only three criteria from the resource published by the National Democratic Institute (NDI), a non-profit organization working to strengthen and expand democracy worldwide (***MINIMUM STANDARDS FOR THE DEMOCRATIC FUNCTIONING OF POLITICAL PARTIES:*** https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/2337_partynorms_engpdf_07082008.pdf), we would find the answer to the question. On party behavior, the resource material lists many criteria, but we will only limit ourselves to the following three:

- Respect for human rights.
- Respect for legitimate election as the basis of government.
- Respect for other parties and free competition.

To see clearly, if these three criteria are in place, we need to ask the following questions:

- Does PFDJ have the capacity to represent citizens and provide policy choices that demonstrate the ability to govern for public good?
- Is there an open environment in Eritrea in which citizens can actively participate in a democratic process? Is there any democratic process to begin with?
- Can we see democracy in the absence of institutions such as multi-party political system and competitive elections?
- Can human rights be respected in the absence of a constitution?

Further, if we refer to The National Charter of PFDJ (<http://ecss-online.com/data/pdfs/PFDJnational-charter.pdf>), the majority of the foot soldiers of the ruling gang seem to have never read, we would find the following:

- **On the issue of active participation** (No. 8 under the INTRODUCTION): it says, “When we say people’s participation, we do not mean merely voting in occasional elections. Rather, we mean, that the people should participate in all decisions that touch their lives and their country, from the inception to the implementation of ideas.”

Here we ask: ***Is there any type of participation of the people in the forms mentioned in this charter (elections and decision-making) or otherwise?***

- **On the section concerning SOCIAL JUSTICE**: a lot of falsely claimed principles had been listed, including: fair distribution of national wealth, narrowing the gap between the rich and the poor, respecting human rights, advancing democracy ...etc. Nevertheless, in every case, the opposite has been achieved since 1994, or from the day of the publication of the charter.

The funniest thing I have noticed in this section is the following sentence: “...Eritreans are convinced that in the absence of justice, neither stability nor prosperity are [is] attainable.” I wish someone in close proximity could ask the Human Rights Council of the United Nations, which had received a 400-page testimony from the victims of torture, rape, and other serious human rights violations, to comment on this sentence.

• ***Does PFDJ stand for justice?*** All of the above, in a way, also show that it is not a party standing for justice. In summary, it cannot claim that it stands for justice, when the following crimes are committed (to mention a few):

- The only voice allowed inside the country is that of the criminal ruling gang and its cronies.
- No freedom of movement.
- No freedom of speech.
- No freedom of information.
- No religious freedom.
- There are chronic food shortages and essential needs, including water, and electricity, so essential for the society to survive.
- No freedom to go to school, to think, work and earn money, get married and build family, withdraw your own money from the bank, sell your property, repair or even paint your house.
- Dismal public health.
- Prison camps and “ghost houses” everywhere.
- Collective punishment for families, whose sons and daughters left the country illegally.
- Eritrean refugee crisis in the Sudan, Ethiopia, Libya, and everywhere in the West.
- The looting of public resources, corruption, and mysterious disappearances of citizens.

In short, from the discussions above, we could see PFDJ is not “People’s” (of the people), it is not “Democratic” and it does not stand for justice. In fact, we can go as far as saying that it is not a party at all (call it the way you like) because fundamentally, “... a political party consists of citizens who contest in elections to form a government and represent the general citizens.” (Refer to the article by Shivani Karn, ***Can Democracies Exist without Political Parties:*** (<https://medium.com/@KarnS/can-democracies-exist-without-political-parties->

dae3923aa0a1). Moreover, we did not see any specific political program covering concrete policies in the so called Charter of the PFDJ, though this is a basic criterion for being a political party. In few words, there is no great mystery about the motive behind the deliberate misnaming of the party and the provisions in its charter. This is exactly what the cynic Amharic proverb, saying: "መል ከ ከ ፍ በስም ይደግፉ", suggests. It means calling an ugly person, handsome, would not give him or her merits he or she does not have.

I think all discussions so far negatively answer the question: ***How much has the PFDJ rule changed Eritrea positively so far?*** If these are our observations of the objective realities of the rule of the party: ***What a good thing that we have not seen in three-decade rule of PFDJ could miraculously come out in future?*** I would leave it here, but regarding the hope that something good would come out from the PFDJ rule in future, I would like to remind the readers of the Arabic idiom:

"Ashum Iblees Fel Janna", which literally means: "It is like the hope of the devil to go to Heaven." ***What is the solution then?*** The solution has been suggested by the title of this piece: UNITE TO BREAK FREE OF THE BRUTAL DICTATORSHIP.

May 24 is the day we remember our fallen heroes and demonstrate our tenable solidarity with them and with the goals they had fallen for. The best way to demonstrate solidarity with them is to renew our oath to achieve those goals and take major steps towards achieving them. Of course, national independence has already been achieved, but it is incomplete under the rule of PFDJ. As a matter of fact, post-independence Eritrea has proved to be more oppressive and more hostile to freedoms than the Ethiopian occupation. That is the reason why the post-independence period has witnessed all unprecedented tragedies, setbacks, and miseries, discussed above.

It is only when we stand for our right to be treated with dignity, and fight tooth and nail, to bring down the anti-people PFDJ rule, that all problems discussed above would be banished into the dustbin of history, together with the criminal ruling gang. This cannot be achieved without sacrifices. Yet our people have been paying precious sacrifices every single day for the whole 27-year rule of the PFDJ, just absorbing punches, the sacrifices to be paid to bring change will be by far less and more rewarding than those accumulated for decades. It is for this reason that we

urge our people to “Go the last mile and enjoy it”. A living and the most recent example is the victory of the Sudanese people.

The sacrifices the Sudanese people have paid, during the last six months of the struggle to depose the dictator, was by far less than the sacrifices they had paid for three decades added. Though they have clear difficulties, as well as barriers have been put on their way by some regional reactionary circles, no Sudanese citizen repents the removal of the monster. They know the downfall of the dictatorship will eventually open the door to all good things they have been aspiring for. This could not happen at one stroke, but with determination, clear action plan, well-organized and well-executed effort, tact and wisdom, self-confidence, and unity of purpose, the journey will be short, though it could be bumpy. Just we need to remember, “Dripping hollows rocks”.

Likewise, we need to start the spark to see the flames blaze up everywhere, to become impossible for the dictatorship to put out the fire. To do that, we need to build a mass movement by mobilizing our people at work, home, streets, schools, and military barracks to assert their power, and put everything under control. When we embark on the struggle to do that, we need to exercise caution in the following ways:

- We need to grasp the nature and the alignment of forces of the world and the region in which we are living. It is only when we do so that we know what positive and negative response we expect, decide who to win and who to neutralize, and accordingly plan to interact with what is to come.
- We have to get rid of the mentality that is incapable of tolerating differences and accommodating them, while avoiding finger-pointing to bring attention to a particular person or issue. We need to avoid finger-pointing, by any means, because it would do more harm than good. We seriously worry: ***When do we expect remedy of this aberration?*** I call it “aberration” because finger-pointing is a departure from what is normal, usual, expected, and typical one that is unwelcomed in our circumstances.

In my humble opinion, failing to exercise caution in both ways (too serious to be ignored), as suggested above, would run the risk of compounding our struggle, and in the final analysis, that could be done at the nation’s peril.

