

Political Programme of the Oromo People's Congress

(OPC)

Part One

Preamble

The Oromo nation is the largest of the not less than hundred nations and nationalities in the Horn of Africa and occupies the heart of present day Ethiopia, which extends to all corners of the country up to the northern part of Kenya. Their occupation of a central position not only serves as a bridge among the peoples of Ethiopia and other peoples of the Horn of Africa but the vast land which the Oromo people occupy is also the heart of the natural resource endowment of both Ethiopia and the rest of the Horn countries.

Nonetheless, the Oromo people could not play a political role that is on par with their number and their vast geographical extension. Far worse, not only failed to play a central political role, they are subjected to a brutal national oppression with a loss of their national rights and honour for a longer period of their history. To understand why the fate of these people has been so, it is necessary to have a brief look at the history of the Oromo People.

Although, Ethiopian history which has been favoring the history of the ruling classes and/or emperors, has very little to tell us regarding the ancient history of the Oromo people, it is not difficult to understand their ups and downs in the last four or three hundred years.

To understand the present national shape and feature of the Oromo people, it is imperative to comprehend at the outset, the bridges of life they crossed and the contours of history they traversed for a century or more, corresponding to their geographical extension and number, which might have contributed to the political riddles regarding the Oromo people unanswered to date. Such a historical phenomenon is linked to the distribution and extension of our people, part of whom have penetrated the northern part of the country; part of whom have continued to live in the heart of Ethiopia, part of whom have extended to the East and West and part of whom have remained in the south.

To make these points clearer:

First, leaders who emerged from part of the Oromo people who penetrated the northern part of to-day's Ethiopia played an important political and military role as of the 17th Century, which included the control of Gonder. Especially, the princes and the military leaders who emerged from the Yejju Oromo were able to create the Yejju Dynasty which controlled what was then the seat of the central government in Gonder and the larger part of the northern region from 1770s to 1850s during the period known as Era of the Princes in the country's history and were able to leave behind their historical imprint on the country's political history.

Mohammed Ali (Ras Michael) who emerged from the same branch of Wollo Oromo made a political marriage with Menelik which enabled his son to briefly control the vast empire – state built by Menelik until he was overthrown by the Shoan coup of 1916 while he himself was king of the northern part.

Secondly, chiefs who emerged from the Oromo of Shoa by forging different political marriages and alliances played a tremendous role in the centralized feudal government created with Shoa as a core. Moreover, by mustering the political games of the time and by changing their ethnic identity to get legitimacy, families like that of Emperor Haile Selassie were able to reach the apex of the imperial power.

Thirdly, when the modern empire – state of Ethiopia was created around Shoa in the second half of the 19th century, the southern, eastern and western part of the country where the majority of the Oromo people were living had been under a different situation from those of the center and the north. Here, including Aba Jiffar's Jimma and the five Gibbe states, there were areas which were able to move beyond the Gada system by undergoing internal feudalization on one hand while in the rest of the Oromo areas people continued to lead their social and economic life based on the Gada socio-political system on the other.

The above differing situations in which our people were in and the stages of their development had detrimental effects on the subsequent history of the Oromo people. These are:-

First, the states which were created by the abolishment of the Gada system had a very little link both with each other and the outside world which was at a higher stage of development. And, as a result they neither got modern weapons of the day which began to determine the outcomes of the warfare being fought at that time nor could stood together to defend themselves against Menelik's wars of expansion.

Secondly, the existing Gada mode of organization was confined to smaller areas and could not help against Minelik, who had under his command a vast resource of an expanding empire – state and the then needed modern weapons. Hence, the struggles of our people to defend their freedom at various areas neither matched the forces of Menelik nor could go beyond scattered resistances which ended in defeat. Here, it is important to note that our people were not defeated because of the “sophistication of the Habasha politicians” or the existence of some “Gobanas” in the Oromo land as some of our naïve politicians would like to make us believe. But our people were defeated because they were left behind in organizational skills as well as in ideas connected with organizations. They also had less historical experience in organized expansions and they could not go beyond the Gada system to create political structures useful for class organizations. Hence, because of the defeat of the Oromo people under the historical condition created in the second half of the 19th century, they not only lost their proper place in Ethiopia, but were also alienated from their land and reduced to serfdom in their own home, including exposure to a very brutal national oppression.

Another point that should be noted here is that the historical perceptions of the Oromo military and political leaders who played key roles in the empire – state of Menelik

during the battle of Adowa as well as the five-year occupation period by Italy could not go beyond the ideological condition created by the country's ruling classes regarding the source of legitimacy i.e. the Solomonic ideology that passed to the succeeding generations for millennia, as the main source of legitimacy; a religion with a vast resource and structure that used to legitimize the Solomonic ideology, and a written language that helped the administration of the empire-state. Even a few of those who were able to go beyond these limitations did so not by destroying the existing fence of history but by putting on themselves those chains of history. The fate of Iyassu, who tried to go beyond the traditional bounds by taking off those chains of history, first lost his throne and later his life, which is a good confirmation of the above stated historical fact. There have been such complicated historical phenomena that forced the Oromo people and the rest of the south to wallow under the Feudo-*Neftagna* system for years. Without exaggeration, it was such a condition which led the Ethiopian Student Movement to characterize Ethiopia as the "prison house of oppressed classes and nations". It was also such a reality, which led the Ethiopian youth to hold high its immortal slogan: "Land to the Tiller".

The continuation of feudal absolutism imposed on the Oromo people and the rest of the Ethiopian peoples in its most abhorring form had led to various uprisings that had different nature and forms in the 1960s and 1970s. In the Oromo areas, not only a national consciousness was emerging at this point in time but it also led to the birth of the Matcha & Tulama Self-help Association, and despite its confinement to a local area, the Bale uprising led by General Wako Gutu. Furthermore, including the rise of the Ethiopian Nations Liberation Front (ENLF) for a brief period at the eve of the Ethiopian revolution, the creation of Oromo organizations in mid-seventies were all product of the same history of struggles.

What is more, one of the fundamental causes for the popular upheaval of the Ethiopian revolution of 1974 was the nations and nationalities question in the country, including the Oromo question. And, the main gain of our people and the rest of the southern peoples to date has been the fulfillment of the demand: "Land to the Tiller" which was the main achievement of the revolution. When the 1974 popular revolution of Ethiopia turned sour and the cream of one dynamic generation were decimated with fascistic cruelty by a dictatorial military regime, the Oromo people were once again not only subjected to poverty and ignorance but was also dragged into a darker era of oppression. Moreover, the differences created between MEISON and ECHAT, two of the organizations in which substantial number of Oromos had participated, further worsened the suffering of the Oromo people.

The change of regime in 1991 despite its promise of democratic governance and self-rule has not changed much the situation of the Oromo people. In certain cases, it even has worsened it.

At this juncture, there is no choice for the honest children of the Oromo people except to shoulder the historic responsibility of saving our people from the impending danger and bring back to track the struggle of our people by putting aside our differences as well as creating a broad-based united front. To this end, those of us who are assembled around the Oromo National Congress (ONC) declare this programme to work for the creation of a democratic system in our country so as to safeguard and

ensure our people's freedom; national rights and honour; to enrich our people's culture and language as well as to help our people enjoy economic and social justice.

Part Two **Programme**

1. Objective

To Struggle for the creation of a democratic system in the country so as to ensure the right of our people to self-determination; to make our people's national right recognized so as to enable them enrich their culture and language, to empower them to control and utilize their national resources without outside pressure and interference.

2. The Form and Nature of Government

- 2.1 In order that the national rights and honor of the Oromo People are respected and their national resources are controlled in a more meaningful way, the form of the Ethiopian Government shall be a Federal Democratic Republic.
- 2.2 Both the Federal and the Oromia regional governments shall guarantee democratic and human rights as well as shall assume and leave office through periodically held 'free and fair' elections as set in the constitution and based on a one man, one vote democratic principle.
- 2.3 The executive, the judiciary and the legislative branches of the federal as well as the Oromia regional governments shall have a constitutionally defined separation of powers. The judiciary shall be fully independent.
- 2.4 The federal as well as the Oromo regional governments shall not discriminate and/or interfere in religious beliefs and practices. State and religion shall be separate.

3. Democratic and Human Rights

- 3.1 The freedom of speech, press, assembly, association, strike and demonstration shall be guaranteed in the Oromia region as well as the country as a whole.
- 3.2 No person shall be subjected to intimidation because of his political views in the Oromia region as well as the country as a whole.
- 3.3 No person shall be arrested without an order from the court or subjected to physical or other psychological torture in the name of investigation.
- 3.4 The right to movement is guaranteed to all Oromos within or outside the country.
- 3.5 Oromo women shall be equal with men before the law or in work.

4. Economy

- 4.1 The national resources of the Oromo people shall be utilized in the interest of our people.
- 4.2 As the 1975 land nationalization proclamation has been the historic achievement to the Oromo people, rural land shall be put into use based on

economic rationality without causing a fundamental change in the basic provisions of the rural land proclamation.

- 4.3 Both the Federal and the Oromia regional governments shall provide the necessary support to our peasants to help them improve their living condition and be self-sufficient in food.
- 4.4 For the revitalization of our people's economy and its development, the bureaucratic inertia shall be removed and the right of any resident of the region to engage in any vocation of his/her choice in agriculture, industry, transport, trade, etc., shall be respected.
- 4.5 Both national and foreign capital shall be put into use in accordance with its benefits to our people.
- 4.6 Both the Federal Ethiopian government, external governmental and non-governmental organizations shall be encouraged to participate in the development of the Oromia region.

5. Social affairs

- 5.1 The Oromo People's history and culture shall be studied in-depth. The positive aspects of our people's culture and practices shall be selectively developed.
- 5.2 The Oromia language shall be developed and be used as a medium of instruction at every level of education. As it is the most widely spoken language in the country, efforts shall be made to make it a national language.
- 5.3 To free our people from illiteracy and help them to advance their frontiers of knowledge, government schools shall be expanded. Government schools shall be free for all.
- 5.4 As far as resource permits, care shall be taken to create employment opportunity for the Oromo youth so as to make them productive citizens.
- 5.5 As for the speeding up of our national development, the development of science and technology, the expansion of roads, water supply, etc., are needed, both the federal and regional governments shall provide all the necessary supports to promote their development.
- 5.6 Public utilities such as hospitals, clinics, health centers, pharmacies, etc.; shall be expanded in all regions of Oromo equally.
- 5.7 To protect our people from natural and man-made disasters, both the federal and regional governments shall make appropriate preparedness and take preventive measures against possible disasters.
- 5.8 To have physically as well as spiritually strong citizens, sport facilities and recreation centers shall be expanded in all the Oromo areas.
- 5.9 Appropriate measures shall be taken to protect and take care of our natural resources as they are essential for the betterment of the present and future generations of the Oromo people.
- 5.10 All possible measures shall be taken to ensure the social security of the Oromo work force.

6. Defense and Police Force

- 6.1 The country's national defense force shall be organized at a capability level which can enable it to defend the country from external aggression. It shall be based on the capacity of the country's economy.
- 6.2 The national defense force shall be loyal to the constitution and shall be neutral in the political struggles of political parties and groups in the country.
- 6.3 The national defense force shall be constituted from all nations and nationalities of the country and shall take into consideration the numerical strength and geographical extension of the constituent nations and nationalities.
- 6.4 A neutral police force of the Oromia region shall be organized to safeguard the safety and peace of the Oromo people.

7. Relations with Oromo and Non-Oromo Organizations.

- 7.1 A necessary cooperation shall be forged to promote common objectives with Oromo political and civil society organizations struggling for the protection and promotion of Oromo people's national interests.
- 7.2 Close links shall be created with southern and other peoples passed through similar national oppression.
- 7.3 Cooperation shall be made with the country's democratic forces who have accepted the national rights of the Oromo people and who have genuinely stood for a democratic system where the equality of all the nations and nationalities of the country are respected.

8. Foreign Affairs

For the promotion of the national interests of the Oromo people at all levels:

- 8.1 The country's foreign policy shall be based on the promotion and/or protection of the national interests of all the nations and nationalities of the country.
- 8.2 The Country's relations with her neighbors shall be based on the principles of peaceful coexistence and good neighborly relations shall be strengthened with them.
- 8.3 The principles enshrined in the OAU charter as well as the United Nations shall be put into practice in light of our people's long lasting interests.
- 8.4 Support shall be given to the Black peoples in Africa and the world over who are struggling to protect their honor and rights. If need be, there shall also be participation in their struggles.

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