

April 19, 1978

**Draft Letter from Honecker to Brezhnev on
Ethiopian-Eritrean Talks, 19 April 1978**

Citation:

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Summary:

The letter is written by Honecker to inform Brezhnev about talks that were held between Aforki (Eritrea) and Mengistu (Ethiopia). The talks focused on the development of autonomy for the Eritreans.

Original Language:

German

Contents:

Translation - English

SED official Hermann Axen to E. Honecker, 18 April 1978, enclosing Draft Letter from Honecker to Brezhnev on Ethiopian-Eritrean Talks, 19 April 1978

Enclosure: Honecker to Brezhnev, 19 April 1978

Esteemed Comrade Leonid Ilyich Brezhnev!

On 23 March 1978, the second meeting between the representatives to the Provisional Military Administrative Council of Socialist Ethiopia and the Eritrean Liberation Front took place. Upon request by the Politburo of the CC of the SED, Comrade Hermann Axen, member of the Politburo and CC secretary, participated in the talks.

[Berhanu Bayeh and Aforki declared again their desire to terminate the bloodshed and to do everything to solve the Eritrean problem by peaceful means.]

Despite this declaration made by both negotiators, the political negotiations showed that the positions on both sides had become stiffer.

The representative of the Provisional Military Administrative Council was inclined to favor a predominantly military solution of the Eritrean problem. They did not make any concrete or constructive proposals for a peaceful and political solution although Comrade Werner Lamberz had agreed with Mengistu Haile Mariam on working papers in December 1977.

The attitude of the representatives of the Eritrean Liberation Movement illustrated, on the other hand that, under the pressure by the leadership of the Sudan and the Arab reaction, there has been a strengthening of nationalist, openly separatist forces within the Eritrean movements, especially by means of the coordination between the Eritrean People's Liberation Front and the Eritrean Liberation Front (Revolutionary Council).

The leader of the Eritrean People's Liberation Front, Aforki, presented the demand for a separate Eritrean state in even harsher terms. Only after long sharp discussion was he willing to agree to this second meeting and to the further examination of the proposals made by the SED. Thus it was possible to hold the second meeting. In the course of the meeting, the representatives of the Ethiopian leadership and the EPLF reiterated their known positions. They accepted the SED proposal - this proposal was, as is well known, agreed to by the CC of the CPSU - to put the following four points before the Provisional Military Administrative Council and the Central Committee of the EPLF as recommendations for a settlement:

1. Both sides confirm their resolve to stop the bloodshed immediately and bring about a political solution.
2. The Provisional Military Administrative Council of Ethiopia will make a public declaration expressing its concrete proposals for the implementation of regional autonomy for Eritrea in the framework of the Ethiopian state and under inclusion of all willing positive forces in Eritrea.

The Central Committee of the EPLF recognizes the achievements of the Ethiopian Revolution and declares itself ready for cooperation in the interest of implementation of regional autonomy.

3. Revolutionary Ethiopia's secure access to the Red Sea must be guaranteed by its

uninterrupted access lines and its control over Asmara and the ports of Massawa and Assab.

4. Both sides form a common commission for the purpose of implementing the above points and all other steps for the security of the Revolution in Ethiopia and regional autonomy in Eritrea.

It was agreed to inform the leadership organizations of Ethiopia and of the EPLF and have them communicate their positions on the results of the second meeting and the proposals of the SED at a third meeting in the GDR in mid-May.

Thus the second meeting undermined all attempts by the representatives of the EPLF to break off all political contacts and negotiations with the Provisional Military Administrative Council of Ethiopia [as they had previously intended to do].

But the situation involves the acute danger that the fighting over Eritrea will escalate and that the Arab reaction and the imperialists will intervene even further and attempt to internationalize the conflict. This would severely endanger the revolutionary developments in Ethiopia.

The Politburo of the CC of the SED is of the opinion that everything has to be done to achieve a political solution of the Eritrean question. The safeguarding of the revolutionary process in Ethiopia and its territorial as well as political integrity is a necessary precondition for this. The Provisional Military Administrative Council must doubtless have reliable control over its free access to the Red Sea. This, however, must be safeguarded by political and military means. It is our impression following the recent meeting that the Provisional Military Administrative Council is only oriented towards the military tasks in this matter and, despite repeated verbal assurances, has not made any concrete political steps in winning over the Eritrean population for the implementation of regional autonomy.

We therefore think that the Provisional Military Administrative Council should without further delay address an appeal to all willing forces in Eritrea for the peaceful political solution of the Eritrean problem. It would have to render more precisely the proposals it has made so far by concrete suggestions on the implementation of the right for self-determination of the different nations within Ethiopia in order to speed up the process of differentiation within the Eritrean population and to isolate the reactionary, separatist forces in Eritrea.

Based on the results of the last meeting, the Politburo of our Party proposes therefore that the Soviet comrades, in conjunction with representatives of our Party, work out internally possible solutions to the regional autonomy of Eritrea in the framework of the Ethiopian state in order to communicate them at the appropriate time to the Chairman of the Provisional Military Administrative Council, Mengistu Haile Mariam.

[Closing remarks]

[Source: SAPMO-BArch, DY30 IV 2/2.035/127; document obtained and translated by Christian F. Ostermann.]