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2020/2021A.Y Third Quarter History Lesson Note for Grade 12

Unit Five

Italian Fascist Aggression against Ethiopia, 1935-1941

The Tripartite Treaty was the first European challenge to Ethiopian independence. As a response to the treaty, Emperor Menilik established the Council of Ministers and appointed Lej Iyasu as his successor.

The Plans of Fascist Italy

The coming to power of Benito Mussolini and his Fascist party in 1922 revived the Italian interest to colonize Ethiopia. Since the Fascists advocated the restoration of ancient Rome, they had to make revenge and erase the scar of Adwa. Besides, Mussolini planned to divert the public attention from the domestic economic crisis.

In order to demonstrate its friendship to Ethiopia, Italy, unlike Britain did not oppose Ethiopia's admission to the League of Nations. Moreover, Italy gave a warm welcome to Ras Teferi Mekonnen in 1924 and signed a treaty of Peace and Friendship in 1928. However, Italy was making some hidden moves against Ethiopia. This was through subversive activities to disintegrate the country. Corado Zoli, Italian governor of Eritrea bribed and agitated the chiefs of Tegray, Wollo, Begemedr and Gojjam against the Emperor. The other move was military preparation.

In 1932 Britain and Italy signed the Hoare-Laval agreement that offered Ethiopia to Italy. It was signed to prevent the possible alliance Italy and Nazi Germany. Mussolini who was waiting for a chance used the **Walwal Incidence** (5 December 1934) as a pretext to invade Ethiopia. Although Walwal was a part of Ethiopia according to the 1908 Italo-Ethiopian Boundary Agreement, Ethiopia did not establish authority in it. In 1934, the Anglo-Ethiopian Joint Boundary Commission made a visit in order to establish effective authority over the region. The Ethiopian troops that escorted the commission clashed with the Italian counterpart and suffered a heavy causality but Italy demanded official apology and compensation. Ethiopia sought peaceful solution and applied for the League of Nations. Mussolini used this condition to launch a large-scale invasion against Ethiopia. The League of Nations imposed economic sanction, which did not include oil, on Italy.

Ethiopia was weak to withstand the invasion as it had less trained troops, which was poorly equipped and supplied. Haile Selassie's reliance on the League of Nations and its principle of collective security was proved useless.

The Italo-Ethipian War, 1935-1936

Despite hardship, the Ethiopians defended their country and their rights against foreign aggression.

Italy made a two-pronged attack: north and south. While, until he was replaced by Pietro Badoglio, Emilio de Bono commanded the northern front, Rodolfo Grazianni led the southern wing. On 3 Oct. 1935, the Italian troops crossed the Mereb River. The Ethiopian army was pulled back from the frontier area in order the world to see the Italian aggression and the Italian communication line get longer and longer. Ethiopia faced no other alternative than fighting when the sanction excluded oil.

The Northern Front

The Ethiopian army on the northern front was under the command of RasImiruHaileSelassie(left flank, Shire front), Ras Seyoum Mengesaha and Ras Kassa Hailu(Centre, Temben) and the war minister Ras MulugetaYigezu (right flank, AmbaAradom). RasKassaHailu was appointed the commander-in –chief by the emperor. Adigrat, Adwa and Meqele were under the Italian control before the first counter attack. The attempt of Ethiopian troops to encircle the Italians at Meqele led to the first military engagement in the north- the Battle of Temben where Ras Kassa and Ras Seyoum were defeated.

Dissatisfied by the lower advance of the Italian army to the capital, Mussolini replaced Gen. de Bono by Gen. Pietro Badoglio. The former used all means including the internationally banned mustard gas.

The next battle brought the two forces at Amba Aradom. The Italians used massive air attack and artillery bombardment and killed 6,000 Ethiopians including the commander- Ras Mulugeta Yigezu.

Though RasKassa and RasSeyoum faced the Italians,who were numerically and tactically superior, at Temben for the second time they were terribly defeated. Later on, they retreated southward and met the emperor at Korem.

On the Shire front, the Ethiopian army under Ras Imiru destroyed the Italian army under Major Luigi Criniti at Demaguina. However his army which was in the midst of problems- including poor fighting morale of the soldiers of Gojjam and Begemeder – retreated to Asshenge.

Finally, the Ethiopian troops- except Ras Imiru's army- under the command of Emperor Haile Selassie made unsuccessful resistance at **Maychew** on 31 March 1936. The Italians had a monopoly control of the air. It was followed by the retreat of Ethiopians and the triumphal entry of Italians into Dessie.

The Southern Front

In the southern front, at the beginning, Graziani followed a defensive strategy though later on it was turned into offensive.

The Ethiopian army in this direction had two divisions: southern and south eastern respectively under **Ras Desta Damtew** (governor of Sidamo) and **Dejazmach Nesibu Zamanuel** (the governor of Hararghe). The armies were better armed than the northern front and under the command of young men with better fighting morale.

Rudolfo Graziani launched his first attack against **Qorahe**, which had a strategic location to control Jijiga and Harar, in Ogaden.He faced the patriotic resistance of Grazmach(posthumously Dejazmach) **Afewerq**.

The fall of Qorahe enabled Graziani to control Jijiga and Harar. The only strong challenge he met was from the army of **Dejazmach Mekonne Endalkachew**. However, Ras Destadamtew made a grave mistake by the march of his army to **DoloOdo**. Almost half of his army suffered from shortage of provisions and epidemics. In the midst of such circumstance, the army met the Italians at **GenaleDorya** and was defeated. It was followed by the capture of Negele Borana. **Ras Desta retreated**.

Italian victory

The fascist army entered Addis Ababa on 5 May 1936.

Why the Ethiopian army was defeated?

- The fascists were numerically and technically superior
- Ethiopian forces had no organized system of military logistics
- Differences and dissatisfaction within the Ethiopian army(Dejach Haile Selassie Gugsa and Ras Mulugeta Yigezu)
- Most of Ethiopian commanders were old nobles who had no familiarity with modern weapons

The emperor ordered retreat to the surviving army. On the way to the capital many people were killed by the aerial bombardment or by the hostile elements while others remained in their villages. The emperor reached Addis Ababa with 5,000 soldiers and of them; the majority were members of the **Imperial Bodyguard (ክቡርዘበኛ).**

After a long discussion of the emperor and his senior officials, the decision was made to let him leave the country for a diplomatic campaign. Meanwhile a provisional government under the premiership of **Ras Imiru Haile Selassie** was established to be centred at **Gore**. Accordingly, the emperor along with his family and five nobles and senior officials left the country on May 3, 1936.

Before the Italian entry, Addis Ababa was full of looting, aimless shooting and disorder. Foreigners kept themselves in their legations. Three days later the conditions were settled by the Italian triumphant entry.

The emperor made a moving speech at the League of Nations. His speech about the victimization of Ethiopia would encourage other powerful states to invade weak countries. However, his speech fell on the deaf ears of the major powers. In his exile days, the emperor, along with English sympathizers, exerted his effort to get support for Ethiopia.

Colonial Administration

By combining Ethiopia, Eritrea and Italian Somaliland, Italy formed Italian East African Empire. It was divided into six administrative units **Eritrea** (including Tegray), **Amhara**, **Oromo-Sidama**, **Addis Ababa** (later Shawa) **Harar** and **Italian Somaliland** (including Ogaden) respectively with their capitals at Asmara, Gondar, Jimma, Addis Ababa, Harar and Mogadishu. Each region that was led by Governor-General was divided into districts and sub-districts and was respectively administered by residents and Sub-Residents. The new empire with the capital Addis Ababa was led by the Viceroy. The post was held by Marshal Emilio Badoglio, Marshal Rodolfo Graziani, Amadeo Umberto D'Aosta. The latter was more liberal minded than his predecessors.

The Italian administration was centred in urban areas and implemented many projects in Addis Ababa. For instance, the fascists introduced electric light, the supply of clean water. *Mercato* became a market area. Cement and cotton factories of Dire Dawa and edible oil factories in different towns were built. However, high attention was given to road construction, it was planned to facilitate the Italian colonial rule and expansion.

The Italians owned the manufacturing and business enterprises. They also made substantial investments in road building, housing constructions, and in opening light scale manufactories and businesses. In the cities, they introduced new life styles.

The Patriotic Resistance

Soon after the end of the conventional war, a rural-based anti-fascist patriotic resistance broke out throughout the country. This patriotic resistance had two phases. The prominent leaders of the first phase were Ras Desta Damtew, Ras Imiru Haile Sealassie, and Abera and Asfawossen Kassa.

Realizing the Italian military upper hand and merciless measures, Ras Imiru did not plan to continue the war. But at Gore he met some soldiers and officers who forced him to continue the war and formed the ‘‘Black Lion Organization”. Its military leaders were Lieutenant Colonel Belay Haileab, Kifle Nesibu and Ketemma Beshah. The movement included the soldiers of RasImiru, and landlords of gathered from Wollega and Illubabaor.

The movement planned to strike the fascists in Addis Ababa. However, it faced a problem from the hostile elements in southwest Ethiopia and fascist elements that created a challenge on the advances to the capital. Ultimately, the force of Ras Imiru was defeated and forced to surrender near the Gojeb River.

After the disastrous campaign of Dolo Odo and the Battle Genale Dorya, Ras Desta Damtew retreated with his surviving army that had significant number of *Askaris*who defected to the Ethiopian side from the recent battle. Their determination greatly contributed to Ras Desta’s success in fighting the fascist troops for a number of months. Moreover, his army got assistance from the patriotic forces under **Dejazimach Beyene Merid** and **Dejazimach Gebremariam Gari**. After months of search and indecisive clashes, Ras Desta was captured in February 1937 and was executed in the town of Butajira.

In order to provoke a popular mass revolt and to end the Italian rule, a plan was made to attack the capital. Accordingly, **Abera and Asfawossen Kassa** from the north, **Dejazimach Balcha Safo** from the south, **Balamberas (later Ras) Abebe Aregay** from the northwest and **Dejazimach Fiqremariam Yinadu** from the eastwere assigned to make the attack. As the mission was poorly planned and lacked effective coordination and timing, it failed achieve. **Abuna Petros** who supported the attack was publicly executed. After their retreat to Selale, the two brothers were persuaded by **Ras HailuTekle Haimanot** to surrender to thefascists. However, the Italians killed them after their surrender and DejazimachBalchaSafo was killed in the course of the fight.

The unsuccessful attempt on the life of Graziani by **Abreha Deboch and Moges Asgedom** ushered in the second phase the patriotic resistance. It was on Feb.19 (*Yekatit*12) at the Genete Le'ul palace was followed by a mass killing in AddisAbaba for three days. Educated Ethiopians were the main victims and targets. The massacre also killed 499 monks at monastery of Debre Libanos.

The massacre brought a nation-wide resistance that was mainly centred in Shoa (AbebeAregay, Bekele Woya, Geresu Duki and TakeleWoldehawaryat), Gojjam (Belay Zeleke) and Begemeder (Amoraw Wubneh). The patriots ambushed the enemy convoys, cut enemy communication lines and on favourable conditions they struck the fascist forces.

In order to compensate the problems of logistics and supply shortage, the patriots quartered the warriors on the peasant homesteads, looted properties of collaborators (*bandas*), ambushed enemy convoys, and seized provisions and armaments. In case of critical problems, fighters were signed for cultivation, hunting and collecting wild fruits and plants. However, they relied on the *Yewust Arbegnoch* medical supplies and other assistances.

The most prominent ***Yewust Arbegna***was woizero Shewareged Gedle. She arranged a favourablecondition for the attack on Italian stronghold at Addis Alem. The greater the magnitude ofthe war, mainly in Ethiopia, the Italians spent more than a trillion of *lire*. The patriotic resistance had some shortcomings: competition and rivalry among theleaders and defection to the fascists. Zerai Deres and Abdissa Aga showed exemplary patriotism in Italy.

The War of Liberation and Ethiopian Independence

The entry of Italy into the Second World War, after Mussolini's calculation of the balance of power, on June 10, 1940 Germany was a great breakthrough to Ethiopia. It was disaster particularly to Britain, which had colonies in east Africa, namely Zanzibar, Tanganyika, Kenya, Sudan, British Somaliland and Uganda. The other threat was the presence of 200,000 Italian troops in the region. Britain feared that, with the help of Hitler's army, Italy would expand in east Africa and take away its colonies. Unable to resist the British force in Western Europe, Britain decided to fight the enemy forces on land in north and east Africa. This condition contributed for Ethiopia's liberation in 1941.

Emperor Haile Selassie, who could rally the patriotic movement in Ethiopia and outside, became essential to British plan to drive out the Italians outside east Africa. Henceforward, the British government began supplying assistance to Ethiopian patriots in preparation for the final campaign in East Africa. In addition, it arrived through Sudan.

Concurrently, the British government arranged Haile Selassie's move by air to the Sudan. The Soba Military Academy was opened to train Ethiopian officers in the Sudan. From the Sudan, the emperor gave instruction to the anti-fascist resistance in Ethiopia.

The British campaign against the fascist troops in Ethiopia and Eritrea was launched from Kenya (General Cunningham) and Sudan (Under General Platt). Keren, which was the main theatre of the war, fell under the British control after a fifty-three-day resistance. The Gideon Force, which accompanied the emperor under Colonel Sanford and Major Orde Charles Wingate, moved from the Sudan. This force reinforced by the patriots of Gondar and Gojjam fought all the way to Addis Ababa.

General Cunningham advanced to Italian Somaliland and controlled Harar. The Italians surrendered to him. The British army under General Cunningham and the patriotic forces made a triumphant entry into Addis Ababa on 6 April 1941. Emperor Haile Selassie entered the capital on May 5.

Glossary

Fascism- Philosophy of government that stresses the primacy and glory of the state, unquestioning obedience to its leader, subordination of the individual will to the state's authority, and harshsuppression of dissent.

Great Depression- worldwide economic downturn that began in 1929 and lasted until about 1939. It was the longest and most severe depression ever experienced by the industrialized Western world, sparking fundamental changes in economic institutions, macroeconomic policy, and economic theory.

Mustard gas- an oily liquid that evaporates into a poison gas. Used in chemical warfare, it burns the skin and causes often fatal respiratory damages.