

## **We Come Undone**

### **KIL and the Unbearable Lightness of Diaspora Politics A Possible Solution to the Impasse**

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*"Let him without sin cast the first stone."  
Jesus Christ*

The controversial decision by the Chairman of Kinijit International Leadership (KIL), Shaleka Yoseph Yazew, to oust two members of the Leadership, Ato Berhane Mewa and Ato Andargatchew Tsige, and the suspension of KIL altogether is perhaps the last nail in the already exhausted and frustrated support base of the Ethiopian Diaspora. Alternately, this may be the seed for the rebirth of an invigorated opposition grassroots movement. These are trying times.

The Shaleka whose quiet demeanour stands in stark contrast to the lightning declaration of October 15<sup>th</sup> has in turn also been dismissed by the eight KIL members in a flurry of counter charges of embezzlement and dictatorial tendencies. The Shaleka on his part countered by producing a letter from Kaliti disavowing the appointment of any of the KIL leaders by name, and that the funds transferred to an investment account was done after consulting some members of the KIL. He declared that the suspension and dismissals were justified for an organization which had become inactive and whose members were far too engaged in conspiracies tearing each other apart. He also claimed that though he had the authority to act individually, without citing how he came by that authority; the action he took was after consulting with other members of the KIL.

Dr. Mogeus Gebre Mariam speaking for the suspended KIL asserted that eight members of the organization had not been consulted, and in due course produced another letter from Kaliti disavowing the actions taken by the Chairman. Both sides were, however, quick to take the dubious credit for maintaining the controversial alliance they have whipped up with the three liberation fronts, Oromo, Sidama, Ogaden and the Eritera based Ethiopian Peoples Patriotic Front. One wonders if the Shaleka had, albeit unwittingly, taken the right measure when KIL's sole achievement is to enter into an alliance whose constituent members would trample upon the principles of Ethiopiawinet, as the Eritreans did on the Ethiopian Flag during their fifteen years independence (sic) celebrations this year. One also wonders if either side

could produce a letter from Kaliti giving their blessings to this alliance. Time will tell.

To get back to the matter at hand, I believe the issues that have come to a head today go to the very incorporation of the CUDP as a single party. The fusion of the four parties, AEUP, EDUP-Medhin, EDL and RC much sooner than the rank and file of all four parties had time to prepare for. Dr. Berhanu's book asserts that the measure was taken precisely to forestall infighting and to further cement the unified struggle. And a noble consideration it was, were it not for the fact that the circumstance under which the decision taken was hurried and did not consult the rank and file.

A hastily hammered out fusion of the parties forced the rallying around of the leadership along the more dominant personalities and their power base. The consequent positioning of cadres in the structure of the new Kinijit was very much left up to the power base of the parties at the top, a political trickle down, if you will. The immediate fall out this method was the sidelining of Lidetu Ayalew (EDUP-M) when he was passed over for Birtukan Mideksa (RC) in the structure of the CUDP as one manifestation of the internal power struggle. This was one of the key points cited for the break away of EDUP-M from CUDP by both himself and Kiflu Tadesse in their respective books.

Whatever his subsequent failures, during the election and up until the time of the fusion, Lidetu was one of the most inspiring, captivating and charismatic of the leaders. He had the credentials of leadership including initiating and heading a grassroots opposition movement later party and paid the price for his defiance of the EPRDF regime by being imprisoned at Shewa Robit and other prisons no less than five times. His oratorical debate prowess, including his walk off with the V-sign during the televised debates is remembered by many as the turning point that made Kinijit jell in the mind of the electorate as "The Party". True, he has turned into a caricature of himself today, unable to bring himself to call this government illegally constituted. In fact, he has gone as far as stating that there is democracy in Ethiopia and participated in government organized foreign junkets as a member of the "loyal" opposition. In the days of the election, however, he was a player.

The Kinijit leadership made two errors at the time of the fusion by miscalculating the impact the isolation of Lidetu would have, and the internal CUDP rank and file struggles among the various factions that would ensue. In many ways the fusion was the most devastating of errors which would lead to the down fall of Kinijit as a cohesive umbrella movement and party. As independent Political Parties in the umbrella CUD, parties had more latitude to take independent decisions and therefore would be forced to exercise great

care to respect dissenting voices. All constituent members of the umbrella could still use their rank and file and grassroots as leverage to advance their strategic and tactical options. As a unified entity this ability was greatly diminished.

The present North American impasse can be seen as an extension of the factional struggle that played itself out in the transformation of Kinijit into a unified party. Part of the stipulations of this transformation method used in the formation of KIL was the application of the quota system to balance out its "party factional" complexion. Nothing bespeaks to the crisis in factional politics than the fact that one has to resort to a quota system; principles, merit, ability, dedication, experience etc. all become relegated a secondary position. However, was this method truly applied? Was there a balance of representation in the KIL of the four original constituent Parties?

When it came time to lay the foundation for the support group structure, all party factions have tried to recruit the steering committee members on the basis of personal subjective measures, i.e., who knows who, or what party faction they support. Close attention should be given to the role of those charged with overseeing this process of setting up the Support Groups within the KIL. The clashes we see today are a reflection of this undemocratic process coming to a head.

What took place in the setting up of the support groups was nothing short of "gerrymandering". Those charged with the task were preparing a shortlist of their hand picked individuals to populate the steering committees of the support groups throughout NA. This was a recipe for disaster. In most cases including our experience here in Vancouver those individuals and groups who were responsible for a lot of the mobilization agitation and support work for the opposition were not queried about their background, participation, grassroots network, their dedication and capabilities. In our case it was intimated that the approval of the application to set up the support group was contingent on having a particular individual as Chairperson. We were willing to go along with this; all we wanted was to get the job done.

With us the last straw came when we submitted the names of three references and the person we thought to be our strongest reference was discarded as unacceptable. We could not believe it. Out of respect for the person, and not to fan the flames I will not reveal their identity. Right then and there we questioned the process of recruitment and decided to investigate this further. To make a long story short the experience left a once united cohesive support unit in Vancouver divided and mistrustful of one another. The powers that be out of DC and Toronto initiated a second group with the blessing of one of the factions we had hoped would give us a fair hearing. Unfortunately, we found

ourselves in the middle of a political tug of war, alienated from both sides and ended up being the casualty.

We sent a letter to the whole body of Kinijit people on both sides of the aisle as well as the Support Group representatives lamenting the lack of objective criteria for membership but never got a reply. It was in this manner that Kinijit Vancouver was set up for the second time. Since its inception, three Chairpersons and two Secretaries have resigned and the support base has eroded, with the latest upheaval, to only a handful.

This power struggle of the party factions has done incalculable damage. I doubt very much that the grassroots will put its heart in any call for fundraising, meetings or lobbying at least in the immediate future until this brouhaha is concluded satisfactorily. What this means is going to the root of the problem and democratizing the whole KIL, as well as the Support Group structure. All inclusive discussions have to be conducted in each city and country with the express purpose of addressing this issue of political "gerrymandering", its cause and how to avoid its pitfalls. If there are those who would think they are helping by canonizing one side and demonizing the other they will simply lose credibility; party partisanship is an illness that afflicts all. Though I gave the example of Vancouver, the conflicts in chapters in Illinois, California, the Greater DC area, and in Europe have all been well documented. What distinguishes the Vancouver case is that we called for the process of establishment and recruitment of Chapters to be democratized (grassroots/leadership) and objectified very early on. (See attachment)

The process of trying to garner signatures from Chapters to demonstrate the support that either faction commands, aside from adding fuel to fire is meaningless. Both factions have their political groupies in place, and some in sleeper cells outside the formal structures. This will simply encourage widening the rift, causing the further alienation of the grassroots that believed it was supporting one Kinijit. It does not help either to pick sides on the basis of the numbers game in the KIL or letters of benediction from Kaliti.

The other real problem is that neither faction can count on more than the steering committee of chapters for support. In some cases, where the committee loyalties are divided, the chapter support are sent in by a majority of only one or two individuals, such again is the case of Vancouver. This is hardly a basis to inspire confidence and to write back home to get the blessings of Kaliti. Once the dust settles both factions will at best be left with dysfunctional chapters without a grassroots following.

Finally, both sides are presently trying to substantiate/qualify themselves by trying to garner the blessings of Kaliti. The very source of the problem has

been the by passing of a grassroots elected leadership in favour of an appointed leadership from the top down. Besides worsening a situation which has caused much confusion (who is appointed where), this unnecessarily burdens the Kaliti leaders who have a full plate dealing with domestic issues, in particular the circumstance of their own incarceration. It might also impact on an uneasy alliance that exists within the domestic front of the various political factions in Kinijit. Also if truth be told, the leadership in Kaliti is severely handicapped. If it were in a position to make such deliberations and considered judgements there would be no need to hand over their leadership to a Diaspora body. To ask them to make pronouncements on the delicate details of a Diaspora movement spread out over three continents gone wrong is patently unfair.

It does not matter which side of the divide one finds oneself in, ultimately the loser is Kinijit and Ethiopia. . I don't believe the blame game will help the cause. Our political leaders have to be clear on one thing; their position is not a birthright they have inherited. They are there to be useful to the cause. When they cease to be useful they will be sidelined, and if they are sincere they will be prepared to step aside.

What we all need to do is reflect on the cause that has brought us all together and how we advance it forward. WE need to take the moral spiritual high ground and cease flinging accusations and insults at each other. If truth be told all of us have made contributions and none of us is above reproach for the errors we have committed. Let us not make this a matter to be decided by tifosi nor benedictions. Let us come together once again to the table with the force of the moral consideration of our battle cry respect for human rights, supremacy of the rule of law and democratic governance for Ethiopia. And I have no doubt we all stand for that and the release of all political prisoners.

In order to break the present deadlock in an equitable manner I propose the following:

- The factions to appoint a three person Diaspora Conflict Resolution Committee (DCRC), that shall be headed by a person acceptable to both sides.
- The selected individual will nominate two more individuals to sit on the committee subject to the approval of the factions.
- These shall be joined by three representatives from each side to plead their case to the committee.
- In order to make this feasible both parties come to the table agreeing to be bound by the decisions of the arbitration team.
- A total restructuring of the chapter formation process, including the selection by the chapters of the International Support Group Leadership.

- The EDCRC makes its recommendations and findings known to the public unless both sides, upon reconciliation, decide against disclosure.

Finally, based on his life long service to his country and his heroic stance in the present struggle I would nominate Ambassador Imeru Zelleke to head up this process. Based on his efforts to secure passage of the HR 5680, his non partisanship and his legal and political expertise I submit the name of Prof. Alemayehu G/ Mariam as my second nominee. Base on the plethora of incisive analysis he has consistently presented on Ethiopia, a true Ethiopian nationalist I submit the name of Professor Paulos Milkias as the third referee.

To the factions in contention, I humbly suggest you scale down the rhetoric, accept the recommendation above and come to the table ASAP. For those of us who have just read this article whether you agree with the analysis or not you can support the proposition for reconciliation by adding your name to <http://www.PetitionOnline.com/Taitu/> supporting the formation of DCRC. If cool heads prevail on both sides of the divide they will recognize that our primary enemy is still holding a whole nation, and our leaders in prison, hostage, and that our petty political differences does not amount to much in comparison. There is still a chance to reverse this process of being undone.

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<http://www.PetitionOnline.com/Taitu/>