

THE INDEPENDENCE OF ETHIOPIA

Following is copy of a talk by Mr. Richard K. Law,  
Parliamentary Under Secretary, Foreign Office, after the  
nine o'clock news tonight:-

You remember the Abyssinian War, don't you? It was over a long time ago. Over, but not done with. There's been a sequel to it. In Addis Ababa yesterday there was a great gathering. The chieftains - the Rasas, as they're called - came flocking in from all parts of the Empire. For an Agreement was to be signed, between His Majesty the Emperor of Ethiopia and His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom.

With the signature of this Agreement the independence of Ethiopia is restored. A great wrong has been put right. The independence of Ethiopia is a fact. More than that - it's an omen.

For four or five years after the Abyssinian War the Emperor was living quietly in this country. He was back in Addis Ababa, on his throne there, in May, 1941. You may wonder why it is only now, eight months later, that an agreement has been signed. There's a good reason for that. So long as Abyssinia was a theatre of war - and Italians still fighting - the Emperor's authority was bound to be limited. Any agreement would have been a sham. But when Gondar fell, the last Italian stronghold, the independence of Ethiopia became really effective. And the present Agreement is the result.

What does it do, this Agreement? First, it provides for an exchange of Ministers between the King and the Emperor. This may not seem so important as it really is. But diplomatic representation - the sending of an Ambassador or a Minister - is the sign that a country is really independent, that it's not a colony or a protectorate, or even what is known as a sphere of influence. And so there will be a British Minister in Addis Ababa, and an Ethiopian Minister here in London.

That's the first thing. Then the Emperor has asked us to find for him a small number of British subjects to help him get things going again. He wants advisers, for himself and his administration; we'll do what we can to find them for him.

And the Emperor has always wanted to modernise his judicial system. We agree to provide him with the magistrates and judges he needs. I used the word 'advisers'. But there's not going to be any divided allegiance. They're his advisers, not ours.

The Agreement provides for an Ethiopian Army, and for the evacuation, under our control, of Italian troops. We train the army. The Italians have been good enough to provide the equipment. And then there's the question of money. After five years of Italian rule Ethiopia has no money. And so we're giving the Emperor two and a half million pounds, spread over two years, to help him reorganise his finances.

That's the Agreement - or the gist of it. And it means a lot. This great Empire in the heart of dark Africa - no darker today than Europe - is free once again, free to make or mar its own destiny. The responsibility is fairly and squarely on Ethiopian shoulders. That means a lot to them.

And to us, too. We've had our chance here - for the first time since the war began - of proving that we mean what we say. We've had our chance - and we're taking it. We've always said that we were fighting to give their freedom back to peoples who'd had it taken from them. Well, we're doing just that. We shall go on doing just that.

And there's another thing. The Ethiopians themselves, they've shewn an amazing tolerance. How often have Germany and Italy made vengeance the excuse for their crimes? That was the reason the Italians gave for their gas attacks during the Abyssinian War - and for the hideous massacre at Addis Ababa when the war was over. The Abyssinians might have used the same kind of argument now. They might have begun exterminating the Italians. Instead, they've shewn discipline and self-control. They've shewn that they're fit to be free.

I said, a few minutes ago, that the independence of Ethiopia was an omen. That's true. The Ethiopians were the first free people to be knocked down by the Axis. They're the first to be set on their feet again. But what has been done in Abyssinia is going to be done all over Europe and all over the world.

There were Patriots in Ethiopia. They played a great part in the campaign. But there are Patriots in all the enslaved countries. The arms of the Allies - and the devotion of Patriots everywhere - are going to wash away from the whole of Europe, and the whole of Asia, this filthy slime that has covered it. This is going to happen, as surely as the sun is going to rise tomorrow morning - as surely as the Italians were driven out, as they were cleaned out of Abyssinia.