

The rebellion

Source:- https://military-history.fandom.com/wiki/Woyane_rebellion

In 1943, open resistance broke out all over southern and eastern Tigray under the slogan, "there is no government; let's organize and govern ourselves." [4] Throughout Enderta awraja including, Mekelle, Didibadergiagen, Hintalo, Samre and Wajirat, Raya awraja, Kilete-Awlaelo awraja and Tembien awraja, local assemblies, called gerreb, were immediately formed. The gerreb sent representatives to a central congress, called the shengo, which elected leadership and established military command system. The rebels established their headquarters at Wokro. During the rainy season of 1943 the rebels under the leadership of Fitawrari Yeebio Woldai and Dejazmach Neguise Bezabih, hailing from Enderta,[5] which was the heart of the woyane rebellion,[6] were busy organizing their forces; and after celebrating the Ethiopian New Year on September 12, they went on the besieged government garrison at Quiha. The highly equipped government forces were to meet with the poorly equipped but determined rebels' for the first time in the rebel's stronghold district of Didiba Dergiajen, Enderta in the village of Sergien; the rebels under Fitawrari Yeebio Woldai (Wedi Weldai) and Dej. Neguisie Bezabih defeated the government forces decisively; they captured countless modern weapons that helped them attract many peasants to join the rebellion; and many government soldiers deserted and joined the rebellion. In the month of September 1943, on the government's second offensive in the village of Ara, also in Enderta, the woyane rebels under Wedi Woldai scored yet a second victory over the heavily armed government forces; this time however, the rebels captured high level feudal chiefs including and killed many prominent Tigray and Amhara war lords that sided with the Emperor Haile selassie's government. The rebels under Bashay Gugsu Mengesha also captured General Essyas and many of his commanders and imperial soldiers at Quiha. The rebel forces estimated at 20,000, moved eastward from Quiha to Enda Yesus, a fort overlooking the provincial capital, Mekelle. They captured the fort and then took Mekelle. The representatives of Haileselassie's government fled. The woyanti issued a proclamation to the inhabitants of Mekelle which stated, inter alia:

Our governor is Jesus Christ... And our flag that of Ethiopia. Our religion is that of Yohannes IV. People of Tigray, follow the motto of Weyane.

The Pan Ethiopian Nature of Woyanne

The slogans of the first Woyanne were clearly Pan Ethiopian and for equality and autonomy. Their proclamation after liberating Mekelle had five main points.

- Autonomous self-administration under Ethiopian flag and unity
- Administration by Tigrean Customary laws
- Appointment of ones own leaders free of domination by Shoan Imperial elite
- Eradication of thieves and badits (shiftas)
- Objection to payment of excessive taxation and payment to appointee of the Emperor

A similar victory was achieved by the rebels under the top leaders of the woyane movement namely Dejazmach Negussie Bezabih and Bashay Gugsu Mengesha again in the district of Hintalo and Wajerat in Enderta; the rebels defeated the heavily armed government forces numbering in thousands and aided by British air power, the rebels were able to capture and acquire yet again heavy modern armaments. By September 20 the successful Weyane rebel army was ready to turn

south to face an Ethiopian force attempting to advance to Tigray. Haile Selassie had ordered his minister of war Ras Abebe Aregai, to take charge of the campaign against the rebels. The Ras rushed northward and arrived at Korem, south of Maichew, on September 17 but his way was blocked by rebels. During the next three weeks, the Weyane forces fought hard against Ras Abebe's Ethiopian troops, who were bolstered by a small contingent of British officers and specialists.^[7] The fighting centered on the great natural fortress of Amba Alaji. Basha Gugusa, one of the first Woyanne leaders, led the battle of Ambalage in the month of September 1943 to victory over Imperial army which was well equipped and supported by British airpower. The Weyane forces outnumbered those of the government, but their advantage in numbers was offset by artillery and British air power. The woyane leaders precipitated the final decisive battle by launching a three-pronged attack on government positions with perhaps 10,000 men. The war is spread to Alaje in Raya, Wukro in Agame and Tembien where by the rebels mostly peasants beat the huge government forces equipped with tanks and modern weapons led by Ras Abebe Aregai, General Abebe Dantew and aided by British Col. Pluck. The total annihilation of government forces heavily supported by the British army sent a signal to the Emperor, that "the Tigrians weren't only brave fighters but also astute strategist" said Hailemariam when he gave an interview to Wegahta magazine.^[8] Countless British officers [*peacock term*] were killed including Col. Pluck who was killed by a Woyane rebel. The inability to subdue the rebellion prompted the Emperor to authorize an aerial bombardment by collaborating with the British royal air force. On October 6 14 bombs and on the 14th 54 bombs were dropped in the provincial capital Mekelle respectively; on October 7, 16 bombs and on the 9th 32 bombs were dropped in Corbetta Raya and Hintalo Enderta respectively as well, though they were devastating mainly to civilians with thousands of people killed, they did not however, crush the rebellion.^[9] Although the rebels scattered and battle formations began to disintegrate on October 7, uncertainty still affected the Ethiopian government forces and Ras Abebe did not personally move out of Korem until October 9. He then moved systematically northward and entered Quiha and Mekelle on October 14, capturing the erstwhile rebel headquarters at Wokro on October 17.^[7] Ras Abebe Aregai was appointed as governor of Tigray and was given authority with the pacification of that province. His pacification was brutal. The punishment for the uprising severe as it may be with the aerial bombardment, the people were obliged to pay large sums of money and their land was confiscated and distributed to loyal gentry as a punishment and deterrent to future revolt. A new taxation was imposed that 'cost the peasants five times more than they had under the Italians during the occupation.^[10] Ten woyane rebel leaders were captured and sent to prison in Debrebirhan. Including the top leaders, Basha Gugsa Mengesha, Dej. Bezabih Negussie, and Hailemariam Reda.^[11] Bashay Gugsa was also not allowed to return to Tigray, because the central government feared his influence.^[11] However, the central government tried to make use of his military skills and sent him with a group of soldiers to suppress other rebellions in the southern Ethiopia.^[11] Although the Woyane rebellion of 1943 had shortcomings as a prototype revolution, historians however agree that, the Woyane rebellion had involved a fairly high level of spontaneity and peasant initiative.^[12] It demonstrated considerable popular participation, and reflected widely shared grievances. The uprising was unequivocally and specifically directed against the central amhara regime of Haile Selassie I, rather than the Tigrian imperial elite.^[13]

Leaders of the Woyane rebellion of 1943 in Tigray

- H.E. Fitawrari Yeebio Woldai (Wedi Weldai), b. Samre-Enderta, Tigray. Chief leader and commander of the 1943 woyane rebellion in Tigray
- H.E. Dejazamtch Negusse Bezabih, b. Da' Meskel-Mekelle, Enderta, Tigray. Top leader and commander of the 1943 woyane rebellion in Tigray
- H.E. Bashay Gugsu Mengesha, b. Adi-seleste, Hintalo-Enderta, Tigray. Top leader and commander of the 1943 woyane rebellion in Tigray.[\[14\]](#)
- H.E. Blata Hailemariam Reda, b. Dandera-Enderta, Tigray. Commander of the 1943 woyane rebellion in Tigray.

References

1.
 - Sarah Vaughan, "Ethnicity and Power in Ethiopia", PhD dissertation, p. 123, 2003
 - Clapham, Christopher, *Transformation and continuity in Revolutionary Ethiopia*, Cambridge University press, pg. 27, 1988.
 - Sarah Vaughan, "Ethnicity and Power", p. 126.
 - Household and Society in Ethiopia, African studies center, Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan, 1977.
 - Mamoka Maki, The wayyane in Tigray and the reconstruction of the Ethiopia government in the 1940s, In: Proceedings of the 16th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies, ed. by Svein Ege, Harald Aspen, Birhanu Teferra and Shiferaw Bekele, Trondheim 2009, p.5.
 - Mamoka Maki, The wayyane in Tigray and the reconstruction of the Ethiopia government in the 1940s, In: Proceedings of the 16th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies, ed. by Svein Ege, Harald Aspen, Birhanu Teferra and Shiferaw Bekele, Trondheim 2009, p.6.
 - Rebels and Separatists in Ethiopia, Regional Resistance to a Marxist Regime by Paul Henze, Rand corporation-- prepared for the office of the under secretary of defense for policy, p. 42, December 1985.
 - Blata Hailemariam Reda, Wegahta Magazine, Nos. 1, 2, and 4, 1993.
 - Gilkes, The dying lion, p. 180.
 - Haggain Erlich "British involvement and Haile Selassie's emerging absolutism northern Ethiopia, 1941-1943", Asian and African studies 15, 2 (1981), p. 219.
 - Mamoka Maki, The wayyane in Tigray and the reconstruction of the Ethiopia government in the 1940s, In: Proceedings of the 16th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies, ed. by Svein Ege, Harald Aspen, Birhanu Teferra and Shiferaw Bekele, Trondheim 2009, p.8.
 - Gebru Tareke, Ethiopia: Power and Protest, p. 121.
 - Gebru Tareke, Ethiopia: Power and Protest, p. 122.
 - Mamoka Maki, The wayyane in Tigray and the reconstruction of the Ethiopia government in the 1940s, In: Proceedings of the 16th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies, ed. by Svein Ege, Harald Aspen, Birhanu Teferra and Shiferaw Bekele, Trondheim 2009, p. 5.