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BACKGROUND

I.—ECONOMIC STRANGLEHOLD

The Italian Government had resorted to advocacy of a nominal independence for Eritrea and for Libya when, in the spring of 1949, a majority of the United Nations rejected Italian trusteeship of those territories. Adoption of the independence policy did not, however, mean the abandonment of the claim to special Italian privileges in the former Colonies, which might nullify true independence and maintain Italian predominance.

The proposal to retain the territories liberated from Italy under economic subjection to her recalls the long, persistent struggle of Italy to control Ethiopia's economy. In particular it brings to mind the tripartite Agreement of 1906, between Britain, France and Italy, by which the three Powers engaged to protect what they claimed to be each other's "interests" in Ethiopia, as follows:

1. *The interest of Great Britain in the affluents of the Blue Nile, which rise in Western Ethiopia and particularly derive from Lake Tana. This British "interest" was to be exercised with due respect for "local, and Italian interests."* (Sic.).
2. *The particular interests of Italy in regard to her colonies of Eritrea and Somalia, and "more especially in regard to the hinterland of her possessions, and the territorial union between them to the west of Addis Ababa." A glance at the map will indicate the magnitude of this tremendous claim.*
3. *The interests of France in the French Somaliland Protectorate and its hinterland, and the Addis Ababa-Jibuti Railway.*

This Agreement was negotiated between the three Powers without consulting Ethiopia. They notified the Emperor Menelik of its existence only after they had signed it; his reply indicated his refusal to recognise Agreements made between others concerning Ethiopia to which Ethiopia was not a party, and his assertion of Ethiopia's independent sovereignty within her own frontiers.

None of the so-called "interests" claimed in this Agreement of the three Powers could have any moral basis, except in so far as they had arisen from Treaties freely made with Ethiopia. The "interests" in free Ethiopian territory "in the hinterland" of their colonies which were claimed both by France and Italy in this Agreement were mere unjustified presumptions.

Still more unjustifiable was Italy's claim, firstly to build and possess a railway through Ethiopia, from Entrea in the North to

Somaliland in the South East, which would make a detour west of Addis Ababa forming a large ellipse sweeping through the country, and to a great extent commanding it; secondly, the still more predaceous claim to "the territorial union between them."

Moreover, there was a further amazing feature of the Agreement: the three Powers pledged themselves to support the *status quo* in Ethiopia, which they deemed to be determined "by the existing state of affairs," and by the international arrangements they had made concerning Ethiopia; a list of these arrangements they inserted in this new Agreement. In this list the Foreign Minister, Tittoni, included three Anglo-Italian Protocols of 1891 and 1894, whereby Britain recognised the boundaries of a protectorate which Italy at that time falsely claimed to possess over Ethiopia. Italy's subsequent defeat at the battle of Adowa, in 1896, when she had taken arms to enforce the alleged protectorate, had been followed by the Peace Treaty in which Italy had recognised the completely independent sovereignty of Ethiopia and made a full renunciation of the claim to exercise a protectorate. This Peace Treaty of 1896 the Italian Foreign Minister, Tommaso Tittoni, most dishonestly omitted from the list, for though Italy had formally renounced the protectorate, she had not abandoned her ambition to possess and exploit Ethiopia. Therefore, Tittoni, as he subsequently explained to the Italian Parliament,* inserted the Anglo-Italian Boundary Protocols of 1901 and 1904 into the tripartite Agreement. The Protocols had no value he admitted, in relation to Ethiopia, because of the renunciation of the protectorate which Italy had made in the Peace Treaty and her recognition of Ethiopia as an independent State. He claimed, however, that between Britain and Italy the Protocols still held good. He further explained that as originally drafted the Agreement referred only to "communications" between the two Italian Colonies. The first text he said would have given to Italy "nothing but that fantastic railway," whereas the second text "clearly recognises the supreme interests which it was above all important for us to protect—and reserves for us in a more or less distant day the share which is due to us and is necessary to assure the future of the two colonies."

Could Mussolini have said more?

Thus Tittoni inserted the protocols recognising the boundaries of an Italian protectorate over Ethiopia which had never existed, whilst omitting the Peace Treaty whereby Italy had renounced all claims to that protectorate—a piece of sheer trickery!

Britain and France were fully aware through diplomatic and other channels of Italy's double-dealing in pursuing her predaceous aims after formally renouncing them in her Peace Treaty of 1896. Nevertheless, they completely accepted the Italian claims.

* *Italy's Foreign and Colonial Policy.* Speeches of the Italian Foreign Minister, Tommaso Tittoni (Smith Elder).