

# **Afro-Marxism: Formation of the Working Party of Ethiopia**

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## **1. Introduction**

The development of political parties in Africa arouses interest among many political scientists. There is no doubt that early party history exerts a major influence on current political parties, the more so that the roots of the majority of present-day ruling parties go back to the colonial days. For this reason it is necessary to return to the roots of African parties to better understand some contemporary political processes. Besides, the origin and development of many modern African parties is fascinating because it documents the astonishing pragmatism of party elites, which adapted to almost any domestic and international situation.

A very interesting chapter of African partisanship concerns a rather small group of countries, namely Angola, Mozambique, Ethiopia, the Republic of Congo, Benin, in which the so-called Afro-Marxist political parties emerged in the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>14</sup> For some Africanist writers the phenomenon of Afro-Marxist parties (AMP) was the only consequence of the Cold War and the Soviet-American competition in Africa (Nation and Kauppi 1984); for others it was an interesting manifestation of the African partisanship, which deserves the attention of scholars (Ottaway-Ottaway 1986; Clapham, 1988, 1989). Although this subject may seem no longer topical, AMP represents one of the significant stages in the post-independence political history of the continent. AMP remains an important source of knowledge about the political thinking of revolutionary political elites in Africa.

After the historic defeat of Communism in the late 1980s and the collapse of the “World Socialist System”, as a group of communist-ruled countries in Europe, Africa, Asia and North America called itself, Marxist-Leninist ideas began to disappear from Africa. Some Afro-Marxist parties such as the Worker’s Party of Ethiopia - WPE totally disappeared from the political

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<sup>14</sup> A few other Sub-Saharan countries, e.g. Sao Tomé e Príncipe, Guinea-Bissau, Burkina-Faso, Cabo Verde, Ghana, could also be included in this category but they mostly represent short-term episodes in the development of their ruling parties, which for various reasons - economic and foreign policy – declared in particular periods adherence to Marxism-Leninism but never attempted transformation into a genuine Afro-Marxist party.

stage, others such as the Congo Labour Party (Parti Congolais du Travail – PCT and the Party of the People’s Revolution Benin (Parti de la Révolution Populaire du Bénin – PRPB) joined the opposition. The People’s Movement for the Liberation of Angola (Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola – MPLA) and the Front for the Liberation of Mozambique (Frente de Libertação de Moçambique – FRELIMO) managed to hold political power and continued as dominant parties in the period labelled “transition to democracy”.

The main objective of this article is to generalize about this most probably<sup>15</sup> closed phase of African political parties. In particular, the text considers the circumstances, cause and manner of the origin of the AMP.

With the passage of time it is possible to say that the foundation of Afro-Marxist parties has never been substantially analyzed in Western professional writing and that even the few existing general studies dating from the 1970s-80s were descriptive rather than deep analyses of this interesting political phenomenon (Rosberg-Callaghy 1979; Henriksen 1981; Katsikas 1982; Wiles 1982; Fukuyama 1984; Keller-Rotchild 1985; Markakis-Waller 1986).

One exception is perhaps *Afrocommunism* by D. and M. Ottaway, where we find the first attempt at a generalization of some aspects of the activity of Afro-Marxist parties (Ottaway and Ottaway 1986), and the other the collection *Marxism’s Retreat from Africa* (Hughes 1992), but these two works did not analyze the process of the very origin of the AMP. Arguably more attention to this issue was paid in Africanist literature by Eastern Bloc authors but their writing was ideologically biased and moreover being written in Slav languages their books and articles were unavailable to most Africanists in the West.

Immediately after the Cold War was over, African revolutionaries abandoned Marxism-Leninism as their ideology. As a result Africanists and political scientists virtually lost interest in this issue. In the past twenty

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<sup>15</sup> Here we should be cautious and point out that history is repeated in cycles, when Communist ideas reappear from time to time in various guises but political practice shows that in the end they evolve into a non-democratic model of government. As a matter of fact, 24 years after the Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia, which toppled the Communist regime, a gradual return of Communist elites to positions in economy and political power takes place, at first on local, then on regional level and it looks only a matter of time when Communists enter the ruling coalition together with Social Democrats.

years only a few studies have appeared, dealing in a marginal way with this topic but their objective was not a proper analysis of Afro-Marxist parties but rather an attempt at explaining their transformation into new political agents, especially in connection with the fairly successful transformation of MPLA and FRELIMO into democratic parties (Ishyama 2004, 2005, Manning 2007).

## **2. Theoretical conceptualization of the research**

The statement that parties are one of the most essential instruments of political mobilization and modernization in non-Western countries appears in all significant writings by political scientists studying the functioning of political systems. There is hardly any doubt about parties being the main agents in politics. Of course, parties do not exist in some countries, especially in Arab monarchies and a few theocratic regimes as well as in various stages of development of African countries such as Uganda, Lesotho, Swaziland, but currently parties do have an important position in African political systems.

The representatives of African political elites have said repeatedly that parties and democracy are foreign in traditional African society but they realize their vital importance in the governing of modern states (Chazan et al. 1999; Tordoff 2002; Joseph 1999). The acceptance of parties as key factors in politics is linked with the inability of these elites to offer an alternative model of governance acceptable to the whole population and enabling the functioning of a modern society. For these reasons the parties became important both before and after independence. The substance of ruling parties is often closely linked with the character of the regime and during the Cold War often with foreign policy.

In Africa, there are, in general, two approaches to the origin and the role of parties. On the one hand, in countries where political elites adopted the non-revolutionary, constitutionally reformist, road and decolonization was the result of the voluntary handing over of power by the colonial powers, pragmatic conservative or, much more often, Afro-socialist parties evolved.

On the other hand in some African countries the elites took the revolutionary road and led the national liberation struggle for independence or after it aimed to topple the non-democratic and corrupt African dictatorships. The radicalization of these elites then sometimes led to the

acceptance of the ideology of Marxism-Leninism as an instrument for building a new, just society.

The proclamation of independence in the former Portuguese colonies, which after a prolonged and bloody war of national liberation was facilitated by the so-called Carnation revolution in Lisbon in April 1974, opened the way to power of leftist intellectual leaders of MPLA, FRELIMO, PAIGC and MLSTP. Considerable military and economic assistance coming from the Eastern Bloc (the Soviet Union, Cuba, Czechoslovakia, the German Democratic Republic and others) and especially the long-term ideological training of guerrillas in the Warsaw Pact countries virtually determined the future orientation of these national liberation fronts. Similarly in the Republic of Congo, Benin and Ethiopia, where the revolutionary section of the army turned against the unpopular and undemocratic government and rejected another unsuccessful handing over of power to other elites, a trend to form the revolutionary avant-garde of society is found.

The character of the AMP may be easily described from party documents as well as from political practice, although it is not yet sufficiently known. In ideology, the AMP accepted Marxism-Leninism (“scientific socialism”) and its practical application according to the historical specificity of each country. In organization, the AMP used the principle of democratic centralism and the AMP collectivism in decisions and evolved the party structure according to the territorial principle.

New members were admitted to the AMP according to strictly individual principles, with emphasis on preference of working class people and other working strata of the population, especially peasants. Candidates for the AMP membership had to pass a waiting period, in which they were to prove their identification with the goals and programme of the AMP. Parties introduced an intensive Marxist-Leninist indoctrination in the form of regular party training sessions and party schools at all levels.

An important feature was the enforcement of the leading role of the party in the control of the state apparatus, the economy, mass social organizations, and in the building of a united national democratic front in the country. In foreign policy the AMP emphasized cooperation with Communist countries and revolutionary democratic regimes, supported the national liberation struggle and adhered to the principle of proletarian

internationalism. The organizational models for the APM were the Communist parties of the USSR and Eastern Europe.

Like the Communists in Eastern Europe, the Afro-Marxists enforced the class struggle and the revolutionary role of the working class. Since the working class was virtually non-existent in most African countries, the AMP were proclaimed the avant-garde of the working class. Revolutionaries in Angola and Congo called it that way, the Mozambique revolutionaries defined the FRELIMO party as an “avant-garde party of the coalition of workers and peasants”. The definitions of the PRPB and the WPE were similar. It was believed that the PRPB was a class party, “...an avant-garde section of the proletariat, all exploited classes and social strata in the Republic of Benin.” The programme of the WPE adopted at the constitutional congress of the party in 1984 stipulated that “Ethiopian workers party is an avant-garde organization of the working class and its allies, peasants, and all working people.”

These definitions of the social-class basis of the AMP spoke of the leading role of the working class but also emphasized the importance of the peasantry and other working people in Africa. Practical enforcement of these theses was most apparent in the formation of the membership of the AMP and in the admission of new members.<sup>16</sup>

The AMP basically copied the principal features of Communist parties and thus it is important to define correctly their character from the aspect of party typology. Afro-Marxist parties, like the Communist parties, belong to the family of socialist parties but it is important to define the differences between the AMP and the Communist (Marxist-Leninist) parties. At first sight it appears that both types share Marxism-Leninism, the type of organization of the party structure and especially the enforcement of its leading role in society.

Afro-Marxist parties, however, differed from Communist parties in several respects. First it was the degree of mastering Marxism-Leninism by its members, and the class composition, which corresponded to the specific conditions in Africa, peasantry being the majority of the population.

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<sup>16</sup> FRELIMO and MPLA underwent the so-called rectification movement, a process of vetting and subsequent change in registration of the original members, when great emphasis was put on the origin among workers or peasants. PCT, COPWE/WPE and PRPB evolved in a similar way but they built their new parties already on the basis of individual application for membership.

Marxism-Leninism was rather a matter of rhetoric, and the party collectivism was often replaced by the political power concentrated in the hands of a narrow party elite.

Also the orientation of foreign policy was rather pragmatic, for example FRELIMO did not hesitate to ask the IMF for assistance in the middle of the 1980s. As well the rapid abandoning of Marxism-Leninism after the collapse of the Eastern Bloc can be cited as an example of pragmatism. Also the enforcement of the leading role in society met with all sorts of obstacles in the political culture of traditional segments of society, namely the influence of traditional elites. For this and many other reasons the identification of the AMP with Communist parties of the European type should be seen as a serious methodological fault. I would argue that the AMP are a specific category of leftist parties situated in the space between social-democratic and Communist parties.

The historical development of political party systems in African countries, where power was seized by revolutionary forces enforcing a radical transformation of the society, shows that many attempts at formation of the AMP which failed because of a variety of external or internal reasons. Part of every dependable typology of the formation of the AMP must be taken into account of both the successful attempts and the failures. For the identification of each particular variant of the formation of the AMP it is necessary firstly to precisely define the criteria for the typology.

In the historical development the starting point is important, i.e. the character of the original political organizations or agents around the formation of the AMP. Next we should be interested in the model for the development of the AMP. Taking into account the conceptions of the origin of the AMPs and an analysis of the historical material, three main variants of the formation of the AMP can be distinguished:

### ***2.1. Typology of the formation of AMP***

#### **1. Differentiation of mass revolutionary democratic parties**

a) without interruption of their activity on their basis (Party FRELIMO), inside and on their basis (MPLA-PT)

b) with interruption of their activity (in Congo up to 1968)

2. By unification of various Marxist-Leninist and revolutionary democratic groups

a) by the transformation of united organizations (for example the evolution of the United Political Organization of the National Front into the Yemen Socialist Party)

b) failure in the unification of the organizations (Ethiopia in 1977-1979)

3. Unification of Marxists and revolutionary democrats accepting scientific socialism (COPWE/WPE since 1979, PCT since 1969 and PRPB since 1975)

The proclamation of AMP and holding the constituent congress can by no means be regarded as a termination of the formation; it is merely the first phase, when the revolutionaries decided to form a new type of political organization guided by the Marxist-Leninist theory. The analysis of their power, ideology, membership, organization, position and function in the political system is outside the scope of this study. In the following case study I shall examine the formation of the AMP in Ethiopia.

### **3. The formation of the Afro-Marxist Party in Ethiopia**

#### ***3. 1. The unification of various Marxist-Leninist and revolutionary-democratic groups (Ethiopia 1977-1979)***

The formation of an Afro-Marxist party in Ethiopia, the country which prior to 1974 revolution was without any experience with political parties,<sup>17</sup> was influenced by specific historical conditions (Clapham 1988: 65). After the removal of the monarchist and feudal regime of Haile Selassie I by the army in September 1974, a complex political differentiation began which led to the formation of a 120 member „revolutionary-democratic“ Provisional Military Administrative Council or PMAC/Derg (Amharic *Derg* meaning council), headed by General Teferi Benti and later by Mengistu Haile Mariam.

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<sup>17</sup> Despite severe repressions and persecution of any political activity in the country, its political life could not be suppressed completely. In the late 1960s, ideas for formation of political parties arose, especially among radical students and the intelligentsia, and stormy discussions went on about the place they should take in Ethiopian society. (Ottaway-Ottaway 1978: 117)

The revolutionary events in the autumn of 1974 had a big effect on the political awakening and political maturity of the population, which joined the movement striving for greater democratic rights and liberties, including the right to form political organizations.<sup>18</sup> Their non-existence in the first stage of the revolution was made up of, more or less, by the army, the only organized power in the country. As Mengistu Haile Mariam said during his visit to Moscow in 1978, "the historical uniqueness of the Ethiopian revolution" consisted in the fact that the army had assumed the vanguard role, normally reserved for the Communist party (Henze 1981).

Ethiopian revolutionaries from the very beginning regarded the formation of a revolutionary party, which would lead the transformation of Ethiopian society, their principal political objective. And yet the Derg members were not united about the formation of parties. Some inclined toward the regime of military dictatorship, others favoured revolutionary changes carried out mainly by lower-rank officers and by soldiers who thought of founding a party but could not agree how. Some of them demanded that each social class should have its own party. Others required a referendum to decide it. Still others believed that a united front of existing social and political organizations should become the core of a new avant-garde political party.

Due to this lack of unity, the first official documents of the Derg, such as "Ethiopia first" and „Explanation of the motto of Ethiopia first" and a few more documents along this way ignored the issue of the formation of parties.<sup>19</sup> Only in the "Political declaration 'Ethiopia first', the origin and the ways of development of the movement" of 20 December 1974 the necessity was stressed of establishing a "mass organization to ensure the participation of people in the administration of the country, promotion of political philosophy, and control of the government" (Declaration 1974: 147). In the „Political Declaration" the creation of a system of several parties was theoretically not rejected but for the reaching of the final goal it was regarded as unacceptable in Ethiopia (Ibid: 148).

The next part of the document discussed the foundation of a national party uniting all progressive forces into a unified front, the main role of which was to establish solid foundations for the implementation of revolutionary changes in society. Through this party the nation was to be highlighted so

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<sup>18</sup> These demands were formulated already in the pamphlet "To the Ethiopian People", distributed in the streets of Addis Ababa on 4 March 1974. For its full version see Scholler – Brietzke 1976: 139-140.

<sup>19</sup> For details see Ethiopian Revolution 1978, the document „Explanation of the slogan Ethiopia first" see Natsional'no-demokraticeskaya revolyutsia v Efiopii (1976), pp 74-82.

as to be able to control its leaders, discuss the present and future goals of the revolution, and bring into life the reforms proposed by the people. The conclusion of the Political Declaration emphasized the absolute necessity of the existence of an Ethiopian socialist party (Ibid: 147-148).

The publication of the Political Declaration is the evidence of the differentiation within the Derg and points to the forming of a sort of balance between the nationalist and the revolutionary-democratic wings (Halliday and Molyneus 1981: 112). The Political Declaration was an obvious compromise, which may be seen in many points of this document. For example in the section dealing with political organization the ideology of the future party was not clearly defined and another important issue, which class and which social forces it should serve, was passed over. Nor does the document mention how and when the party is to be built.

The character of the party was explored later, in July 1975 by the then chairman of the Derg, the Brigadier General Teferi Benti, who said that the party should unite peasants, workers and other progressive forces of the country and that the party should be guided by the goals of Ethiopian socialism and as soon as it is formed, it should take over the control of the country (Africa Diary 1975: 7544).

As far as the rhetoric of the leading Ethiopian revolutionaries is concerned, the intensification of the national-democratic revolution (meaning physical liquidation of the supporters of a pragmatic democratic development) made it possible to proceed from the declaration about the foundation of a party to practical activity. The newly formed People's Organizing Political Committee (POPC), consisting primarily of Derg members, was charged with issues of the formation of the party. The POPC at first demanded the formation of mass social organizations, among which the new urban and rural associations were to play an important role. Through their unification the POPC members wanted to create a mass political party.<sup>20</sup> (Ferede 1981: 40).

This idea was largely illusory and was bound to fail because the urban and rural associations, which were to become the core of the future party, only started forming themselves and it was by no means a simple process. Also

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<sup>20</sup> An Ethiopian student, an EPRP member, says that General Teferi Benti supported the theory of meeting, based on the formation of various political organizations as schools of political practice and democracy. These political organizations were to merge, after a long and open struggle, into a single party. (Ferede 1981: 40)

the activity of each trade union and their central organ, the Confederation of Ethiopian Labour Union (CELU) was marked by controversies both within these organizations and by disagreement about the policy of the Derg itself.

Among civilians, the problem of the formation of parties became the central issue because from this was derived the hope for a transition toward a non-military government. The post-revolutionary situation in Ethiopia was very confused. Leftist students and intellectuals were returning from abroad and jointly with the local leftists established the first underground political organizations.

The first attempts at organizing urban populations were made by the two main political groups, which had much in common, but unfortunately were unable to find a common language. They were the All Ethiopian Socialist Movement, known under the Amharic abbreviation MEISON) and the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP). In addition to these two largest Marxist-Leninist organizations, soon after the revolution several minor organizations emerged, such as the Workers' League (the Waz League), the Ethiopian Marxist-Leninist Revolutionary Organization (known by the Amharic abbreviation MALRED or Emalered),<sup>21</sup> and the revolutionary Ethiopian Oppressed People's Struggle, known as ECHAT) (Clapham 1988: 54).

The MEISON was allegedly founded in deep illegality as early as 1969 (Tiruneh 1993: 138), but its existence is officially first linked with the publication of the journal "Voice of the Masses" in 1974 (Halliday and Molyneus 1981: 128). The leaders of MEISON were Haile Fida, Fikre Merid, Negede Gobeze and Kebede Menguesha, mostly former representatives of political emigration. The MEISON recruited members mainly from among students, the revolutionary intelligence and bureaucracy.<sup>22</sup> The MEISON did not call itself a Marxist-Leninist party but wanted to cooperate with the Derg and openly backed its policy.

The EPRP allegedly emerged as a proletarian party in 1972 (AC 1975: 6). Its leadership was mainly comprised of urban intellectuals, who rejected military dictatorship and called for a revolution of people's masses. It

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<sup>21</sup> It was a group of former EPRP members, who disagreed with the policy of confronting the Derg, detached themselves and founded their own party.

<sup>22</sup> In literature it is often said that the MEISON was based on the Oromo ethnic group from the Wollenga province. See e.g. Legum and Lee 1979: 37 or Farrer 1979: 63.

found support mainly among students of secondary schools and universities and partly among the working people in Addis Ababa and peasants in northern Ethiopia.<sup>23</sup> The EPRP, proclaiming the Maoist variety of Marxism-Leninism (Schwab 1985: 22), differed from the MEISON in several principal issues of strategy and tactics, especially in its open confrontation with the Derg and also differed in the issue of national minorities and the formation of a party. In August 1975 the EPRP issued a programme demanding an instant termination of military dictatorship and the formation of an interim civilian government (AC 1975: 6).

The representatives of the MEISON and the EPRP, although their programmes were similar, differed completely in real politics. While the MEISON chose the road of critical cooperation with the Derg, aiming at the absorption of revolutionary soldiers into politics, the EPRP unequivocally rejected any cooperation with the army. The minor parties followed the MEISON line and wanted to cooperate with the Derg.

The first symptoms of open opposition toward the Derg appeared during the 1<sup>st</sup> anniversary of the Ethiopian revolution. Disagreement with the plan for the formation of the ruling single-party system and with the Derg's policy was heard also at the Confederation of Ethiopian Labor Union (CELU) Congress in Addis Abeba at the end of September 1975 (ARB 1975: 3759). After an evaluation of the deteriorating political situation in society, the influential Derg members finally arrived at the conclusion that the fate of the revolution depended on their unification with representatives of the existing parties and groups in order to form a common platform based on cooperation.

The first step toward this strategic goal was taken in September 1975 by the foundation of the People's Organizing Political Committee - POPC), comprised of seven high members of the Derg (including Mengistu Haile Mariam) and four government ministers. In the autumn the POPC members held intensive talks with the chief representatives of Ethiopian parties, which in December 1975 joined the activity of Mass Political Education and Co-ordinating Committee. The committee was to prepare a new programme of Ethiopian revolution, which was to meet the interests both of the society and the army in Ethiopia.

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<sup>23</sup> Ethnically the EPRP was regarded as a party of the Tigre.

The National Democratic Revolution Programme of Ethiopia (NDRPM) was finished at the end of March 1976 and was officially proclaimed on 20 April 1976 after being passed by the POPC and the Derg. On the same day, a special decree announced the formation of the Provisional Office of Mass Organizational Affairs (POMOA), which was charged with the realization of the NDRPM, especially with promoting the ideas of scientific socialism, preparation for establishing a people's democracy in Ethiopia, education and training of the leaders of the new political party. From the 15 POMOA members, seven were foremost officials of the MEISON<sup>24</sup>, and Haile Fida became the chairman and Mesin Kassu the general secretary (Tadesse 1998: 54).

The foundation of the POMOA was due to the Derg's successful involvement of leftist intellectuals in the army-controlled revolution, especially when mass demonstrations were organized by dissatisfied students and trade unions. From that moment on, the Derg through its civilian organ could influence the Ethiopian masses and at the same time give the impression of the lawfulness of its military regime.

The April 1976 programme of the national-democratic revolution already spoke of the formation of a real proletarian party, a vanguard party and the Programme referred to "the principles of scientific socialism" (POMOA 1977: 9-17). The role of the POMOA in the preparation of the foundations of a revolutionary party was not easy. The POMOA encountered heavy criticism from the EPRP, which rejected the foundation of a party from above, preferring the Maoist idea that a really revolutionary party had to start from a mass revolutionary movement.

The relations between the POMOA and the Derg were not simple either because the Derg's rightist wing feared the loss of political power and saw in the formation of the POMOA an attempt of the Derg's leftist wing led by Mengistu Haile Mariam to increase its power. These fears became more intensive when the POMOA at the end of 1976 was joined by a military political organization, "Revolutionary Flame" (*Seded* in Amharic), established by Mengistu Haile Mariam.

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<sup>24</sup> Tiruneh says that nine members belonged to the MEISON. Further represented in the POMOA were the Waz liga, MALRED and ECHAT (Tiruneh 1993: 158).

The situation inside the POMOA was not very positive either because it stood in confrontation with the MEISON and other minor political parties. MEISON members did not hide their effort at taking over the dominant role in the POMOA and thus in the foundation of the future political avant-garde. That is why nobody was surprised by the sharp ideological and personal conflicts between the POMOA chairman Haile Fidou (MEISON) and the vice-chairman Senaye Likkem (the Waz League).

In order to strengthen the position of the POMOA (as well as of the MEISON), the main representative of the Derg's right wing and their loud opponent Major Sissay Habte was arrested and executed in July 1976, having been charged with preparing a pro-imperialist coup d'état (Ottawa-Ottaway 1977: 122).

In the second half of 1976, the POMOA reached the peak of its power. Its members were in charge of the political education of people's militia, they organized the formation of rural and urban associations, the arming of units in factories, offices and institutions. The POMOA leadership supervised the political schools Yekatit'66, which trained cadres for state and social positions. Thanks to them, the MEISON supporters penetrated the leadership of social organizations, government offices and the state apparatus.

The MEISON did not hesitate to exploit its dominating position in the POMOA to settle accounts with its political adversaries from the EPRP, which was defined as an enemy to be removed from political life. The EPRP was at first branded as a petty bourgeois, anarchist and finally as a fascist organization. It was de facto liquidated during the so-called Red Terror (from September 1976 to the end of 1977). During the Red Terror, only in Addis Ababa more than 55,000 EPRP supporters were executed, most of them students and teachers<sup>25</sup> (Tadesse 1998: 269). Schwab says that in 1978 the EPRP virtually ceased to exist since most of its members were murdered, imprisoned or fled abroad (Schwab 1985: 41).

Some Derg members watched with unease the rapidly growing influence and the strengthening of the positions of the POMOA. Due to the

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<sup>25</sup> On the other hand it should be noted that the EPRP responded by a campaign of killings of noted members of the POMOA and the Derg, but this led to no change (for details see Tadesse 1993 and 1998). EPRP's assessment differs considerably in the literature, e.g. Clapham regarded it as a threat to Ethiopian revolution (Clapham 1988: 67).

increasing struggle between the right and left wings in the Derg during the second half of 1976, which culminated in February 1977 with the victory of the revolutionary- democratic platform of Mengistu Haile Mariam, nobody dared to enter an open conflict with the POMOA/MEISON. The Derg rather tried to gradually push the MEISON people from important governmental offices, and especially form a political counter-force within the POMOA. It was to be based on smaller political parties as well as on the Marxist political organization Seded, founded by the soldiers and headed officially by Legesse Asfaw, a member of the Derg's permanent committee.

The Seded, according to some sources, was formed as early as at the end of 1975, allegedly by Mengistu Haile Mariam himself (Halliday-Molyneus 1991: 129). Not much is known about its origin, roles and composition. It seems to have been only an instrument of the control of the POMOA/MEISON by the Derg, which was losing control over the POMOA (Haile-Selasie 1997: 175). The Seded was a political organization of exclusively military forces although it enjoyed some support from civilians in higher state functions and state apparatus. Its members tried to regain the lost influence in social organizations and urban and rural associations, and thus weaken the MEISON. Before the formation of the Union of Marxist-Leninist Organizations of Ethiopia (see below), this party was regarded even as a possible core of an avant-garde political party (Ottaway-Ottaway 1977: 187-188).

The final victory of the Derg's revolutionary-democratic wing led by Mengistu Haile Mariam in February 1977 was the beginning of a new stage in the Ethiopian revolution, which according to its leader had passed from defence to attack (Report 1980: 46). At the beginning of 1977 favourable conditions developed in the country for the formation of a unified central political organizations cooperating with the Derg, with the objective of building up the AMP.

This cooperation is based on the declaration of five political parties (MEISON, the Waz League, MALRED, ECHAT and the Seded), which in March 1977 pledged to set up a preparatory front and to attempt at achieving unity in ideology and organization. Each party, which on entering the Union of Marxist-Leninist Organizations of Ethiopia (*Amharic Emaledh*) preserved its integrity in organization, its own programme and leadership, was close to Marxism-Leninism (Mengistu 1985: 92).

The Emaledh and its Coordinating Committee since the very beginning faced considerable problems, especially in producing a common platform for their activities. The differences in political interpretations and approaches to the theory of revolution by each Emaledh member organization, for example their relation to the Derg, the resolution of the issue of nationality, the method of establishing civilian government, etc. (Ottaway-Ottaway 1986: 188; Halliday and Molyneus 1981: 129-130) were removed only after four months of negotiations that resulted in the action programme of the Emaledh.

In the introduction to this document of July 1977 its authors stressed the leading role of the working class. Among the main goals of the Emaledh were the strengthening of friendship with peasants and the weakening of domestic and foreign enemies, the increase in political maturity and participation of the masses in the revolution and strengthening of the united front in order to speed up the formation of the working class party. For this Emaledh members pledged to assist in the organization of the masses and in the raising of their political maturity, in the education of their political cadres and the preparation for the struggle with bureaucracy and enemies of the revolution, and to support, in congruence with the Programme of National-Democratic Revolution the right for self-determination, to spread Marxism-Leninism and make it an efficient weapon in the revolutionary struggle of the masses.

Emaledh's action programme created a favourable ground for the removal of differences in political platforms between the groups and helped in the further elaboration of the general line, and created conditions for their organizational merging.

The formation of the Emaledh and the new structure of the Derg brought about a reorganization of the POMOA, because its composition and activity no longer corresponded to the new phase of revolution. Part of this reorganization was the decrease in the number of the representatives of each Marxist organization to five, which ultimately led to a dramatic cut in the influence of the MEISON that had until then strongest representation in the POMOA. The MEISON leadership started an open confrontation with the military government.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> MEISON in May 1977 tried by means of armed people's militia to seize power in Addis Ababa, but after a short fight the militiamen were pushed out of the city. In the same month, the MEISON asked the members of urban associations to suppress with violence the demonstrations of students supporting the EPRP, which ended in

In August 1977 the MEISON issued the declaration about “A change in the tactic of the struggle”, which practically meant a transition from the existing “critical support” of the Derg to “a revolutionary opposition” to it (KCA 1977: 28637). MEISON leaders accused the Derg of supporting the old state bureaucracy, acceptance of state feudal bureaucratic structures, restriction of political freedoms and retreat from the nationalist policy of the revolution. They demanded an immediate handing over of power and establishing a civilian government (Ottaway-Ottaway 1986: 148).

The Derg rejected the demands presented as an ultimatum, accused the MEISON of abusing their influence in the POMOA and in the political school Yekatit’66, of infiltration into various offices and bodies on all levels of the state apparatus and social organization, with the ultimate aim of seizing the power in the country (Sovremennye 1982: 35). The subsequent attempt by the MEISON to go underground ended in a complete failure. The members of the central committee of the MEISON were arrested and executed in August 1977 and the MEISON virtually stopped existing at the end of 1977.<sup>27</sup>

Although the situation became a little quieter, the struggle over the leadership in the Emaledh continued when the leading position of the MEISON was taken over by the ECHAT, which moreover became the refuge of the former MEISON members. Its leaders of Oromo stock stood in the way for supporters of Mengistu Haile Mariam in his attempt at seizing complete power. The official reason for the exclusion of the ECHAT at the end of 1977 was instigation of ethnic conflicts and open collaboration with the „reactionary“ regime in Somaliland (Report 1980: 47, Tadesse 1998: 244).

In August 1978 the Emaledh published two programmes: “Joint declaration about the transitory period” and “Programme of activity in the transitory period”, which analyzed the development of the Ethiopian revolution and set new tasks for the Emaledh in the subsequent period (AAS 1980, No. 11: 11).

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a massacre of mostly innocent people. For having organized the massacre, the Derg sentenced to death five MEISON leaders including a POMOA member, Girm Kebede (AC 1977, No. 17: 6-7 and No. 24: 35).

<sup>27</sup> During Derg’s offensive against “the traitors of the revolution“, between December 1977 and February 1978, more than 2,500 MEISON supporters were executed (AC 1978, No. 17: 6-7).

In the middle of 1978 a new crisis in the Emaledh culminated in a conflict between the Waz League and the Seded. The gradually increasing controversies had been for a long time hidden under the surface of a very narrow cooperation of these two organizations so that some western observers even expected the proclamation of a workers' party in September 1978 on the occasion of the 4<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the revolution (AC 1977, No. 8: 7).

Still in September 1978 Mengistu Haile Mariam in his address delivered at the celebration of the 4th anniversary of the revolution urged Ethiopians to found a revolutionary political party by unification of Ethiopian Marxist-Leninist organizations, although by that time it was evident that neither the POMOA nor the Emaledh would be capable of doing it.

An open crisis broke out after the extensive arrests of the supporters of the Emaledh in the autumn of 1978. Especially military circles were accused of double membership, in the Sedad and the Waz League. The latter in this way wanted allegedly to infiltrate the Sedad with the aim of obtaining control of the Emaledh. Several prominent members of the Waz League were executed and many more ended up in prison, having been charged with preparing a coup d'état (Clapham 1988: 69).

However, the two remaining organizations of the Emaledh did not avoid fractionism either. As Mengistu Haile Mariam said at the First Congress of COPWE in 1980, the MALRED leaders said one thing and did something else. He also said that some individuals in the Sedad had tried to raise their own interests above the interests of the revolution and thus committed fractionism (Report 1980: 47).

The continuing conflicts between the Emaledh and the Derg, intensive fighting for the leadership of the union, and fractional competing showed at the turn of 1978-1979 that the formation of the AMP by unification of the Marxist-Leninist organizations was impossible. In February 1979 the Emaledh newspaper, Voice of the Union, pointed out the mistakes and errors committed during the formation of the party and informed people about the disbanding of the Emaledh and founding a party "not by mechanical merging of its member organizations but through unification of experienced fighters, sufficiently armed with the knowledge of Marxism-Leninism" (Mengistu 1985: 92).

The history of the POMOA and the Emaledh clearly demonstrated the virtual impossibility of the formation of an avant-garde party by means of unification of various Ethiopian Marxist-Leninist organizations. The different approach to the fundamental revolutionary issues became an endless source of conflicts. Each political fraction active in the POMOA in 1975-1979 and later in the Emaledh promoted its own goals and had its own ideas about the character of the revolution and the role it should play in it. These ambitions resulted in an unceasing inner conflict and in the competition of the two organizations, which led to the gradual elimination of the founding members and a complete termination of the activity.

After the failure of this process, the Derg decided to set up a new revolutionary party, on an individual basis, by merging the real Marxist-Leninist revolutionaries. This plan was announced by Mengistu Haile Mariam in early August 1979 (Korn 1986: 167).

### ***3.2. Unification of Marxists and revolutionary democrats promulgating scientific socialism (Ethiopia 1979-1984)***

On the African continent, one encounters a variant of the formation of the AMP, which is sometimes regarded as a model of unification of Marxists and revolutionary democrats leading to the decision of the ruling leftists to form a party from above by decree. This model of building up the AMP is usually found in countries with no experience with political parties or where all previous attempts at founding an avant-garde party either by the transformation of a wider front or by unification of smaller parties failed.

The basis of this model for the AMP is the key role of a narrow group of leftist revolutionaries, usually members of the army, who accepted Marxism-Leninism and who became the core of the AMP. Around this leftist group under its direct supervision various party structures and the party membership rules develop: Generally it is not a very large elitist party closely linked with influential personalities (Mengistu Haile Mariam in Ethiopia, Mathieu Kérékou in Benin, Marien Ngouabi in the Congo) and people who serve as a political tool for the control of the society.

These parties often emerge through the attempt of the representatives of the army who grabbed political power in a successful military coup and who want to keep the ruling position and develop a political instrument for the transformation of the military regime and the involvement of civic

organizations in institutions of the new political system. The party that thus arose then wants to make the regime appear legitimate and “demilitarized”.

This model of the formation of the AMP was successfully used by the leftist soldiers in Congo, Benin and Ethiopia. While in the first two countries the formation of the AMP was rather pragmatic, when Congo and Benin soldiers responded to the leftist mood in society, in Ethiopia the development of the AMP underwent several stages before a Marxist-Leninist Ethiopian Workers’ Party came into being.

The controversial development of the political situation in Ethiopia in 1974 – 1979 practically prevented the Ethiopian revolutionaries in this period from forming the AMP. Its formation through the unification of the five Ethiopian parties supporting the Derg into the Union of Marxist-Leninist organization of Ethiopia (POMOA) and their later fusion and adoption of a common political programme turned out to be unreal. The rivalry of the organizations within the POMOA in order to prevail and enforce one’s own aims at the expense of the other members of the union became the main cause of the failure in the unification of the parties into the AMP.

Conflicts between the POMOA and the Derg grew in this period and several times even led to open confrontations. After an assessment of the situation and of all circumstances, the POMOA leadership finally, in February 1979, came to the conclusion that the formation of the party through mechanical merging of existing political organizations is unreal and recommended the formation of the Ethiopian AMP through the unification of individuals devoted to the Ethiopian revolution.

This proposal was discussed in July 1979 by the delegates of the Fifth plenary session of the Derg, who finally decided to set up a committee led by Mengistu Haile Mariam, which would control the admissions. This decision made by the supreme organ of the Derg was approved in August 1979 by the participants in the seminar of political staff and cadres of armed forces (KCA 1980: 30018).

The setting up of the Committee for Organization of the Party of Workers’ of Ethiopia – COPWE) was officially announced on 17 December 1979. Mengistu Haile Mariam on that day called upon the workers, peasants, members of armed forces, the intelligentsia and all strata of the population to unite their efforts in the formation of the party of the working people which would lead the revolution. “It could be founded,” he continued,

“only on the basis of the unity of real communists ready to fight for the ideological and organizational unity of all progressive forces.” (Proclamation No. 174 of 1979)

On the next day the Derg Proclamation no. 174 about the formation of the COPWE<sup>28</sup> was published, which set the goals, structure, role, rights and duties of the controlling organs and of the rank and file, arranged the relations between the COPWE and the state bodies, between the COPWE and social organizations, and between the COPWE and the Derg. For the next period, this decree became practically a law about political activity in the country (Poláček 1985).

Among the chief goals of the COPWE was the dissemination and promotion of Marxism-Leninism and the organization of the party of the working people, “based on Marxism-Leninism and with the historical mission of liquidation of feudalism, imperialism, and bureaucratic capitalism in Ethiopia, the setting up of a people’s democratic republic, and the leading of the masses towards socialism and later to communism.” (Proclamation No. 174 of 1979) The decree warned against sabotaging the activity of the COPWE and its members. Simultaneously with the COPWE proclamation, the POMOA was disbanded and activity of any other political body, party and group was banned, which laid the foundations for the setting up of the system of a single ruling party. This situation was theoretically justified at the First Congress of the COPWE by a simple assertion that “real revolutionaries have in their struggle a single goal and therefore need a single programme and a single organization.” (Report: 45)

The top representatives of Ethiopia emphasized, and not once, that for the formation of an Ethiopian workers’ party “a preparatory period is necessary” (Gebre 1984: 63) and that the formation of the COPWE was “a step corresponding to the specific conditions in Ethiopia, based on the wishes and full support of the working masses” (Mengistu 1985: 93). The COPWE was described not as a party but as a special political body, an original school at which the members may obtain experience in party work and prove in practice their usefulness for the party. (Denisov-Sharayev 1980: 12)

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<sup>28</sup> The decree was published in The Ethiopian Herald, 19 December 1979.

By the creation of the COPWE, the structure of the political system in Ethiopia became much stronger. At first sight, the COPWE hierarchy occupied the leading position. But the reality was different. The Derg still kept its leading place in the Ethiopian revolution although some responsibilities were transferred, especially those concerning the building up of the Ethiopian Workers Party and the promotion of Marxism-Leninism among the COPWE bodies. The decision of the military members of the Derg to create the COPWE was very smart because the COPWE in a greater part included Derg members in its structures. Mengistu Haile Mariam chaired both COPWE and Derg, more than two thirds of the Central Committee of the COPWE consisted of members of the armed forces and police, while all members of the central and standing committees of the Derg were represented (Schwab 1985: 50). On the other hand, the DERG kept its independent political existence and in case of failure could continue holding political power. With a certain lapse of time it may be said that the COPWE was formed in order to commit to revolution the traditionally active civilian layers, while Derg prepared for itself such positions which in practice should not prevent the spreading of its influence. On the contrary, the COPWE was a symbol of “the new, political and traditional order, and the legality of the revolution within the doctrinaire political norms“ (Schwab 1985: 47).

On the basis of the generalization of the revolutionary process in Ethiopia, made by participants of the 2<sup>nd</sup> congress of the COPWE in 1983, the work of the Committee was divided into three phases: preparation (from the proclamation of the COPWE to the First Congress of the COPWE), active operation (from the First to the Second Congress of the COPWE), and setting up of the party (from the Second Congress of the COPWE to the constituting congress of WPE) (Documents 1983: 11).

In the first six months of COPWE’s activity, the politically most mature and progressive representatives of the armed forces, peasant associations, associations of urban population and social organizations began to create the inner structure of the COPWE, from the basic bodies up to the level of provinces, began to select their leaders and admit new members. In this period the principal documents of the Committee were prepared, which after being discussed and approved by the First Congress of the COPWE were to become the principal directives for further political development.

The most important event in 1980 was the First Congress of the COPWE, held in June with the participation of 1,500 delegates from 14 provinces and the capital of Addis Ababa. These delegates represented workers and peasants, the army and the people's militia, the intelligentsia, and other working people (KCA 1980: 30592). The Congress delegates heard the evaluating report delivered by Mengistu Haile Mariam, in which this leader of Ethiopian revolution analyzed the revolutionary process in the previous period. The delegates then approved the statutes, instructions and directives for the work of the COPWE, elected its central committee and the executive committee, and approved Mengistu Haile Mariam as COPWE chairman. The elected committee of the COPWE was comprised of 93 members and 30 candidates.

The main goal of the revolutionary party, the First Congress concluded, was the unification of the struggle of the working people "against exploiters and oppressors" and "creation of a just and flourishing society, liberated from exploitation of man by man" (Report 1980: 53). The delegates set a clear political line for the Ethiopian revolution, formulated the particular tasks in the building up of the party, and passed from the earlier programmatic declarations about the formation of the party to their practical implementation.

The initial phase of the COPWE activity was much marked by the application of centralist working methods of the leaders. However, as three years later the delegates to the Second Congress of the COPWE mentioned, already in this period favourable conditions arose for the fulfilment of the main goal of the Committee – the formation of Ethiopian AMP and deepening of the revolutionary process in Ethiopia (Documents 1983: 10)

After the First Congress of the COPWE, its members concentrated on setting up COPWE organizations at each level of administration in the country. Attention was also paid to the training of cadres and the efficient promotion of Marxism-Leninism.

The greatest contribution to the stabilization of COPWE's position in the revolution, the formulation of its future tasks and direction of activity came from the Second Plenary of its Central Committee (CC), in February 1981. The CC members were acquainted with the achievements of the Committee in the past period and heard the report on the issues of ideology, foreign policy, organizational work and military-political work in

the army, economics and other major issues (Sovremennyye 1982:39). The decisions made by the Second Plenary of the CC of the COPWE in fact became a programme for the economic and social development of the country, the improvement of organization and activity of social bodies, and contributed to the greater ability of the country to defend itself.

At the Third Plenary of the CC COPWE, held in November 1981, much attention was paid to ideological work, the fight against corruption, and wastage of public money (KCA 182: 31688). The correct evaluation of the situation and removal of barriers to further development of the revolution enabled the continuation of the implementation of the resolutions of the First Congress of the COPWE (Documents 1983: 11, 14).

At the Fourth Plenary of the CC of the COPWE, in June 1982, the course of the building up of the party and economic issues were discussed and the way to the resolution of the „Eritrean question“ was outlined (KCA 1982: 31688). The Fifth Plenary of the CC of the COPWE, in January 1983, dealt mainly with the better organization of the Committee.

In the second phase of the so-called active COPWE, the organization of the committee became stabilized and the main directions of COPWE activities in all areas of public life were cleared up. The success achieved in this period enabled it to pass to the final stage in the activity of the Committee, the formation itself of the AMP.

That stage began on the eve of the Second Congress of the COPWE, when due to “the qualitative and quantitative improvement in the work of the Committee the leading elements were stabilized and so were the links with the working masses, where thus the main conditions for the building up of the party were met” (Mengistu 1985: 94).

The way to the formation of the Ethiopian AMP was opened by the Second Congress of the COPWE, held from January 3 to January 6, 1983. It was attended by about 1,600 delegates from all over the country representing all the social strata of Ethiopian society.

The delegates assessed the previous period of the COPWE and announced new tasks in all areas of social and political life in the country. An important resolution passed by the Second Congress was the decision to end the preparations for the founding of the AMP and proclaim it on the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the overthrow of the monarchy in September 1984. The CC of the COPWE was to write the statutes and the programme of the

future Workers' Party of Ethiopia and to prepare everything for fulfilling the conclusions of the Second Congress of the COPWE.

At the beginning of 1983, the COPWE entered the final phase in the formation of an avant-garde party. It had to assess the activity of the bodies established by the Committee and its members, to write the programme and the statutes, to develop party structures and hold conferences at each level. This was discussed at the Sixth Plenary of the CC of the COPWE, which devised new measures to be taken in organization and ideology. The next plenary, in January 1984, assessed the achievements of the final phase of the formation of the AMP, approved the statutes, the programme, the structure of organization, and issued many instructions for the work of the Committee (KCA 1984: 33017).

The last plenary of the CC of the COPWE, before the proclamation of the Workers' Party of Ethiopia, took place in August 1984. The participants positively assessed the party conferences, which had established the basic organizations of the future party, elected new leaders and the delegates of the constitutional congress. The participants also discussed the draft of the statutes and the programme and supplied more than 300 proposed amendments. The resolution of the Eighth Plenary of the CC the COPWE said that all necessary conditions for convening the constitutional congress of the Ethiopian ASP had been met (Poláček 1985).

The constitutional congress of the Workers Party of Ethiopia (WPE) was held from 6 to 10 September 1984 and was attended by 1,742 delegates. They approved the statutes, the programme, and the ten year plan of economic and social development of Ethiopia. In the main congress report Mengistu Haile Mariam said that "the COPWE had finished its historical role successfully and from this moment existed no longer. Because the organization and activity of COPWE differed from the other Marxist-Leninist parties, all its achievements would serve as a stepping stone for our party." (Central Report 1984: 141)

The WPE programme said: the Workers' Party of Ethiopia is the leading power of the working class, revolutionary intelligentsia, and all working masses in Ethiopia and that it is a revolutionary democratic party which matures by the deepening of the revolutionary processes, and is gradually developing into a Marxist-Leninist party. The WPE is guided by the theory of Marxism-Leninism, the principles of democratic centralism, and is based on the principle of regions and their productions. Its main objective

is the finishing of the stage of national democratic revolution and a transition to the building of socialism and later of communism (Program WPE 1984).

## **Conclusion**

With the passing of time it may be said that the formation of the AMP was influenced by domestic as well as by foreign circumstances. A very important role in the formation of the WPE undoubtedly played advisers from the Soviet Union, who advised the Ethiopian revolutionaries how to build the AMP. The difference in historical roots and the cause of the origin of the AMP may be observed in Ethiopia, where the formation of the AMP was affected especially by the manner power was seized, by the revolutionary section of the army (military coup) and their efforts at influencing the subsequent transition to civilian government by the formation of one's own avant-garde political party by the unification of Marxist-Leninist and revolutionary-democratic organizations and groups or by unification of individual Marxists and revolutionary democrats adhering to scientific socialism.

All these processes took place in a bi-polar world when communist countries headed by the Soviet Union gave long-term support to revolutionary forces in Africa, where they opposed the so-called Western (mainly American) imperialism and neo-colonialism. The support coming from the Eastern Bloc before 1989 varied from verbal defence of the interests of progressive African countries in international organizations (especially UNO) up to direct economic and military support. Still I believe that explaining the origin of the AMP only by the so-called export of socialist revolution does not correspond to the historical development of the African countries.

In my opinion, the popularity of socialist and social-democratic ideas in Africa, where a substantial part of the population was and still is impoverished, the emergence of the AMP is mainly due to domestic causes (peasants prevail in African societies, which is reflected in ideologies of modern political parties in Africa). This explains the radicalization of the revolutionary forces at the key stages of the development of society paralleled by the favourable situation in international politics (support by the Eastern Bloc).

Afro-Marxist parties in their goals, programmes, principles and ideologies came near Marxist-Leninist parties but in no case managed to fulfill their programmes and goals. The main reason was the inability of the political elites and the party members to accept Marxism-Leninism in full context and meanings. In political practice only some postulates of the building up of the Marxist-Leninist party were applied. Many declarations of Afro-Marxists were verbal only and served for the gratification of the wishes of foreign sponsors (the communist countries headed by the Soviet Union) rather than having an adequate response among the members of the Afro-Marxist parties and in society.

Party elites did not have enough experience in the political and economic management of society, they made many tragic mistakes. The result was the subjectivist evaluation of the political and economic situation in their country, overrating their strength and the covering up of deficiencies. Moreover, the Afro-Marxist parties often broke party discipline, did not put the resolutions into practice and changed democratic centralism into the centralism of individuals (cult of the personality of party leaders) and some bodies. One basic thesis describing Afro-Marxist parties as an avant-garde of the practically non-existent working class was an utter illusion.

Although the democratization of African society after 1990 closed the chapter of the existence of the Afro-Marxist parties in single-party authoritarian systems, from the viewpoint of typology of political parties they have been an interesting phenomenon, which deserves further attention from Africanist researchers.

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