

Two Groups of the TPLF and Two Issues of Ethiopia

By Tesfay Atsbeha, and Kahsay Berhe
SEPTEMBER 2002

POLITICAL ANALYSIS

Part I

[PART II - TPLF: Human Rights Crisis \(1977-1979\)](#)

[PART III - The Rise of Meles, More Purges and Liquidations](#)

[PART IV - The Struggle for Ethiopian Sovereignty
and The Reign of Meles](#)

Author: Abiy Araia
[The Birth of an Eritrean
Cliques from The Womb of
TPLF](#)
July 2001

Part I Ethiopia is for the first time in her history under the control of a tyrant who started with an open anti Ethiopian program. All Ethiopian rulers before Meles, including Colonel Mengistu, whatever mistakes they might have made, were committed to the cause of Ethiopia.

The ruling group has started to be known as the "Palace Group". This group can also be called "The Meles- Sebhat Group" because Meles and Sebhat are its decisive protagonists, whereas the rest are their followers. It smacks of a clan with at least five of its members Meles, Mulugeta Alemseged, Sebhat Nega along with his sister Kidusan Nega and her husband Tsegay Berhe, etc... are connected by blood and marriage. The other group can not be named after individuals. Its members have neither follower-leader nor known blood connections. The dissident group is no doubt patriotic, but it has failed to articulate its Ethiopian position and implement it while it was in power for the last ten years.

The issues which are of cardinal importance for Ethiopia and on which the groups have real or alleged differences can be divided into two main categories: The question of national sovereignty and the system of exercising power.

We are convinced that differences on ideology, the practice of democracy, corruption, nepotism or power struggle did not lead to the division of the leadership of the TPLF. If we take ideology as an example, it is only a means of rallying supporters, defending interests, attaining certain goals or justifying certain measures. It would otherwise be naive to assume that any one of the groups would have a religious belief in any ideology. Many of the cadres who are trained and conditioned to imitate like domestic animals and not to think independently may believe in one or another ideology.

Meles has used the Stalinist organizational structure and centralism as well as the security apparatus to purge the dissident group and contain opposition. Tigrayans in the Diaspora who were otherwise at variance with their Ethiopian compatriots in giving blind support to the TPLF Regime are reaching unanimous decisions for the reversal of the drastic measures taken by Meles against the dissidents. This is a clear indication that Ethiopians at home and particularly Tigrayans would have done likewise, if they were as free from fear as their compatriots abroad.

The dissident group is raising the slogan of People's Democracy which it never implemented. For that matter, this form of democracy has never worked anywhere

else. Both the measure taken by Meles and the slogan of the victims have their origin in the Marxist-Leninist League of Tigray, or in the now defunct ideology of the Party of Labor of Albania. Corruption and nepotism could have been dealt with easily and individually unless these practices were promoted by Meles himself. The power structure within the TPLF has already been stabilized since the early 1980s. It was suicidal to oppose Stalin or Colonel Mengistu after they had consolidated their absolute power. The same situation applies in the case of Meles and the dissidents know this from their collaboration.

At this point of time it is not clear whether any of the factions is prepared for real democratisation and for an end to corruption. Democratisation would mean the transfer of political power from the TPLF/EPRDF to the people, the release of all political prisoners, the lift of all restrictions on political parties and trade union activities and above all the call for a nation-wide dialogue that includes all political organisations including those banned by the Meles regime and the formation of a transitional government of national reconciliation. Therefore, to call for a democratic resolution is tantamount to supporting the traitors against those who are ousted. The Meles-Sebhat clique has amply demonstrated its anti-Ethiopian nature since 1976. It must be removed from the political scene and replaced by a government of the choice of the Ethiopian people before it causes irreparable damage on the nation.

Similarly, the struggle against corruption would mean controlling and auditing the small and big TPLF firms as well as firms owned by other political groups. It would also mean the right and power of the people to investigate wealth amassed under suspicious circumstances by relatives, friends and allies of state and party officials. Only the issue of sovereignty seems to be the point of difference between the factions and at the same time the common issue for the dissident group.

The dissidents obviously risked to differ with Meles, when the fate of Ethiopia and their personal dignity were at stake and Ethiopians were humiliated during the beginning of the war. Meles gave in, not because he commanded a minority but because he was aware of his weak position which is uniquely alien to the Ethiopian tradition of self-defense. He practically made a tactical retreat to prepare for a strategic offensive against his rivals. The dissidents seem to have been emboldened by their undeniable role in defending Ethiopian sovereignty to confront Meles and his followers. Whereas on the one hand their peaceful approach is laudable, the dissidents' accusation could have meant the loss of absolute power for Meles. Therefore the peaceful approach was so naive that it had to logically lead to Meles resorting to administrative measures to incriminate, isolate and destroy the dissidents. On the other hand, Meles has chosen to stand above the constitutional law of the country to expel elected parliamentarians in order to stay in power. In the first place, liquidation, purges and incriminations are like a culture in the TPLF. Differences of opinion have never been tolerated. With the purging of Abay, all



An Ethiopian soldier fighting against Eritrean invaders during the 1998-2000 war. Despite stunning military victory, Ethiopia was punished through the instrumentality of Meles Zenawi to hand over its territories - the Afar Red Sea, Badme (except the tiny village), and half of Irob - to Eritrea. Is Ethiopia under the rule of Ethiopians, or Eritrean agents? If you have any lingering doubts, this page would help put your doubts to rest. - ed

members but one who started the armed struggle and who are still alive have been purged. It is a system in which the people of Tigray are organized from above several times according to their profession, sex, age, in the form of law making, judicial and administrative committees (the committees were organized as imitations of the soviets), cadres, militias, as the members of the TPLF and the MLLT. This system facilitates control and mobilization from above. It is a system of mutual suspicion, fear, absolute obedience and loss of self confidence and initiative. This system of absolute intellectual and physical control is spreading all over Ethiopia like an epidemic. It is a system which chocks people and instills fear; which puts loyalty to the tyrant above knowledge, experience and ability and retards development. Individuals appointed before they are declared to be elected by the people. The electors are executing orders from the government as an euphemism for the tyrant, when they cast their votes. The elected know that they have no chance of candidacy without the permission of the same tyrant. Hence the result, the elected owe their mandate to him and he can deprive them of it. They have to be loyal to him and not to the electors.

We are former members and dissidents of the TPLF. We will deal with the major crises in the history of the TPLF, in order to show the individual and collective positions and practices of the main protagonists of the present groups on the two issues to interested readers. The crises in the TPLF involving the system or national sovereignty were as follows:

The question of national sovereignty

Since it has its roots in the first issue of the program of the TPLF, we will begin with the present crisis. The question of Ethiopian national sovereignty takes us back to the 1976 manifesto of the TPLF. The aim of the TPLF according to the manifesto was to establish a democratic republic of Tigray. It was clearly an anti-Ethiopian manifesto. When it started the armed struggle, the self-appointed leadership of the TPLF, excluding other founding members wrote a declaration which stated that the Front would dissolve itself and join an organization at a higher level, if such an organization came into being. The "higher level" was understood to mean at the level of the whole of Ethiopia, but its authors did not elaborate their role in the formation of that would be organization. Although the formation of a Tigrayan Front preferred ethnic consciousness to that of Ethiopianess, there was no reflection of any secessionist tendencies in the Front at the time, when the declaration was written.

An emotional feeling of being Ethiopian is anchored in the psychological make up of Tigrayans. But something alien to that make up appeared in the TPLF, when it was joined by Meles Zenawi and Sebhat Nega. Meles, who belonged to the group which was supposed to be trained by the EPLF had been scared by the sound of a remote gunfire and fled from Asmera without informing his friends. He joined the TPLF after some months in 1975, after giving some unbelievable excuses.

The leadership made some changes in the beginning of 1976 within itself. Sebhat became the chairman and Meles a deputy member of the CC and an assistant to Abay Tsehaye, who was the head of the political committee of the organization. Both Meles and Sebhat aggravated the undemocratic practice in the TPLF not only by excluding the rank-and-file-members but also members of the leadership, like Aregawi Berhe (the military commander of the Front at that time) etc. They dissuaded Abay Tsehaye to collaborate with them and wrote the anti-Ethiopian and infamous manifesto of the TPLF with the aim of forming the republic of Tigray and supporting the independence of Eritrea.

They sent Seyoum Mesfin like an errand boy to publish and distribute the manifesto in the Sudan. Abay, who enjoyed high regard for his decent character and who was

influential as the head of the political committee of the TPLF was to prove to be a marionette in the hands of Meles with terrible consequences for members of the TPLF, the people of Tigray and later the people of Ethiopia.

The reaction of the members of the TPLF was confused, when they simultaneously heard the news about the manifesto and the fact that it was opposed by the EPLF. Kahsay remembers Asfaha Hagos, one of the founding leaders asking him if anyone had ever mentioned the word secession the previous year. They could not dismiss the criticism of the EPLF as a fabrication because they were confronted by a manifesto which was supposed to be theirs. But the opponents of secession and the authors of the manifesto in the leadership joined hands after some outbreaks of initial emotions and created the impression that all were responsible for the manifesto. The names of the authors of the secessionist manifesto were not known to none- CC members of the TPLF for more than 10 years, until Aregawi Berhe disclosed them after he was forced to leave the TPLF and MLLT by Meles, The problem caused by the first program did not develop into a crisis.

Although the members of the CC had hidden their differences on national sovereignty, the cadres of Meles, like Addisalem Baliema (for instance in a discussion on 6.6.1988 in Cologne) were agitating for a referendum for the people of Tigray till the eve of the ascent of the EPRDF to power. Since the relative military strength of the TPLF convinced him that he can control the whole of Ethiopia, Meles seems to have at least postponed the secession of Tigray.

However, Ethiopia is for the first time in her history under the control of a tyrant who started with an open anti Ethiopian program. All Ethiopian rulers before Meles, including colonel Mengistu, whatever mistakes they might have made, were committed to the cause of Ethiopia. The erosion of Ethiopian sovereignty did not begin with the the war between Ethiopia and Eritrea. In 1991, Ethiopia lost access to international waters. The MLLT/TPLF leadership lied to the people that Assab would remain free for Ethiopia. The Afar people who raised this question were silenced by force or many Ethiopians are languishing in prisons because they raised the interests of the nation. At the same time the clique in power was demolishing the Ethiopian defence establishment and arming its neighbour. And despite such grave differences in the Politburo, Meles lied to the Ethiopian people that the leadership of the EPRDF spoke as if they were reading from the same book. [TOP](#)

Crises in the TPLF

The democratic and human rights crises from 1977 to 1979

Part II

The TPLF had experienced some major internal crises prior to the current one in its history. The assertion that the TPLF had democratically solved previous crises, whereas Meles has resorted to undemocratic measures in the present crisis does not correspond to the truth and leads to the confusion of the root-cause of the present crisis. Surveying the crises can enrich our knowledge of the character of the TPLF, if and only if our analysis is based on facts. For us, as eyewitnesses of the events, the solutions to the real, imagined or fabricated crises show an identical pattern of behaviour of their protagonists. The so called solutions in all the cases ended up producing incriminated victims, intimidated, uncritical and opportunist members and the corresponding aggravation of tyranny.

All the past crises including the current one have the following common factors:

- They were produced from above and could have been avoided,
- Meles was directly or indirectly the main or part of the cause for all the crises,
- Their solutions involved anti democratic methods and victimised members,
- All enhanced the power of Meles and the opportunist behaviour of the members in the organisation.

Political power in the TPLF was relatively evenly distributed amongst five members of the CC:

- (Abay Tsehaye head of the political committee, Aregawi Berhe head of the military committee, Sebhat Nega chairman of the TPLF, Gidey Zeratsion deputy chairman of the organisation and to a lesser extent, Seyoum Mesfin, head of the foreign relations committee) and three deputy members (Meles Zenawi, Seye Abraha and Atakelti Qetsela) till 1979.
- Atsbeha Dagneu who was the only deputy member of the CC prior to the three mentioned above was demoted and later executed by Meles. The deputy members were appointed by the five CC in 1976 and acted as full members until their position was formalised during the TPLF Congress held in 1979.

Rank-and-file-members of the TPLF, as a result of the power distribution and collective leadership amongst the CC, had a room of manoeuvre to relatively freely express their opinions within the organisation. At that time the Sebhat-Meles clique was confined to clandestine preparations to control the leadership. The democratic atmosphere, which held up to late 1977, despite random and arbitrary killings and imprisonment of simple members by the leadership, was totally abolished following the 1977-1979 crisis (branded Hinfishfish- literally chaos and later interpreted as factionalism) in the Organisation.

Since the crisis, as an administrative measure, and not as a root cause was the excuse for unleashing the undemocratic process, it would be of interest to briefly shade some light into it. It all started with a barrage of questions. The two main disturbing questions for the leadership were:

Why eight youngsters (some put the number at twelve) who fell into the trap of the leadership that they would be allowed to go home if they wanted to and openly said so, were executed? The youngsters could not bear the hardship like constant mobility, hunger, lice etc. They were collected, as if they were to be sent home after a political education and executed.

Why Meles was not punished for cowardice according to the law of the TPLF, for not fulfilling his duty during a military operation at Adwa in 1977 where a fighter called Tekle Gebre Yohannes (Sherifo) was martyred and his body left behind? These questions were followed by demands for the formation of an inquiry commission to deal with the grievances of the fighters. The leadership, although it recognised the legality of the demands within the Front, ignored the demands for the formation of the commission and refused to discuss the grievances at the level of the whole organisation.

As the crisis was simmering further, the leadership started preparations to call the first congress of the Front. Accordingly, Abay Tsehaye started consulting with commanders and commissars. Abay briefed the participants on the plan of the CC to hold the first congress of the TPLF and asked opinions about the situation of the fighters. The participants tried to convince him of the need for the formation of an inquiry commission to ward off some doubts of the fighters that members of the leadership were committing crimes.

Abay declared that the formation of a commission to deal with the grievances of the fighters would have been possible, had the initiative to call for a congress been taken by the rank-and-file fighters. His answer was so illogical that it meant that the CC, because it took the initiative to call a congress had the privilege to deny the fighters their right to formally present their case. Several veteran members of the Front who heard that Abay was blocking the formation of the inquiry commission did not hesitate to say that what Abay said did not originate from him and that it was all the work of Meles. Most of them did not dare raise the complaints openly, but they explained why Meles should be interested in hindering the formation of the inquiry commission. They also claimed that Meles was aggravating the contradiction between the TPLF and the EPRP by propagating narrow nationalist ideas.

It was obvious that Meles would not like an inquiry commission but it was not convincing that he alone could decide on whether the commission should be formed or not, because he did not have an absolute power at that time. The other members of the leadership had also something to hide or they did not like an inquiry commission out of solidarity with Meles. Every individual full or deputy CC member of the TPLF had the power to pass a death sentence without consulting others. Victims had no right of appeal. As long as they did not expose the person who committed massacre on the youngsters, all members of the leadership decided to defend a criminal at the cost of justice and democracy.

The massacre could have been committed by any one of the leaders according to the practice of the Front. But since the victims were sent to the base, where the prison was located and the political committee in turn controlled the prison, Abay and Meles who headed the committee were the most likely culprits. Abay was under the permanent influence of Meles on many issues. Abay behaved like a gentleman and was respected. He was not rough, but he was being manipulated and used as a mouthpiece by his extremely rough assistant. Opinions and decisions forwarded by Abay or in his alleged interest seemed to get acceptance by other CC members. Meles was collecting power into the hands of Abay and depositing it for himself. In the course of the preparations for the congress a military committee had to be elected. In the mean time complaints against the CC were taking more momentum. The discussions on the grievances influenced the out come of the elections for the military committee, in such a way that rank-and-file members were democratically elected to the committee while some heads departments were not accepted as representatives by the rank-and-file-members of their units. The leadership drew a lesson never to allow free elections take place.

The meeting of the military committee was chaired by Tewolde W/Mariam (He was not in the CC, but he came to the meeting as a representative of the leadership). The issue of the grievances was excluded from the agenda from the very beginning, even before some delegates arrived. Therefore the tension within the delegates manifested itself either in being fully supportive of or being critical to the leadership, leading into the division of the delegates into two groups, with some exceptions. The arguments revolved around the following points:

Whether or not the members of the CC should be accepted en block in the Congress without competition. Among those who were for a new start in an open competition were Abera Manka (later imprisoned and executed), Teshome Gudo (he escaped before he was imprisoned and he lives in USA.) Ayele /Hayelom (He escaped after he was released from prison. He lives in the USA), Abadi (He committed suicide resisting imprisonment) etc. Those who were for the acceptance of the same old leadership were grouped around Arkebe Enquay, then a unit commissar, later

promoted to the CC. A compromise was reached to accept one third of the old leadership without competition.

Whether members of the TPLF were to have equal votes or not. According to the supporters of the leadership the CC was to decide the number of delegates that every unit was supposed to send. The criterion of representation was to be according to the quality (it was called Tsereyet which means purity) of the members. Apart from the normalisation of inequality, this system of representation enabled the leadership to manipulate the election of delegates. The other group rejected the idea.

How the Preparatory Committee was to be controlled to prevent it from being manipulated by the members of the CC. The Committee was supposed to collect ideas from all members for an agenda, lead discussions on the agenda and supervise the election of delegates for the congress. The fear at the meeting was that, the committee, if controlled by the leadership would be an instrument of the latter. It would manipulate the discussions and elections of delegates as well as inform the CC on members with differing ideas, who would be dealt with as dissenters. Since no agreement could be reached on how to control the committee, Tewelde helped settle the issue by appealing to the delegates to have confidence in each other as comrades. The meeting of the military committee concluded its mission with the election of the Preparatory Committee.

The TPLF had faced a catastrophic situation when the Ethiopian Democratic Union (EDU) launched an offensive in March 1977. The EDU had overrun a garrison of the government at Humera. It was much better armed (with automatic guns, rocket launchers etc.) and had an overwhelming number of troops compared with the TPLF. The TPLF fighters were much more disciplined and dedicated but not in a position to confront the EDU forces in a conventional fighting. The EDU made a surprise attack on a unit of the TPLF at Sheraro and almost annihilated it and then marched forward and inflicted heavy losses on other units of the TPLF, to the extent that some TPLF units lost most of their combatants including their commanders and commissars.

The actual and feared losses caused mass desertions in the TPLF. Since the overwhelming majority of the TPLF fighters were either peasants or students with only rudimentary training and no experience of fighting, it was not surprising that they run for their life, when many of their comrades fell in combat. Some TPLF Militiamen went over to the EDU and many fighters went to areas held by the Dergue.

However, this situation posed only a temporary threat to the existence of the TPLF for almost two months, between March and May 1977, and came to an end, when the EDU attacked well-armed and entrenched troops of the Dergue at Endasselassie.

EDU fighters suffered heavy losses and fled in disarray. The TPLF stabilised itself with the fighters who did not desert it and overcame the EDU in a protracted war till the first quarter of 1978.

The TPLF had become much stronger and experienced after its final victory over the EDU. It had collected many automatic weapons from deserting militias of the Dergue and had ejected the EPRP from Tigray between February and May 1978, while also fighting against the Dergue at the same time. The morale of its members was very high.

Despite the favourable situation, the leadership of the TPLF disseminated the information that those who claimed to have grievances during the previous year were regiona-lists who were out to destroy the organisation by eroding confidence in the leadership. Although the mass desertions were mainly caused by the war with EDU, the leadership tried to associate the desertions with those who expressed grievances. Although the TPLF had no serious problems in 1978, the leadership launched a planned harassment of the members.

The Preparatory committee for the congress, on the orders of the CC went out of its way and started to call meetings with the aim of exposing those members who had expressed grievances. When the leadership launched a campaign to expose the fighters who claimed to have grievances and sent the preparatory committee for this purpose, it practically wreaked havoc amongst the fighters. Some believed what they were told in the cam-paign and were gripped by the fear that the front was threatened in its existence, others rightly saw a desperate intrigue to curtail their rights and defend the culprits to pave the way for their unchallenged election.

Many from those who saw an intrigue tried to leave the Front whenever they saw any possibility. Still others feared that someone would simply implicate them for some thing they did not remember. The-refore exposing someone for every small talk became tantamount to defending the front for some and an expression of loyalty as a sign of innocence for others. Many fighters who were exposed as having said anything inconvenient about the leadership were sent to prison and ne-ver seen thereafter. Since anybody who asked about the whereabouts of the victims was considered as their accomplice nobody asked this question. Nor was the leadership prepared to give any information on such issues.

As a result of this campaign followed by liquidation it became a Tradition in the TPLF not to ask inconvenient questions from down upward, not to talk of opposition. The suspects were during and after the campaign students or “opportunist petty bourgeois” as they were called in the Front.

This manipulated Participation of the fighters has officially gone as a de-mocratic participation into the history of the TPLF. A democratic solution would have been an open discussion at an organisational level without intimidation and misuse of administrative measures as well as the formation of an inquiry commission to investigate the criminal malpractice of arbitrary killings. The undemocratic solution instilled fear into the minds of the fighters through naked force, arbitrary measures and exaggerated misinformation.

The reaction to the crisis led to the psychological conditioning of the fighters not to express their own opi-nion, to monotonously repeat what has already been said from above and to generally mistrust each other, which has been cemented by Stalinist centralism. The official explanation for the passiveness and uncritical behaviour of the non-CC members is that they worship the leadership and cannot imagine that the leadership can make mistakes. This is of course only meant to aggrandise the leaders. The undemocratic measures taken to solve the stage-managed crisis produced two results: 1) The non-CC members of the TPLF became uncritical towards the leadership, passive and opportunist. 2) Meles, a deputy member of the CC was formally elected to a full membership in the first Congress of the TPLF, held in 1979. These two results have been reinforcing each other up to the present situation. [TOP](#)

Part III - The Rise of Meles, More purges, and Liquidations

Once the non-CC members of the TPLF were deprived of their rights to express their opinion, Meles concentrated himself on the internal struggle for power within the leadership of the TPLF. He has murdered two of them (Atsbeha Dagneu and Teklu Hawaz) and purged 13 others including the latest ten so far.



Meles Zenawi

We concluded Part Two of our article with the observation that the brutal measures taken by the CC of the TPLF in 1978 to deal with the stage-managed crisis wrongly known as factionalism forced non CC members of the TPLF to political passiveness and enhanced the power of Meles, thus paving the way for the present tyranny. Internally, the TPLF leadership recognises the passiveness that followed the crisis. However, the CC used to cover up the actual cause, which is fear of repression, by trying to attribute the passiveness to some sort of a worship i.e. the alleged belief of the fighters that the leadership does not make mistakes.

The non-CC members were simply turned to slave-like creatures and treated likewise. These slave-like creatures, who heroically struggle against those whom they consider to be their enemies can in small groups or individually be purged, isolated, imprisoned, tortured or liquidated by the TPLF leadership without any institutional or legal possibility of defence or appeal, The CC members can commit any sort of crime without transparency, accountability and with impunity. Therefore the purging and incrimination of the 12-2 dissenters by Meles is in line with the tradition of the TPLF in its aggravated form. Meles is doing what he used to do during the armed struggle i. - e. intrigues, arbitrary measures, false accusations and purges by using the Stalinist organisational structure under the present situation, a situation under which the maltreatment of the victims cannot be hidden from the public simply because the victims are well known due to their participation in the government.

The campaign which was launched to silence and destroy critical members in 1978 followed by brutal administrative measures proved to be a turning point in the organisation in that it made criticism, the expression of grievances and opposition from down upwards a taboo. Ironically, many members of the CC did not seem to realise that they, by taking a united stand to suppress the freedom of expression of the non-CC members were at the same time creating a situation under which they would be the next victims. The logic is very simple: Either there is a system, which accommodates differences of opinion, or no differences are permitted and therefore a single person prevails over all others. Since the TPLF leadership practically opted for the second alternative as of 1978, the question of who prevails had to be decided in an internal power struggle with nasty intrigues, purges and liquidation as we are trying to show as follows.

The preparation for the formation of a party

Meles' instruments for the power struggle were the MLLT with the cadre school and Abay Tsehaye along with the political committee.

Since the founders of the TPLF and most of the student members of the Front were socialist oriented, the wish to form a leftist party had a consensus amongst the active members of the TPLF. Therefore the delegates in the first congress of the TPLF in 1979 (1971 Eth.C) principally agreed that the necessary preparations to form a socialist-oriented party be made within the TPLF. Soon after, the CC of the TPLF delegated the responsibility to make the preparations for the formation of the party to Meles Zenawi. Therefore Meles got the golden opportunity to avoid his nightmare i.e. the danger of physical participation in the civil war. He had the whole time to engage himself in the collection of quotations and impress other CC members who had no time for reading. He had the possibility to disseminate his point of view as a teacher

of cadres and above all the possibility to train and organise his loyal cadres as his own troop for the struggle for power within the organisation.

An article in the constitution of the MLLT makes the previously unwritten but applied law clear that only Meles had as an individual the monopoly to disseminate his anachronistic views in the form of political education to his cadres by stating the following: "any member who wants to disseminate a new idea has to get a permission from the Central Committee to do so". (MLLT constitution. in Tigrigna July 1985, p 9). There was no discussion on the introduction of such an article in the TPLF but some members of the EPDM like Getatchew (Yared Tibebe) opposed the concept that members were required to get permission to express a new idea. Tamrat Layne argued for the introduction of the article and prevailed with the intervention of Meles.

This, according to experience means taking care not to express any new idea or an idea that opposes an existing one. If one member does not share one's idea with another individual, one would not get a feedback, if one shares the idea without a permission from the CC, it would be seen as factionalism because it is against the Stalinist centralism. If one applies for permission to express one's idea, one cannot be sure that the idea in the application would not be distorted by the self-proclaimed leader for one reason or another and used to incriminate the applicant. And finally, if one is harassed, imprisoned or even liquidated for entertaining a certain idea, nobody except the perpetrator would, due to the total absence of transparency, know what happened and why.

Meles practically formed an organisation within the TPLF under the cover of the preparation for the formation of a party. He included all veteran members of the TPLF in a grouping of a so called "vanguard elements" of the TPLF, which was the forerunner of the MLLT to avoid dissent amongst the veterans, before the position of his cadres was consolidated. He simply prepared a list of names and read it out for all to hear during the congress of the TPLF in 1983. He later became the head of the ideology and propaganda activities of the organisation under the cover of which he gave key positions to his own cadres.

The mystification of the MLLT and power struggle

The CC of the TPLF tried to avoid the emergence of a personality cult from among its ranks and claimed to exercise a collective leadership. This exercise was the logical outcome of the fact that the founders of the Front were at a more or less similar educational level as well as degree of experience in the struggle. They were in one clique before the crystallisation of their differences and had to agree to be equal in front of their subordinate new comers.

No member was supposed to write his/her name in connection with an article or any writing so that some may not be more known than others, thus leading to the development of a cult. Differences of opinion within the CC were kept so secret to non-CC members, that the expression of any basic critical opinion of non-CC members was blocked. Since the members of the CC stood en block, as if they were reading from the same book (according to Meles reiterated this Phrase even as a head of government, Addis Zemen July 1998), there was no room of manoeuvre for the opinion of the rank-and-file-members, lest they be branded sectarians and be dealt with correspondingly as counter-revolutionaries, anti people etc. Conformity and discipline became therefore synonymous. Consequently the choice of agenda and discussions were rituals of top-down-indoctrination which had to be accepted.

One of the consequences of the above system of leadership was that decisions and explanations of the CC members were attributed to that of the Front as a whole. As individual opinions of the CC members were hidden, so were also their responsibilities. Concrete individuals became abstract in the name of the Front. The Front was personified and thus mystified. If something went wrong or was simply declared to be wrong, there was somebody to blame for being allegedly against the Front and not for opposing a certain idea or action from a certain member of the CC, because in the final analysis the CC was the Front until the power struggle within the CC could no more be kept secret.

Although the process of differentiation within the CC of the TPLF was not openly discussed by non CC-Members, it became gradually evident in the distribution of power. The four committees, the political, military, economic and foreign committees were first led each by a politburo member. The five initial CC members (Abay, Aregawi, Gidey, Sebhat and Seyoum) had become Politburo members after the first congress in 1979, as if they wanted to move away from the new CC members. Since none of the five could impose his view on any other, they had a phase of collective leadership. Meles as the deputy of Abay, the political head of the Front, sought a loophole and followed the strategy of curbing the power of the other politburo members and subordinating them to the political committee under Abay, because on the one hand Abay was respected as a person and on the other hand politics was supposed to lead all other activities. But the concept of subordinating all other activities to politics was misused to such an extent that it became structural.

After some time, Seyoum, who was the head of the foreign relations committee and the weakest of the five, partly owing to his detachment from the field became the first victim. He was subordinated to the political committee. Seyoum practically became less important, whereas Meles was gaining more power indirectly behind Abay. Interestingly, it was Meles who, breaking the show of solidarity amongst the members of the CC, spoke about the need of curbing the power of Seyoum. Seyoum had on the advice of Professor Richard Greenfield changed the concept of a united front of the TPLF. The change put the U.S.A. as an enemy of the Ethiopian people parallel with the Soviet Union. Meles on hearing of the change said: (in the presence of one of the authors) "the TPLF had no need of a Sabe". Usman Salih Sabe was responsible for the foreign relations of the EPLF and said to be growing independent of the EPLF leadership in the field. Seyoum accepted his demotion and appeared to be so eager to adjust himself to the wishes of Meles at all costs that his demotion seemed not to have taken place at all. Therefore Seyoum's recent interview in Demtis Weyane (TPLF radio) is a manifestation of his continuous servile allegiance towards Meles, even to the extent of repeating the latter's ugly expressions.

The strategy of Meles in the power struggle that politics were to lead the military was again used against Aregawi, who was the head of the military committee to be subordinated to the political committee, as if the structure were more decisive than the political concept. Therefore Meles used first Abay and the political committee to win influence and then the MLLT, as a second instrument. Since he could not use only the MLLT to get rid of his seniors in the hierarchy, he won the tacit support of Abbay Tsehaye and the active co-operation of Sebhat Nega, the chairman of the TPLF then, to launch his intrigues to destroy Aregawi Berhe, and Gidey Zeratsion, the deputy chairman of the TPLF.

There were two incidents, which led to a personal animosity between Meles and Aregawi. Firstly, Aregawi had ordered imposed on Meles physical punishment such as carrying water, cooking and push ups for failing to discharge his duty during the exchange of fire in a military operation at Adwa in 1977. He had participated as a

deputy commander next to Aregawi in the operation; it means that Aregawi confirmed the validity of the accusation of cowardice against Meles, which was an embarrassment for the latter in front of fighters trimmed to be selfless.

Secondly, Aregawi wrote a letter to Sebhat reminding him of some factional activities by Meles. Sebhat secretly showed the letter to Meles instead of expressing his agreement or disagreement with Aregawi's suggestion. Meles and Co. prepared for the final coup against Aregawi. Gidey who was approached in the course of the preparation and did not agree to become an accomplice became the next target. When the founding congress of the MLLT took place in July 1985, the power struggle within the leadership of the TPLF was openly known only to the CC members and the cadres prepared by Meles. As a result of this system of destructive secrecy, differences of opinion, which both perpetrators and victims claim to have had, were not openly discussed before and during the congress. The protagonists were elected to the CC of the MLLT in the tradition of the TPLF (the old leadership, those appointed by it as deputies, those suggested by it as candidates and those for whose candidacy the members of the election gremium made up of CC members demonstratively raise their hands, get elected).

After the congress, a meeting of the members of CC of the MLLT and TPLF took place. Aregawi and Gidey were demoted, isolated, harassed and they had to accept political tutors just to humiliate them till they were forced to leave Tigray altogether. Even private letters of Gidey were read in some units and used for ridiculing and cracking jokes. Once a small group picked by Meles and co reached decisions, the remaining members of the TPLF had to hear the decisions with corresponding explanations. Aregawi and Gidey did not have basic differences even with Meles. It was simply a power struggle that ended up the phase of the collective leadership. There was a stage-managed podium discussion between Gidey and Meles, in which the participants either applauded Meles or had to keep quiet. Meles demagogically portrayed Gidey as "a gangrene of the organisation. And as an infected limb must be amputated to save the life of a person, Gidey must be amputated to save the organisation". Meles declared: "Gidey is not a political animal" and ordered the latter to get out of the meeting. Abay Tsehaye, who was nominally the General Secretary of the MLLT, expressed his pride that there were people like Meles who defended the line of the organisation. Abay's reverence for Meles could not be overlooked and this showed that he had given up his role in the political leadership of the TPLF/MLLT. The thesis of amputation from Meles says a lot about the taboo of having different opinions in the organisation. Amputation in this connection is the justification for liquidation, purges and isolations. If a member is declared to be gangrene or an unwanted person by Meles, he is automatically an outcast. Such a person, if not killed is all of a sudden an alien amongst his/her former friends, because the former friends do not want to be associated with the outcast out of fear. Meles Bezabeh had to commit suicide after such a dirty experience that made him an outcast.

Here is an example of what happens to those who do not respect this rule of getting rid of an outcast: Teklu Hawaz, a member of the CC of the TPLF, who did not agree with the measures taken against Aregawi and Gidey was sent to a military operation near Adigrat and arrested on the way. Addisalem Balema, the most loyal cadres of Meles who (after receiving an English language course in London) later became the Ethiopian Ambassador first to Italy and then to the People's Republic of China, explained in 1988, in London that: "Fighters who chat with Aregawi always reported what Aregawi told them, but Teklu who was seen with Aregawi more often than any other person, did not report. Therefore he was sent to a battle with Samora and arrested because he was suspected of planning to escape. And he was suspected

because he looked absent-minded". Teklu was murdered. There are several versions as to how and when he was liquidated, but there is no doubt that he was sent to the battle as part of the plan to murder him.

An interesting aspect of the mystification of the TPLF is, how Meles tried to transfer the mystification of the TPLF to the MLLT. He had to dismantle the myth around the TPLF in order to discredit the leaders of the TPLF he wanted to get rid of. Therefore, he wrote that the TPLF were not only not showing any progress, that it were not even only stagnating at what it had achieved but rather deteriorating and loosing the level it had reached. He declared the TPLF to be on the brink of collapse, a phrase, which he always employs to justify liquidation and purges, or amputations in his own words as in 1978 so also in 1985 and now in 2001.

Meles described what he called the basic mistakes of the TPLF in Leninist polemical categories as "empiricism" and "pragmatism". The point of the mystification is not whether the TPLF had committed mistakes or not. It is rather the claim that the mistakes were corrected not because some individuals perceived certain mistakes, but because the MLLT came into being and corrected the mistakes of the TPLF, as if the MLLT had a certain magical power to do so. Accordingly, the TPLF was declared to have made the mistake of pragmatism by for instance, concealing its Marxist nature out of sheer opportunism, in order to get money from the West, thereby hiding its Marxist program and identity to its Marxist-Leninist strategic allies and hence missing the opportunity to start and cement its relationship with its strategic allies (a report to the Congress of the TPLF and MLLT in Tigrigna, 1989).

Meles suddenly started counting the mistakes of the TPLF and called them pragmatic on the eve of the formation of the MLLT. He then picked some members for reproach. But none of the reproached, like Seyoum and Asfeha was working in opposition to the guidelines of the leadership as a whole in which Meles was a key part. As no one was running one's own policy the reproached were taken by surprise and could neither defend a pragmatic approach for which they were supposed to be responsible nor themselves. It could on the surface appear that Meles stood for textbook Leninism but he was simply using it to attack others in the power struggle. This can clearly be seen in the contradiction between calling relations with imperialists opportunist (pragmatic) but ordering and driving around 200,000 peasants* to the Sudan (13,000 died on the route) so that the TPLF could get aid from those characterised as class enemies. Every argument used against pragmatism was reversed after the Meles group prevailed in the power struggle. Pursuant to the above change of policy before it was again changed, extremely small and pro Albanian ML-Parties all over the world and the Labour Party of Albania were contacted as a correction of this alleged opportunistic mistake. TPLF members responsible for foreign relations were reprimanded for not doing so much earlier. Asfeha (Mulugeta) Hagos, a member of the CC of the TPLF, in the department of foreign affairs left the Front and sought asylum in Norway. Asfeha complained about his isolation. When he was supposed to organise the invitation of the ML Parties to the founding congress of the MLLT, he complained that he did not himself take part in any discussion about the MLLT.

Many of the victims of Meles had similar grievances, but we did not exchange them as we were not open to each other, because we had gone through a nasty period of recriminations and were witness to imprisonment and killings. We were used to repeating what was already said, in order to be on the safe side. This atmosphere of keeping quiet on serious matters had the effect that we who devoted our full-time for political activities and even our lives were forced to avoid unauthorised political discussions. We were at ease only when we talked about issues, which did not

involve political risks, like battles, journeys, hardships, hunger, thirst etc. We were conditioned to mutually suspect each other, which made it easy for Meles to disseminate his ideas through his robot-like cadres with an official blessing and with little challenge.

The TPLF was also said by Meles to be on the brink of collapse due to "empiricist" mistakes, because it, according to Meles, depended on its own practical experience instead of adopting scientific theories. The theory was supposed to have been discovered due to the formation of the MLLT, which was destined to lead the TPLF, which it allegedly saved from collapse. On the surface, the TPLF was being discredited to make place for the MLLT. But it was part of the leadership of the TPLF, which was practically being discredited, while the other part, which was controlled by Meles was taking the credit for "saving" the TPLF. Culprits had to be found for the imagined threat of collapse and "amputated" (in the words of Meles) Meles concentrated himself primarily on the struggle for power against those who took him for a friend within the TPLF, but his victims were not aware of this fact till it was too late! The former CC members of the TPLF and later victims of Meles behaved like a child who understands that fire hurts, only after making a personal experience! [TOP](#)

PART IV The Struggle for Ethiopian Sovereignty and the reign of Meles

We have been writing about the TPLF, dealing only with two cardinal issues: the issue of democracy and that of national sovereignty. Although we have not yet finished publicising some parts of the series of our articles, we would like to present the sketch of the conclusion we want to arrive at. We tried to show that the dictatorial measures of purging taken by Meles against the ten (twelve minus two) top representatives of the TPLF at a stroke are neither new nor unique in the Front, by giving similar examples in the history of the TPLF.

Although the TPLF leadership has a tradition of liquidating, Purging, incarcerating and harassing its members the sheer number and the leading positions of the ten victims showed the nature of the TPLF in a dramatic way. It was not only the tyranny of Meles which manifested itself but also the inherent undemocratic nature of the TPLF. Meles did what he did because he knew that the slave-like members of the TPLF would accept whatever orders he gives them. Such members who live in fear of repression, who betray each other overnight and behave according to orders from above do not act with their own conscience. Although only a few cadres are likely to support Meles, the remaining members of the TPLF simply behave likewise, because they are conditioned to do so by bitter repressive experiences and a structural control mechanism. The EPRDF is only a physical enlargement of the TPLF. Therefore, the cadres, the party and government officials (with the exception of some individuals, like the former President Negasso), the army commanders (with some exceptions like General Tsadkan etc), and the judges as the beneficiaries and apologists or instruments of this undemocratic system are putting Meles' orders into practice. Similarly, we mentioned the anti-Ethiopian manifesto of the TPLF (which declared the aim of the TPLF to be the independence of Tigray) while dealing with the issue of sovereignty to show that, what Tewolde and Co. opposed as an anti-Ethiopian position of the Meles clique during the war with Eritrea did not come all of a sudden. Meles and Sebat, as the main protagonists as well as Abay and Seyoum as their followers had at least by the time they wrote the manifesto for the independence of Tigray from Ethiopia decided that Ethiopia is not their country. Once they reached this decision, they could not and did not, as a logical consequence, have a vision for

Ethiopia. The TPLF army became so strong that Ethiopia fell into the hands the Meles clique, a clique that had no program for a sustainable economic development, the long-term interests and borders of Ethiopia.

We have, on the basis of the facts we have been disclosing reached some conclusions accompanied with corresponding proposals:

The policy of Revolutionary Democracy, as applied in Ethiopia is a system of Stalinist repression and control, the violation of human and democratic rights, a divide-and-rule policy on the basis of ethnicity, the erosion of Ethiopian sovereignty (like the act of reviving defunct colonial treaties), servility to foreign powers, the cheap manipulation of constitutional laws to serve personal interests and revenge (like the denial of the right to bail hastily prepared and retroactively directed against Siye etc. and the decree to control the activities of ex-presidents directed against Dr. Negasso). Therefore the Tewolde group has to clarify whether it distances itself from the Stalinist revolutionary democracy of Meles or not and contribute to transparency and enlightenment on the practice of the TPLF. It has furthermore to clarify its position as to whether it accepts the need for a conference for peace and reconciliation with all Ethiopian opposition forces or not. The TPLF has always been undemocratic and harmful to Ethiopia. Notwithstanding the noble intention of tens of thousands of TPLF fighters who sacrificed their lives and whom we remember with respect, the TPLF has always been under the control of murderers. And no matter what positive roles the Front has played, the leadership has established such an undemocratic and an anti Ethiopian regime, that it has rendered the heavy sacrifices of its own members and the people useless. The TPLF grew to become militarily the strongest organisation in Ethiopia with heavy sacrifices paid by tens of thousands of men and women, it grew on our blood, sweat and efforts and on the financial and material support of many more Tigrayans.

The Meles clique, who determined the policy of the TPLF, has become the victor. This clique has never been willing to resolve internal or external conflicts peacefully, without resort to intrigues and/or bloodshed. The military wing of the leadership, which was always successful militarily has become the vanquished, because it was bogged down in an enslaving centralism, that it subordinated itself to Meles in the organisational structure and failed due to its tradition of destructive secrecy to expose Meles in front of the Ethiopian people including the army before it was too late. Many Ethiopians waited with zest for the course of action of the "pro sovereignty" wing of the TPLF during the war, but Meles was prepared for his private war and undeservedly reversed the situation to his advantage. A closer look at the organisation reveals that the TPLF is like a private company of Meles. It is, as one of its former members put it, "a killing machine". All the sacrifices paid to remove an Ethiopian murderer were in vain, because the struggle ended up with the tyranny of an anti-Ethiopian murderer. The reign of Meles is like a humiliating blackout for a generation of Ethiopians in the history of the country. Despite our suffering in the struggle and in spite of our good intentions, we, by contributing to the fact that the traitorous clique headed by Meles came to power, did harm to the people of Ethiopia. We have, as a result, a feeling of guiltiness and shame.

The Tewolde/Siye group has also in this case to reappraise the goals of the Meles clique and the means used by it to control the TPLF which explains why the TPLF does not have a democratic tradition and that the anti-Ethiopian elements held key positions in the leadership of the TPLF from early on. The Tewolde/Siye group was still in power when the Algiers Agreement was reached on the basis of defunct and unjust colonial treaties, which deny Ethiopia an access to the sea. The dissidents revealed their concern for Ethiopia's sovereignty in their recent article because, they

say, Meles Zenawi did not try to make the best out of the so-called 1990, 1992 and 1998 treaties. They call on the Ethiopian people to share their concern. In actual fact, it is they who had one way or the other contributed to the erosion of Ethiopia's sovereignty who must pledge to share the concern of the people. Sovereignty should not depend on treaties overtaken by history. Therefore it is high time that the group realises, that the question of sovereignty is not only a matter of gaining or losing a few square kilometres. The Imposition of fake solutions on the people can only exacerbate the problem

Now, Ethiopia is at a critical juncture in her history, at which her basic interest is at stake, because our country is under the reign of her enemies. The Struggle for Ethiopian Sovereignty and the reign of Meles are inseparably intertwined. Therefore Ethiopians have to wake up, wake up soon, bury their differences, stand as one person and rise up to get rid of Meles and preserve their sovereignty.

Tesfay Atsbeha, E-mail: Tasbeha@surfeu.de

Kahsay Berhe, E-mail: kahsay@gmx.de

Further information on this and other similar issues:

- A book by Kahsay Berhe, **Ethiopia: Democratisation and Nation-Building - Documentation and Critical Analysis**, which will soon be published,
- **Can One Accuse a Dictator in Ethiopia?**, 1997, by Kahsay Berhe and Tesfay Atsbeha,
- **The National Movement in Tigray: Mythes and Realities**, February 1991, by Kahsay Berhe,
- **Die positiven und negativen Aspekte der TPLF-MLLT**, Maerz/April 1990, by Tesfay Atsbeha
- **Mystifizierung der Partei zur Glorifizierung einer Person**, 1990, by Tesfay Atsbeha,
- **Hizbawi Woyane Harnet Tigray: Nabeyyn Kemeyn?**, March 1989, by Kahsay Berhe,