

Angola and the Legacy of Stalinism

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Abstract:

In this essay I will investigate how the legacy of Stalinism still affects Angola today, arguing that it negatively impacts the current possibility of an actual national Marxist-Leninist movement taking root in Angola. I furthermore argue that the four main institutions through which the party in control of the Angolan government holds power—that is, the institutions of presidential patronage, the elite government bureaucracy, denial of the legitimate rights of ethnicities, and severe restrictions on the press and political freedoms—were inherited from Stalinism, and it is these four institutions that also serve to demobilize and demoralize workers. Stalinism has not only led to the collapse of the national workers' movement there, however; it has also paved the way for an incredibly corrupt, bureaucratic, and authoritarian form of crony capitalism that deprives the great majority of Angolan people their most basic social and economic rights. This in and of itself makes it even more difficult for the workers' movement to be revived and for a truly Marxist-Leninist revolution to take place. It can be said, then, that overall the legacy of Stalinism has deprived Angola the opportunity to become actually independent and free.

In the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Eastern European socialist bloc, perhaps the most important question for twenty-first century Marxists concerns the legacy of Stalinism, namely: What are its consequences regarding the worldwide anti-capitalist movement today? And, following that, how can we overcome these consequences to build a stronger, more resilient movement so as to prevent Stalinism from resurfacing in the future? While the latter question is beyond the scope of this essay, the first question is a readily addressable first step toward answering it. For the continent of Africa, I believe that Angola is an important case study for being able to appreciate and understand the long-lasting consequences of Afro-Stalinism in particular. Understanding the problem, as the saying goes, is the first step toward solving it. In this essay I will investigate how the legacy of Stalinism still affects Angola today, arguing that it negatively impacts the current possibility of an actual national Marxist-Leninist movement taking root in Angola. I furthermore argue that the four main institutions through which the party in control of the Angolan government holds power—that is, the institutions of presidential patronage, the elite government bureaucracy, denial of the legitimate rights of ethnicities, and severe restrictions on the press and political freedoms—were inherited from Stalinism, and it is these four institutions that also serve to demobilize and demoralize workers in the labor force. Stalinism has not only led to the collapse of the national workers' movement there, how-

ever; it has also paved the way for an incredibly corrupt, bureaucratic, and authoritarian form of crony capitalism that deprives the great majority of Angolan people their most basic social and economic rights. This in and of itself makes it even more difficult for the workers' movement to be revived and for them to organize a truly Marxist-Leninist revolution. It can be said, then, that the legacy of Stalinism has deprived Angola the opportunity to become actually independent and free.

Before delving in to the substance of my argument, I would first like to clarify what I mean by Stalinism more broadly, and by Afro-Stalinism more specifically. In his essay "Doomed to Degeneration: Afro-Stalinism—Toward a Genealogy," Nimitz (Unpublished) offers a very concise definition of Stalinism:

...[It] is fundamentally and objectively—in spite of the rationalizations offered by its practitioners and apologists—a counter-revolutionary current within the workers' movement. Exactly because it wraps itself in the mantle of the real communist movement—especially in the prestige of the Bolshevik revolution—it can be a more effective counterrevolutionary force than the reactionary right. (p. 2)

I argue that Stalinism created a movement in Angola that was not only a more effective counterrevolutionary force than the reactionary right, but in being so counterrevolutionary,

actually ended up becoming the reactionary right after Marxism's so-called "retreat from Africa" (Hughes, quoted in Nimitz, p. 1). Afro-Stalinism, then, differs primarily from Stalinism in Europe because of its added layer of neo-imperialist exploitation. Afro-Stalinism, in addition to striving to destroy workers' movements in Africa from the inside out, also seeks to destroy national liberation movements from the inside out. In the parts of Africa it infiltrated, including Angola, it operated under the guise of assisting national liberation movements. What the historical record shows, however, is that a primary goal of Afro-Stalinism was not to actually liberate African colonies, but to change the benefactor of African colonies' dependency—both economic and political, but the latter more so—from the Western imperialist powers to the Soviet Union. An illustrative example of this for Angola is when Brezhnev used Cuba's victory in Angola in 1975 to "burish Moscow's claims to be the champion of Third World liberation" (Glejises, 2013, p. 70), even though the Kremlin was initially angered by and opposed to Cuban intervention, fearing that it would upset the balance of power with the United States. Indeed, Valenta (1978) writes:

The main objectives of Brezhnev's leadership in African countries can be summed up as follows: first, to gain strategic benefits, mainly by generating local support for a Soviet naval presence along the coasts; second, to weaken U.S. and Chinese political and economic ties in the region; and, third, to gain political and economic benefits, mainly by attaining a voice in Africa's affairs and enhancing (if only in the long run) economic ties with African countries. (p. 7)

The devastating effects of this policy of political manipulation and fostering dependency cannot be overstated; when the Soviet Union collapsed, it was in no position to maintain control over its satellites, and the Western imperialist powers and Japan were presented with a perfect opportunity to pick up neo-colonialism in Africa right where they left off.¹ In other words, the independence projects that the USSR supposedly championed in Africa were largely failures; these former colonies ended up no more economically—and therefore politically—independent after leaving the socialist bloc. In Angola, this has resulted in the loss of countless lives and the suffering of millions because of civil war, abject poverty, epidemic disease, and all the

other ails of crony neo-colonialism. I will save the unpleasant details for expansion later in the body of this essay.

The Origin of Stalinism in Angola

In mapping the effects of Stalinism in Angola, it is necessary to first place the issue in its proper historical context by tracing the origin of Stalinist roots in this part of Portuguese-controlled Africa, namely within the background of the Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola (MPLA)—which has been the main party in power in Angola since the mid-1970s—through its connections with the Portuguese Communist Party (PCP). The MPLA has its origins in the Angolan Communist Party (PCA), which was born in October 1955 as a clandestine political organization geared toward the independence of Angola from colonial rule. Not only was the PCA heavily influenced by Portuguese 'Marxists,' but César and Marcum (1969) concur that the PCA itself most likely "did not amount to much more than an overseas cell of the Portuguese party, organized by European civil servants" (p. 28). The problem, however, was that it was not Marxism that entered Angola through this arm of the Comintern, but Stalinism (Nimitz, p. 3). The PCP itself was an international arm of the main Stalinist party in the Soviet Union, and perhaps the most infamous and doctrinaire one of them all in Western Europe. From the late 1920s until 1943, under the ideological guise of proletarian internationalism and with the global backing of the Communist International (Comintern), the Soviet Union spread its political influence—that is, Stalinism—to every populated continent in the world. Rather than use this influence to assist the global class struggle and the independence projects of nations subjugated under colonial rule, however, the Stalinist parties would defang revolutionary movements, or only help them insofar as their assistance was rewarded with a shift from politico-economic dependence on colonial powers to dependence on the Soviet Union instead. Stalinist influence on the PCA followed this same line through the arm of the PCP. While the Comintern claimed to be spreading Marxism, what it was really spreading was Stalinism.

In 1956, barely a year after its initial formation, the PCA merged with the Partido da Luta Unida dos Africanos de Angola (PLUA) to form the MPLA. Viriato da Cruz, former President of the PCA, took up the title of Secretary General of the MPLA while Agostinho Neto took up the mantle of the new organization's President.

¹ As a tangential note, I argue that this is the main difference between Soviet intervention and Cuban intervention in Angola. On the issue of Nito Alves's attempted coup, in which the Soviets sided with Alves and Cuba with the MPLA's right to determine internal matters independently, Foreign Minister Paulo Jorge remarked: "There was a huge difference between them [the Soviets] and the Cubans. The Soviets wanted to tell us what to do" (Glejises, 2013, p. 75).

Both men were educated either in Portugal itself or by the Portuguese colonial educational system in Luanda, and both held close ties with the PCP. From the Portuguese Stalinists, the MPLA inherited both a warped form of democratic centralism¹ as a guiding principle and the drive to create an autocratic one-party state. Of the main nationalist parties in Portuguese-controlled Africa at the time, the MPLA was the one that was the most influenced by the PCP—and even served as the very inspiration for the term ‘Afro-Stalinism’ (Nimtz, p. 33-34). Indeed, as Guimarães (2002) remarks, “the links between the PCP and the MPLA are clearly long-standing” (p. 39). Nimtz summarizes the general effect of Stalinist parties’ influence in Portuguese-controlled Africa quite nicely: “...Stalinist organizational norms aimed to create structures to establish bourgeois nationalist—as opposed to socialist—regimes, which would empower a ‘state capitalist’ bourgeoisie, ruled by party-military castes, integrating them into ‘post-colonial’ but necessarily dependent ruling classes” (p. 34-35). This link with the PCP continued for some time after Angola gained independence from Portugal, “with the PCP playing an intermediary role between Angola and Mozambique on the one hand, and Portugal on the other” (Young, 1988, p. 168). At the same time, other nationalist liberation movements were competing for influence among the masses, including the *União das Populções de Angola* (UPA) and the *Partido Democrático de Angola* (PDA), which would come together to form the *Frente Nacional de Libertação de Angola* (FNLA). A few years after the breakout of the Angolan War of Independence against Portuguese colonial rule in 1961, the FNLA splintered into another group, the *União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola* (UNITA). The MPLA, UNITA, and the remnants of the FNLA simultaneously fought against the fascist Portuguese army until victory in 1974, whereupon they promptly devolved into armed conflict amongst each other. Independence was finally legally granted from Portugal in late 1975. Due to indecisive leadership and a lack of clarity or consensus on the direction that postcolonial independence should take, however—socialism (Stalinism) or capitalism, Luandan workers’ rule or Ovimbundu hegemony, etc.—Angola’s War of Independence degenerated into a civil war between the three factions. It was a war of the bloodiest and most corrupt kind that would last for another few decades until 2002, the ramifications of which still gravely affect Angola and its people today.

1 I do not use the term ‘democratic centralism’ here in the Leninist sense. Instead of policy being decided centrally in the party and being binding on all members, in Stalinism policy is decided by the head of the party with limited, if any, input from other members, and is expected to be carried out unquestioningly through the ranks.

Civil War and the MPLA’s Institutions of Power

The Angolan Civil War’s prolongation was due to a mix of many interconnected factors, and the nature of the leadership of the MPLA was undoubtedly one of them. Agostinho Neto was also well-known for nurturing a cult of personality around himself; and, in true Stalinist fashion, secured this cult by force when in 1975 factionist tendencies, spurred on by the power vacuum left gaping in the wake of independence from Portugal, arose within the rank and file of the MPLA. By 1977 this infighting culminated in an unsuccessful attempt at a coup d’état, led by former guerrilla commander Nito Alves, and Neto took it upon himself to eliminate all potential rivals within the party in the form of a bloody ‘rectification’ process (Nimtz, p. 50). This political purge harks back to Stalin himself, when he consolidated power in Russia by 1928 by forcibly eliminating or exiling any Bolshevik leaders left to pose a threat to his position—and thus a similar situation, a violent and autocratic one-party state, was cemented in Angola. Neto’s cult of personality and influence in the executive served to institutionalize a system of presidential patronage, which itself ensured that the MPLA would remain insular and divorced from the voices of the Angolan masses, who were suffering terribly because of the civil war. The 8th World Congress of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International resolution (1965) on revolutionary movements in Africa reads:

The MPLA has...considerable backing abroad...particularly from the Soviet Union. ... On the plane of conscious leadership, the MPLA claims to have a more progressive, even socialist, orientation. However, this has not prevented it from having ties with dubious formations and from continuing to follow a confused line. Its relative strength in negotiations is derived less from its intrinsic influence than from the support granted it by the wing of the Communist movement adhering to the Soviet bureaucracy. (p. 4)

A close reading of the document makes it quite obvious that the previous passage is subtly condemning of the influence of the Soviet Union on the then-burgeoning revolutionary movement in Angola. For the MPLA, the civil war itself began under the pretext of stemming and eventually eliminating what they considered to be a counterrevolution, in the form of UNITA and FNLA resistance. As the war

progressed, however, and especially after the MPLA officially shed any pretense of Marxism-Leninism in 1990, it instead became a pretext to halt Angola's still-incomplete democratic transition and to restrict democratic liberties in order to defend the interests of a bourgeois elite whose wealth "depended on the absence of strong checks and balances" (Hodges, 2004, p. 201). This is because it had never actually practiced Marxism-Leninism to begin with, but Afro-Stalinism.

The system of presidential patronage first implemented by Neto both relies on and sustains the echelons of the MPLA's elite government bureaucracy. This bureaucracy, by being overgrown and rife with redundant posts and unnecessary institutions, severely hampers administrative efficiency. Not only that, the bureaucracy is essentially an oligopoly or monopoly that distorts the capitalist market to favor special business interests, "at the expense of potential rivals, and in certain cases the adoption of explicit policy measures to limit competition for the same purpose" (Hodges, 2004, p. 76 & 138). It draws membership primarily from the wealthier rung of the Mbundu ethnic group based in and around urban Luanda, including many mestiços. During the time Neto was still alive, the MPLA was much stricter about adhering to these recruitment criteria, even going so far as to outright reject the idea of recruiting from other ethnicities and tribes, such as the Ovimbundu, Kimbundu, or Bakongo, which together make up the majority of the Angolan population (Marcum cited in Keller, 1987, p. 75). The former is especially subjected to political discrimination because of UNITA's mostly Ovimbundu membership, which has ironically "contribut[ed] to UNITA's capacity to survive over the years as an effective guerrilla movement" (Rothchild & Foley cited in Keller, p. 302). This policy of ethnic exclusion, too, is an eerie echo of Stalin, who held a similar position on the independence of ethnicities who were oppressed under Russian czarism before the 1917 Bolshevik revolution. This inflexibility on the issue of negotiating with nationalist or ethnic separatist movements—something that has, again, prolonged the civil war with UNITA—draws extensively on the writings of Stalin (Rothchild & Foley cited in Keller, p. 305). Following Neto's death and dos Santos's rise to power, these restrictions on party membership lessened some, but the majority of MPLA members today—and therefore the majority of government officials, even after the abolition of the one-party state—are still Mbundu and/or mestiços. As such, given the insulated character of the MPLA and the crony nature of its capitalism, all other ethnicities in Angola are denied many of their fundamental rights, including the right to participate in the political process

and have at the very least a minimum standard of living. I will touch on this deprivation of their basic social, political, and economic rights in greater detail in the following section, but for now I will simply say that this ethnic tension exacerbates and reinforces splits among and between urban workers and rural peasants, thereby gravely hampering class consciousness and genuinely revolutionary Marxism.

The corruption of the elite MPLA bureaucracy is largely obscured by repression of the press and any and all political dissidents, by either armed force (e.g. police intervention) or bribery. Even after economic liberalization and the drafting of the new constitution in 1992, the MPLA has continued to resort to repressive security laws inherited from the colonial regime or the former 'Marxist' one-party state to silence political opponents and critical journalists (Hodges, p. 85). The government is content to both ignore existing laws and create new ones if and when it suits them. In 1999, for example, repression of independent press organs increased with the Angolan government's introduction of a law which "provided harsher sentences for defamation and increased to 30 days the period during which journalists could be detained without charge" (Hodges, 2004, p. 98). This gave rise to the suspicion among members of the international community that the civil war was being used as an excuse to forcibly silence journalists and newspapers, especially those interested in providing coverage on the war and corruption inside the government. This became particularly evident with the high-profile arrest and detainment of Rafael Marques in that same year, who was outspokenly critical of President dos Santos and accused him in several articles of corruption and incompetence. Marques, after being held for forty days in a prison in Luanda, was tried and sentenced to serve six months. Commenting on the ruling, Marques remarked, "Press freedom in Angola is still vulnerable today to arbitrary attack from the executive and the chilling climate of repression that results. The steps Angola must take to prevent future transgressions are clear: decriminalize defamation, establish truth as a complete defense in defamation cases, repeal special protections for the president and chief executive, and ensure due process for defendants throughout the judicial system" (Goldston, 2004). Even though the civil war has officially ended, the press still have very little, if any, freedom to speak out against the government. Just in 2015, human rights activist Marcos Mavungo was arrested and tried on charges of sedition, and in 2016 seventeen more human rights activists—the so-called "15+2"—were detained and sentenced to several years in prison for planning to organize protests against the state. All of these wrongfully detained citizens had

done nothing but catch the government's attention by "highlight[ing] economic mismanagement and corruption in their critiques of the government" (Moorman, 2016).

Petro-Diamond Capitalism in Angola Today

Following the renunciation of what they considered Marxism-Leninism and the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union, the MPLA proceeded with plans for economic liberalization. This meant the crony privatization of key sectors such as oil, diamonds, housing, and agriculture. In reality, however, ownership of these industries did not even change hands—they still belonged to government officials, who could now control economic resources with even less transparency than before. This crony privatization was possible only because of the absence of those previously mentioned strong checks and balances—the basis of which lies both in the nature of pre-independence Portuguese rule and also in the nature of Stalinism itself, which depends on an elite insulated from accountability from the very citizens that they supposedly represent. On the successive phases of Angolan governance, Hodges writes: "The starting point, after independence, was the superimposition of a Stalinist political model on the already highly centralized and authoritarian political system inherited from Portuguese colonialism."¹ When Neto died in 1979, one of his Ministers, José Eduardo dos Santos, quickly took up the mantle of President and all of the corrupt government institutions that he left behind. These included presidential patronage, the government bureaucracy, democratic centralism, and corruption of the Angolan labor movement. He did not just take them up, however; he deepened and strengthened them, particularly the institution of presidential patronage. This institutional expansion has resulted in a state of deep and widespread corruption. It is no coincidence that the overwhelming majority of cadre in the state bureaucracy were born into a select few wealthy families from the capital of Luanda. As was previously intimated, this has been the pattern for the MPLA from the beginning—to select members not from the most talented or qualified of the working class, but to hand-pick members on the basis of familial or political ties or expensive favors, essentially committing political incest. According to Hodges:

Oil revenues have...had profound consequences for the nature of the state and the system of governance. First, the rent from oil has given the presidency far larger resources with which to dispense patronage than would have been the case in a non-oil state.

¹ Hodges, p. 47

The term 'oil *nomenklatura*' has been used generically to encompass the nexus of elite families, interrelated through marriage and political allegiance, who have benefited from this 'manna' ... Suffice it to say that oil-financed patronage has been a fundamental part of the strategy pursued by President dos Santos for the consolidation and conservation of political power...

Along with the profits to be made from diamond trafficking, the diamond concessions awarded since 1994 have become one of the new *nomenklatura*'s main avenues for accumulating wealth, while the shadowy procedures for awarding the concessions provide another prime example of the non-transparency of resource management and the role of presidential patronage in building and cementing alliances. The tendering process has been opaque and it is well known that the final decisions on diamond concessions are taken by the president [dos Santos]. Significantly, several concessions have gone to companies set up by army fees, suggesting that the diamond concessions have been one of the main ways of rewarding military loyalty. (p. 61 & 190-191)

This statement has very insidious implications for the nature of Angola's government, even beyond the obvious. Up until the end of the civil war in 2002, the main areas of the country under UNITA control were rich in diamond and mineral resources; the prolonged civil conflict seems to have been motivated out of the greed of the MPLA elite rather than out of any real concern for the safety and wellbeing of the Angolan people. This is especially obvious when one considers the economic state of the country; not only are all sectors of the economy doing poorly except those which benefit almost exclusively government elites (oil and diamonds), Angola also lacks in infrastructural development, education, and availability of social and welfare services, including access to basic healthcare and nutritional requirements—in spite of the fact that the 1975 independence constitution that the MPLA drafted established health care as a right for everyone (Wolfers, 1983, p. 111). These resources are only available to those who have the money to afford them, i.e. MPLA-affiliated families based mostly out of Luanda. The civil war itself has crippled agrarian productivity and forced millions of peasants to flee to urban areas, which has had disastrous

consequences given the lack of urban planning and availability of social resources. The MPLA has enough finances to prolong an unnecessary civil war for decades, but refuses to allot even the bare minimum of funds toward the needs of everyday Angolans—democracy, indeed!

The state of abject poverty in which much of Angola's population resides is masked by the government paying a scant fraction of their funds to social service institutions that actually do more to serve families who are already well-off. This includes foundations like the Fundação Eduardo dos Santos (FESA), as well as post-secondary education scholarships that typically go to children of government officials. Outside the flashy upscale areas of the cities, however, the government's neglect of everyday people becomes very clear. The prolonged civil war has resulted in a mass migration of rural refugees, but without a planned system of welfare or infrastructure this has resulted in the proliferation of thousands of ramshackle slum settlements outside Angola's major urban cities. These slums are hubs for the black market, or informal, economy. The first major confrontation between the government and the urban poor occurred in 2001, when more than 10,000 families in a slum outside Luanda were forcibly evicted to clear land for the construction of luxury housing. The government served no eviction notices and proceeded to use armed force to remove these people and destroy their homes; at least two residents were shot and killed on the first day of the operation (Hodges, 2004, p. 58). These characteristics are ones which in and of themselves have their roots in Stalinism. Because the oil and diamond industries were nationalized under state ownership—and not worker ownership, as the previously supposedly 'Marxist' policies of the MPLA before 1990 would suggest—government officials are allowed to take the lion's share of the wealth for themselves. Economic liberalization post-1990 has only exacerbated the problem. This means that Angola's economy is essentially structured around and entirely dependent on an oligarchic government-owned monopoly on crude oil and diamonds—both resources that are 1) finite by their very nature, and 2) especially vulnerable to global market fluctuations. As such, Angola's people are subject to the whims of the government elite, while the economy is wracked by economic uncertainty at the best of times, on top of being plagued with the ills of an undiversified, dependent economy, and a critical deficiency in skilled labor and industrialization. Economic dependency on Western and East Asian capitalist powers means that the independence Angola gained in 1975 is severely restricted. In spite of this crisis, the imbalanced wealth that the *nomenklatura* gains from the arrangement—and the

lack of both national and international accountability to which they are held—emboldens and encourages not just complacency, but outright contentment with the status quo (Hodges, 2004, p. 156). Evidence of this is plain above all else in the repression of independent trade unions and workers' organizations, especially ones that display militant tendencies. In the 1970s, just after independence, the MPLA began to suppress workers' movements under the guise of combating 'reactionary' political opposition to its 'revolutionary' line. Marcum writes: "Illustrative of this approach, it squashed the beginnings of an independent labor movement through which Luanda dockworkers had wrung economic concessions from Portuguese authorities in 1974 and imposed its own affiliate, the União nacional dos trabalhadores angolanos (UNTA) as the country's sole labor organization" (Marcum cited in Keller, 1987, p. 71).

The fact that this suppression has continued and even worsened after economic liberalization, however, is very telling; although trade unions independent of UNTA and the MPLA are now technically legal, the development of independent trade unionism "has been held back by repression and intimidation and, perhaps even more important, by the nature of the labor force." The Angolan government is infamous for deploying armed para-military police (e.g. ninjas) when confronted by strikes or the threat of strikes by independent trade unions; according to Hodges, this has been very effective at instilling fear and discouraging union militancy (Hodges, 2004, p. 94). Invariably, strikes and independent trade union activities have been subjected to reporting black-outs in the state-controlled mass media. Another key reason for trade union weakness is that there are so few of the working class employed in the formal sector of the economy, and especially in enterprises where there is a critical mass of workers to organize. As of 2004, according to Hodges, less than 0.1 percent of adults in Angola are employed in the formal economy (p. 94), which itself is severely constricted by the MPLA's policies of presidential patronage, the *nomenklatura* bureaucracy, and the devastating impact of the civil war. That figure is even less than the estimated approximately 4 percent of adults working in the formal manufacturing sector in 1967, most of whom were white Portuguese settlers and the rest—roughly one-third—of whom were forced black laborers (Revolution in Angola, 1972, p. 20). Everyday Angolans are unable to participate in the formal economy for much the same reasons they are unable to be a part of the political process. Hodges writes: "Political participation by the mass of ordinary Angolans has been hindered by illiteracy, displacement and the daily struggle for survival, as well as by the pervasive

atmosphere of fear, which has been nurtured by the long years of political conflict and intolerance” (Hodges, 2004, p. 67). This weakness in Angola’s labor force has a grave impact on workers’ ability in present day Angola to organize a truly revolutionary Marxist-Leninist movement.

Conclusion

Stalinism, and Afro-Stalinism in particular, was at the root of the MPLA’s rise to power in the mid-twentieth century, and is at the root of the MPLA keeping hold of its power even up to today. As such, whatever ‘revolutionary’ intentions the organization’s leaders may have had in the beginning, Stalinism has had disastrous consequences for the welfare of Angola and the overwhelming majority of its citizens. These consequences include a critical lack of industrial development, a horrifically inaccessible health-care system ill-equipped to deal with Angola’s widespread disease and malnutrition, crises of urban underdevelopment and overpopulation—all the characteristics one might expect from a country torn asunder by war for half a century, and then some. By fomenting civil war for its personal gain, the MPLA has enabled, exacerbated, and in some cases, caused these problems. The birth defects that it inherited from Stalinism gave it the power to be able to do this in the first place. The government’s system of presidential patronage has resulted in a cycle of political incest and severe corruption that limits the ability of everyday Angolans to be a part of the political process; its elite bureaucracy controls and distorts the political structure and the economy for its own profit, enabling a total economic dependence on large capitalist countries buying crude oil and diamonds that leaves millions of Angolans without even the basic necessities for everyday survival; its policy of denying of the legitimate rights of ethnicities and nationalist separation movements has disenfranchised Angola’s major ethnic groups and only worsened ethnic conflict, serving to prolong the civil war and disintegrate the already weak trade unions; and severe restrictions on the press and political freedoms ensure that this system of bourgeois corruption endures and is able to reproduce itself without substantial consequences. Given these conditions, I argue that the legacy of Stalinism has not only left Angola bowing under the yoke of neo-imperialism, it has also left Angola less equipped to carry a genuinely Marxist movement to fruition today.

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