

# The Communist campaigns

The revolution in Africa has re-shaped the overseas strategy of the Soviet Union and China. Their contacts with the African countries are increasing rapidly. The African nationalists, however, are masters in their own house and they intend to remain "African"

JOHN BOYNTON

ONCE again there is talk that Mr. Khrushchev is planning to visit the African continent, following a visit to West Africa earlier in the year by one of his astutest deputies, Anastas Mikoyan. There was similar talk more than a year ago, when the titular head of the Soviet Union, President Brezhnev, paid a state visit to Morocco, Ghana and Guinea.

There is no doubt that the Soviet Premier is intensely interested in African developments. Over the past eighteen months he has received a number of top-level delegations from the newly-independent countries—President Nkrumah from Ghana and President Keita of Mali having been given special welcomes. Among the latest of these visitors to the Soviet Union was that led by Vice-President Apithy of Dahomey, which in June reached an agreement in Moscow for the exchange of diplomatic representation at Embassy level between the two countries. He was followed by a Senegal delegation led by Premier Mamadou Dia.

The current phase of communist bloc activity in Africa dates from 1956, but it is illuminating to look back on Russian interest long before that. There are accounts of Russian travellers in Africa as far back as the fifteenth century, though few penetrated farther south than what is now Somalia. In the nineteenth century various Russian groups established themselves in Ethiopia, which established diplomatic relations with the Tsarist empire in 1895. A Russian officer of that period even served for a while as a provincial governor under the Emperor of Ethiopia. A Russian field hospital sent to Addis Ababa in 1898 during the war against the Italians became a permanent institution, and in 1947 it was rebuilt by the Soviets, on Emperor Haile Selassie's invitation, to become the modern 200-bed institution it is today.

But if the Russian Tsar had an interest in Africa, this was not shared by his successors after 1917. Lenin had little to say on the continent, considering it too backward politically for communist activity. Likewise Stalin. It was not until the end of Stalin's time that any serious work was attempted in Moscow to evaluate the revolutionary possibilities in Africa. Some work had been started at Leningrad University in 1929 with a

course on Swahili, but it soon closed down and little more was done here until after 1945. But in 1955 the Soviet Communist Party theoretical journal *Kommunist* complained bitterly at the haphazard way African studies were being tackled. "The study of the history, economics and culture of the African peoples," it declared bluntly, "and the unmasking of colonial policies of the imperialists in Africa is one of the most important tasks of Soviet orientology."

The past six or seven years have seen a considerable change. The work at Leningrad has expanded considerably, with the addition of a number of visiting lecturers from the African countries concerned. Departments of African affairs are functioning at the Universities of Moscow, Odessa, Kiev, Kharkov, Tiflis and Simferopol. An African Institute under the Academy of Sciences has an expanding programme of work. Similar institutes have been set up in other communist bloc countries and a new one is likely soon in Poland.

These university departments and institutes have a simple task. Their job is to train Africanists to help spread Moscow's message. It is now recognised that until recently Moscow failed to appreciate the subtleties that make up Africa. Right up to a decade ago the Kremlin was still trying to fit Africa into the traditional Marxist revolutionary pattern, based on the use of an industrialised working class which did not exist anywhere outside the Rand and the Copper Belt.

# in Africa

Tribal patterns and ways of life had no meaning for Moscow in those days, and this was very evident in communist writings.

The first signs of Moscow's changing attitudes were of a formal nature. Diplomatic missions were set up at an increasing rate. In 1952, Addis Ababa was the only African capital with a Soviet Embassy. By 1962 some 90 communist bloc missions had been established, some of them with staffs out of all proportion to the size of the countries concerned.

Trade followed the red flag very quickly. It is not possible to give any exact figures of communist bloc economic relations with Africa but it is significant that the Republic of Guinea is expecting to get 85 per cent. of the 39,000m. Guinean francs needed for its first economic development plan from the Soviet Union, communist China, Poland, Hungary and Eastern Germany. Czechoslovakia exported \$47m. worth to 18 African countries in 1959, while Eastern Germany exported \$40½m. to nine African countries.

The emphasis of this trading is on the supply of complete industrial units by the communist bloc countries—public works schemes, factories, schools and technical colleges with all their equipment. In 1961 the Gottwald shoe factory in Czechoslovakia—formerly the expropriated Bata enterprise of Zlin—built a shoe factory in Ethiopia and plans to build two more this year in Ghana and Guinea. As is well-known, numbers of Soviet passenger aircraft have been supplied to Ghana and Guinea airlines. As part of this deal, African airline employees are being trained in the Soviet Union, some for as long as five years.

At the same time as diplomatic and trade relations have expanded, so has the training of Africans in communist bloc colleges. In 1952 there were a handful of West Africans at the Charles University, Prague, and a further few at Budapest. There were no foreign students of any kind at that time in the Soviet Union. Now African students alone in the Soviet bloc have long ago passed the thousand mark. According to recent scattered statistics, there are 250 Somali students in the U.S.S.R. out of a total of 500 Somali students in the communist bloc as a whole, including Peking. Despite reports to the contrary, African students are to be met at various Soviet universities outside Moscow, including a number in Soviet Central Asia, where they are sent for preliminary Russian courses.

The Lumumba Friendship University in Moscow is well-known as a doctrinal centre for Africans, Asians and Latin Americans. Last autumn it was supplemented in this rôle by another new foundation, the November 17th University in Prague. Both these institutions have the political function of training potential communist sympathisers for their return home. At different levels training courses for African

trade unionists are now being run in East Germany at the Fritz Heckert Trade Union College, the latest of which has been attended by trade union activists from Morocco, Mali, Ghana, Guinea, Nigeria, Cameroon, Somalia, Tanganyika, Kenya and Northern Rhodesia. This is one of the ways in which the communist East German trade union movement has been spending a quarter of a million pounds in furthering its work in Africa. This work is also being supplemented on the youth front by the Wilhelm Pieck Youth College of the East German youth movement, an ideological institution which is now open to African students, the first groups attending from Cameroon, Nigeria, Ghana, Somalia and Senegal. The second six-month course for African youth leaders is now almost completed.

Of course, not all the accent is on ideological and revolutionary training. Africans are taking various specialist courses, such as that in tropical medicine at the University of Greifswald in Eastern Germany. At another East German college a course of tropical agriculture is offered for Africans, while various groups have been on training courses in farm machinery in Russia and other communist countries. At a time when the Soviet Union is in considerable trouble with agricultural production, she and other countries of the communist bloc are undertaking to restyle the agricultural systems of various West African countries from those developed under the old colonial regimes.

Side by side with the ever-widening diplomatic, trade and training relations is the increasing use of more direct propaganda techniques. Following the pattern already established in Asia, the Soviet bloc is taking part in trade exhibitions, cultural tours, film festivals, all obvious ways of putting across the communist image at its most positive. The emphasis is on building for peace at home and supporting the national liberation struggle being waged in Africa.

Such manifestations only make themselves noticed in a few areas of the continent. More pervasive, however, is the radio propaganda which is now beamed direct to Africa by Moscow, Peking, Prague, East Berlin, Bucharest, Warsaw and Sofia transmitters. All told these transmitters now broadcast close on 200 hours weekly to Africa south of the Sahara in English, French, Italian, Portuguese, Amharic, Hausa, Swahili, Somali and Arabic. Peking even beams programmes in Cantonese to the Chinese settlers in East Africa.

These programmes naturally put the communist

viewpoint about life in the Soviet Union and attitudes towards African affairs. At the same time they spend much time in denigrating Western policies as they affect Africans, to the extent of complete fabrications. A recent Moscow Swahili programme, for instance, was the dramatised story of how an old negro in the United States was forced to earn his living as a fairground human coconut shy.

Important components of these broadcasts for Africa are talks on their experiences and impressions given several times weekly by African students in Moscow and other communist centres. These talks help make up the African language programmes, though they are equally important in the English, French and Italian language programmes. Russian-language courses are also being given in African transmissions, as they are in Moscow broadcasts beamed to other parts of the world. These courses are based on an excellent primer published in Moscow as a paperback and widely distributed abroad.

The introduction of the transistor radio has meant a great step forward in the effectiveness of radio propaganda. Hungary and Czechoslovakia have been specialising in the manufacture at home and under licence abroad of such radios capable of picking up short-wave transmissions clearly. What is probably one of the best mass-produced short-wave receivers in the world comes from the Orion plant in Czechoslovakia, being sold abroad at a price well below the home cost. In addition to providing radios, the Soviet bloc is also building transmitters, such as that outside Conakry for the Guinea government.

Such is the broad sweep of communism's attention to the African scene. It is certainly not static, but changing both in direction and form, 1961 was the year in which Moscow concentrated on West Africa. This year appears to be the turn of East Africa: Somalia, Kenya, Tanganyika and the Central African Federation. If we take into account communist bloc activities on the other side of the Red Sea, then there seems to be a more than usual interest in the Horn of Africa with its dominating position.

Fast as the old colonies get their political freedom, so does communism change its tune on colonialism as a concept. Moscow is now strongly emphasising what it calls neo-colonialism. Old-style colonialism, runs the argument, was political. With it thrown off, the imperialists are now resorting to economic neo-colonialism as a means of continuing the subjugation of their former possessions in the form of so-called "aid."

This argument has been taken even further with the invention of what they call West German imperialism, in other words the increasing economic rôle being played by West Germany in Africa and Asia. This line is not quite so simple in its detailed form as might appear at first glance. It is tied up with the communist campaign to get the East German regime accepted diplomatically as the equal of West Germany.

A further argument now being made in communist propaganda for Africa is that the proposed European Common Market would disrupt the economies of the African countries trading with ECM members. Therefore, states Moscow, they would do better to trade

with the communist bloc, which offers assured markets.

Africa is a continent with only seven communist parties—the latest being the tiny one in Basutoland—and fifty thousand out of a world total communist party membership of forty millions. Mr. Khrushchev and his theoreticians are optimistic that with the industrialisation they are helping to build up in Africa there will develop a suitably pliant proletarian nucleus on which they can work.

In the meantime they have so far been content to do international communism's work through the existing nationalist movements, whenever the opportunity arises. The expulsion of the then Soviet Ambassador to Guinea earlier this year on the grounds of political interference in Guinea's internal affairs came as a warning to Mr. Khrushchev, who replaced his "Man in Conakry" (an old-time political organiser) with an economic expert. Sekou Touré has not been alone in making it clear that Guinean interests in Soviet aid are material rather than ideological.

By replacing the expelled Ambassador Solod without any fuss, Mr. Khrushchev apparently heeded the hint at the time. But since then he has shown signs of displeasure. Speaking in Bulgaria in May, he took the opportunity to attack as "siding with reaction" unnamed African and Asian political leaders who preferred to lead their countries along orthodox bourgeois paths rather than along those of what he considered to be true socialism. This point has been made since in communist propaganda, though still without being specific in its attacks.

We do not know to what extent this apparent change of tactics in Africa has been conditioned by the Sino-Soviet dispute, which is now worldwide in its impact. The Chinese have not yet been playing a big rôle on the African continent, but it is far from insignificant and many African delegations have in recent months been received with open arms in Peking. Ideologically the more aggressive Chinese revolutionary line appeals to African militants, who reject Moscow's oblique and essentially long-term strategy and tactics. (See "China, Russia and the Have-Nots," *NEW COMMONWEALTH*, March, 1962.)

For the time being, at least, these militants are not a threat to the established régimes in emergent Africa. In his dispute with China, Mr. Khrushchev can count on one diplomatic factor in his favour. Communist China is still not a member of the United Nations and Soviet Russia is. If the voting in the 1960-61 General Assembly in New York meant anything Mr. Khrushchev just about has the edge in the African bloc vote. During that Fifteenth Assembly the U.S.S.R. received 207 votes from the African countries, against the 192 votes by them cast for resolutions put by the United States. In this he received greatly more support than from any of the other regional groups other than from those of the Middle and Near East, which supported him with 175 votes, against the 142 they cast for the United States.

But even such African support on international matters is only marginal and is offset by the 301 times the African bloc abstained from voting at all. Africa so far is proving somewhat difficult to fit into the Marxist-Leninist pattern.