The "People's Friendship University"

David Currie

HOUSED IN A BUILDING that formerly belonged to a Soviet military academy in Moscow, the People's Friendship University (recently renamed the Patrice Lumumba Friendship University) is now in its second academic year. Five hundred and forty-two foreign students, who devoted the past academic year mainly to learning the Russian language at a preparatory school, have now started a four-year course of study including physics and mathematics, natural sciences, social sciences, agriculture, medicine, history, philosophy, economics and law.1 Among these foreign students, the University admitted many Soviet students who last year studied at the preparatory school. (Articles in the Soviet press did not indicate what they studied while the foreign students were mastering Russian.) This October 700 students enrolled in the preparatory school. Of these, 520 came from fifty countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America. The rest were either Soviet students or foreign students transferred from other Soviet institutions of higher education. By 1965 the number of students at the Friendship University is expected to reach three or four thousand.

An international institution for general higher education is a new venture not only in the USSR but also in the history of education in general. It is true that in the 1920's in Moscow there was an operation of the University of the Tatars of the East. But that was in an undignified school for political cadres. The Vatican had higher educational institutions with an international body of students, and in Brussels the "Collège d'Europe" has been operating for some years, but in contrast to the Lumumba University these institutions are concerned with rather specialized types of training. In addition the Vatican has announced that it plans to found a similar institution of higher education for Africans. But the project has not gone beyond the planning stage. The Africans themselves, moreover, have not registered any enthusiasm for it. For some years now the question of founding a general European university in Florence has been kept on the agenda of the European Assembly in Strasbourg, but despite the formulation of detailed plans, this university has not yet been opened since there are serious disagreements among member nations about its tasks and functions. The Moscow Friendship University is thus the only undertaking of its kind.

A VENTURE so novel inevitably runs into difficulties of a purely technical nature. In an article written after the completion of the first academic year at the University, its rector, S. V. Rumyantsev, enumerates them frankly. The first of these is the language barrier which foreign students must expend enormous effort to surmount. Secondly, the varied character of the secondary education completed by students who come from different countries makes it almost impossible to combine large groups under a single curriculum. Thirdly, there exist few textbooks or other aids for foreign students, especially those who do not have full mastery of the Russian language. In addition to these difficulties enumerated by Rumyantsev, the Soviet Union does not have the personnel to teach a large part of those subjects listed in the Friendship University's curriculum. What, for example, will students from countries with a tropical climate study at the school of agriculture, when the USSR has no specialists in tropical agriculture? And what future awaits a young man from Ghana who has finished a law school in Moscow, when among Soviet jurists there are not only no experts on Ghanaian laws, but few teachers (if any) who have a detailed knowledge of Anglo-Saxon law, which has been adopted in Ghana, or with French law which is common to many countries which have recently obtained their independence?

But one must not exaggerate the importance of these difficulties, serious though they may be. The main professional focus of Friendship University is on technology and the natural sciences, and in these fields Soviet education is strong. It is not by chance that an engineer was appointed as its rector. In opening the Friendship University we deserve only one thing and that is to help other countries in

1 The figures and descriptive data are taken mainly from the article by S. V. Rumyantsev, Rector of the People's Friendship University, entitled "The People's Friendship University's First Academic Year," Vostok cyzheto sablye, No. 5, 1961, pp. 108-110.

and the propaganda noise was lou

Khrushchev could not fail to realize that the propaganda effort was a transient gain, not worth tens of millions. The degrading impact of the University is indicated by a comparison of two figures. Last year 43,531 applications were submitted from abroad.3 This year there were only about 6,000, one-seventh as many.4 In the second place, the propaganda babble inevitably led to intensified Western efforts in this field, which from the Communist standpoint was not at all desirable.

A GLUE TO the real reasons for creating a special university may be found in the earlier Soviet experience with students from economically backward countries. In the academic year 1959-60, before Friendship University was set up, there were 940 such students in the USSR.3 A considerable number of them came to the Soviet Union with pro-Communist leanings, intense but rather confused, since they stemmed more from a reaction against Western colonialism and racial discrimination than from a real commitment to communism. The students envied the Soviet Union as a utopia, devoid of the social and racial inequalities of the non-Communist world. They expected a great deal from the USSR, "not only education but also the truth of life," in the words of one Nigerian. Such exaggerated expectations occur in the articles and documents written by former foreign students whose experience in Moscow disenchanted them with communism.4

Utopia generally stand up poorly in the light of reality. This is especially the case when one compares Soviet actuality with the myths of Soviet propaganda. Theophilus Olomokan, a Nigerian student who lived in Moscow for two years and seven months and who openly admitted that he went there as a pro-Communist, told in an interview with the author of this article: "I realized that not everything was as I had imagined when Russian students began to ask me questions which showed their distorted conception of the outside world and their aspiration to find out facts which had clearly been inaccessible to them." The utopia was thus dispelled and replaced by feeling of acute and bitter disappointment such as could never have been experienced by any who had come to Moscow either neutral or unfriendly towards communism. Talking with the

2 Rumyantsev, loc. cit.


5 See, for example: "An Open Letter to All African Governments," Youth and Freedom, Vol. 3, Nov. 5-6. Also, Everet Muleke, "I Was a Student at "Moscow State," Reader's Digest, July 1961; interview with four Brazilian students, Le Figaro (Paris), January 31, 1961; and, Michel Ayl, "We Cannot Accept Free, Decent, Subversion, or Terrorism," The Student (Leiden), Vol. 4, No. 11, December 1960."
They complained of the bad living conditions, of racial discrimination (which they sometimes confused with the ordinary segregation of foreigners in Soviet society), of the disrespect for their religious ceremonies and customs, of the threats that followed any expression of dissatisfaction, of the censorship of correspondence, of political pressure, and of the suppression by Soviet authorities of the slightest indications of "political deviation." Thus, a paradoxical situation has been created among the foreign students from non-Communist countries in Moscow. The only ones who do not express open dissatisfaction are the University students (such as the Indians) who from the start had a more or less clear picture of what was in store for them, or young Communists from such countries as Syria and Iraq who have tied themselves as closely as possible to the party that they consider homely, and therefore need not fear the authorities. On the other hand, the neutrals and pro-Communists from Western countries are in most cases openly critical.

The Friendship University was intended at least in part to straighten out this situation which is fraught with international and internal complications. In a separate university the neutrals may be given more freedom to remain neutrals. In such a university much more freedom may be granted in discussions, without the fear that this will have an undesirable influence on the Soviet students. The contradiction between reality and propaganda will probably not be so evident to foreigners in the artificial atmosphere of this university, and carefully selected Soviet students will be able to maintain the proper optimistic tone which could by no means be created in an ordinary school of higher education with its oppositionists, philandering cynics, and wildly pro-Western students.

However, such a basic problem as isolation from normal life, of which foreigners complain, can only be aggravated if one is isolated from the students. The depressed students of the "Union of African Students in Moscow," and to the right and dismissal of dozens of students. The depressed students of the "Union of African Students in Moscow" sent a sharp anti-Communist "open letter" to the locals of the African governments which made a strong impression on university students in the African countries. The almost open political conflict in the University of Moscow had a demoralizing influence on the Soviet students as well.

The disappointed pro-Communists proved to be the most vociferous opponents. This does not mean, however, that the genuinely neutral students were left unaffected. Communist intolerance of ideological neutrality dismayed many of them. A student who returned from Moscow writes: "At Moscow, if they find that the student is really neutral, that he is unwilling to commit himself (politically), then he is regarded as a dangerous man and politically undesirable." The specifics of the dissatisfaction of the neutrals were summarized in a letter addressed by seven students from Somalia to the Prime Minister of their country.

OBVIOUSLY A NEW APPROACH was required if Friendship University was to serve successfully its basic purpose of training pro-Soviet technicians for the emerging states of Africa, Asia, and Latin America. The direction of this new approach was frankly revealed by Rumanyshev in his previously quoted article. "The New University," he wrote, "is intended in the main for those persons who, while having good abilities, nevertheless cannot get education either in their own native land or in Western countries" (italics added). What does this mean in practice? At present foreign students wishing to go to a Soviet university are selected by academic organizations of their countries, by their governments, and by UNESCO. For Friendship University, however, the candidates will in the future be selected, according to Rumanyshev, by social organizations and by public figures, without the local Communist parties or supervisory bodies.

Soviet Falsification—

A CASE HISTORY

In the summer of 1960 most of the African students at Moscow University joined in organizing an African Students' Union. The organization—like its predecessor, the Black African Students' Union—was refused recognition by the Soviet authorities. Two members of its Executive Committee fled the University in August 1960, along with another Negro student from former French Togoland who left Moscow about the same time, published an "Open Letter to African Governments" in various European newspapers and magazines (including The Guardian, Manchester; Le Monde, Paris; Die Weltwoche, Zurich). In it they set forth the story of the mistreatment of African students by the Soviet authorities. The forged photograph (right), which had appeared in the Soviet weekly New Times (No. 33, August 12, 1960), is described in a portion of the "Open Letter" as follows:

There are many cases we could cite of Communist deceitful exploitation of African students without our knowledge or consent. In early July [1960], Mr. Thophila Okonkwo was exercising in the Moscow University gym, and a Russian student took a picture of him in a boxing pose. Perfectly innocent, so far. But then, a few weeks later, a friend put the August 12 issue of The New Times in front of him and said: 'Look what they have done to you!' There, in a full-page picture, was Mr. Okonkwo in the boxing pose. But now, the Soviet propagandist had blatantly dubbed in broken chains on his wrists and a white man with a whip falling back in terror. Without Mr. Okonkwo's knowledge or consent, the Communists had spread this propaganda construction in a number of Communist magazines through the world. Mr. Okonkwo's protest to the Soviet authorities was, of course, to no avail.

The Soviets obviously could not deny the truthfulness of this incident. Instead, they published a smear attack on Mr. Okonkwo in Trad (Moscow, October 29, 1960), accusing him of being a spy and a disruptive—standard Soviet technique, as standard as forged photographs.
unexpected perspectives of students are capable of being trained as technicians and scientists, while at the same time they are indoctrinated with the appropriate ideology. Such social advancement. The few young people from the Soviet Union's "rabfaks"—workers'-friendship universities—have been admitted to higher educational institutions.

But the same experience has shown that youth of university age who have had only one year of schooling profit little from training in the usual system of secondary education. They need a special system of training. In the first two decades of the Soviet state's existence, the "rabfaks"—workers'-friendship universities—have been the last resort for students from underdeveloped areas. Since Soviet higher education has become independent, the trend toward technical and scientific training has increased.

David Burt

(Mr. Burt is a young student who attended Moscow University and served in the Soviet army in 1956. At present, he is a research student at King's College, Cambridge, and has published numerous articles on Soviet student life in British, German, and American publications.)

Recent Trends in Soviet Farm Incomes

WHILE THE PLANNED public sector of the Soviet economy has been diligently studied by students of Soviet affairs, the private sector has remained relatively neglected. The scarcity of relevant data and the decline of the private sector's share in total Soviet output of goods and services have probably been the factors most responsible for this lack of interest.

The most striking feature of the private economic sector is that the Soviet Union is its vitality. In spite of decades of deprecation by Communist ideologists, private economic activity in the USSR still survives and affects the daily life of Soviet citizens much more than production figures might indicate. Its scope encompasses a broad variety of consumer goods and services which, as a rule, are on the scale of priorities of the Soviet planners. In other words, private economic activity is strongest where the government monopoly is weakest, and it tends to adjust to the supply-demand conditions in that sector of the market over which the consumer has some degree of influence.

In this note we shall focus our attention on recent income trends in the most numerous social group—private farmers. For over thirty years, private peasants have divided their time and effort between the socialist sector of the collective farms and their own household garden plots and livestock holdings. In order to gain some insight into the size and labor requirements of the private sector of Soviet agriculture, it is necessary to compare the labor input and total output data for the two sectors (socialized and private) of the collective farmers' economy.

Soviet authorities estimate that in 1958 able-bodied members of collective farms devoted between 25% and 29 percent of their total work time to their private plots. Thus, roughly one-third of the collective farmers' labor goes into their private economy. What are the results of this labor compared to the production resulting from labor in the socialist sector?

In 1957 (a year for which detailed official data is available), the private sector's share in the collective farmers' gross output of eleven major commodities was about 34.9 percent; in livestock production the share of the private sector was 54.4 percent. The inclusion of other products would probably lower the contribution of the private sector to about 28-30 percent of the total gross output. In net output figures, however, the share of the private sector would be necessarily higher (since feed and seed, which are produced mainly in the socialist sector, are excluded from net output).

The above figures indicate that the productivity of labor in the socialist sector (measured in terms of output per unit of labor input) is much lower than in the private sector. It is evident that in spite of the substantial capital investments in the collective sector, labor productivity in the socialist sector remains low. Soviet economists explain this by pointing out that while labor productivity has risen substantially in the production of grains, it is still very low in the production of other crops and livestock. Official data also indicate that, compared to the pre-1913 period, labor input in 1956 (on the collective farms) was lower by only 20 percent per hectare for sugar beets and potatoes, by 22 percent for flax, and by 27 percent per cow.

What were the returns for the labor inputs of the peasants in the private and socialized sectors, as reflected in the income of the peasants? In order to answer this question, it is necessary to compute the value of the gross output of the collective farmers' private plots and compare it with the income they derived from the collective farms as payment for their labor performed in the socialist sector.

The private plots comprise over eight years' worth of cropland at a rate of computation of 0.76 hectares per 100,000,000 rubles of the private output.

5 On a per hectare basis, 0.76 hectares in 1956 and 0.71 hectares in 1957. According to Tikhonov's Upravlenie, 1957-1958.

8 Private livestock holdings in the late 1950s were as follows (in heads of the household):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>1957</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cows</td>
<td>693</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cattle</td>
<td>404</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pigs</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheep</td>
<td>397</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goats</td>
<td>349</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Sel'skoe khoziaistvo, pp. 56, 57, 266, 93. The data for livestock are as of 1957.