

## CHAPTER NINE

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# THE USSR AND BLACK AFRICA

Soviet interest in black Africa has reflected a considerable degree of continuity with the former tsarist policies and attitudes. This is to be expected given the close territorial identity and inherently similar geopolitical circumstances faced by the two otherwise contrasting Russian regimes. However, both the objectives and activities of the Soviet government in Africa have been far more extensive than those of its tsarist predecessor. The ultimate Soviet aim is to facilitate the revolutionary role that Africa is to play in the universal defeat of capitalism. The primary method for achieving this goal has been to exploit strong African nationalist sentiment in order to weaken the colonial powers. In this approach clear parallels with the Comintern policies in America are evident, including the dilemma of how to reconcile nationalism and communism. Discussion in the previous chapter of Soviet deliberations on the Negro question has shown that resolutions at the Fourth and Sixth Comintern Congresses provided the main policy definition on this subject. These deliberations were aimed at Africa as well as America. However, Russian observers had a clearer understanding of the African situation than they did the American.

The history of Russian involvement in Africa, which included efforts to limit the imperialist endeavors of other European powers,

provided a tradition and a literature from which to draw perspective. In addition, the Soviet leadership bore a certain justified siege mentality as it emerged from the Russian Civil War and from the Allied intervention in the early 1920s. Consequently, as mentioned previously, one of the Soviet Union's chief concerns was the potential use of Negro troops against it, as the French had done in one instance during the Civil War. This threatened a dreadful distortion of class lines in lieu of the anticipated Marxist revolutionary upheaval. It, therefore, became particularly urgent that the African masses be won over to the communist cause.

In this same setting, Soviet leaders also evinced a fleeting interest in the Garvey movement and in the budding Pan-African movement, both of which featured radical demands consistent with Soviet doctrine and were international in scope. However, the tendencies which Moscow favored in these movements were not the ones which predominated as the movements further evolved. More precisely, black nationalism proved to be too strong for Soviet appetites.

Official denunciation of Garveyism surfaced at the Sixth Comintern Congress in 1928. The movement was criticized as a utopian Zionism which would damage the cause of world revolution by advocating removal of American Negroes from their location in American society where they could be a most effective disruptive force. However, this same congress then signalled its acknowledgment of the power of nationalism by proposing that independent Negro republics be established in South Africa and in the southern United States. This proposal, which had no practical foundation in either continent, apparently grew out of the concept of union republics adopted in Russia to solve the nationalities problem on her own soil. This measure caused factionalism to emerge within the American and South African Communist parties and practically destroyed the latter. Part of the difficulty here was that the white membership feared black domination of the party.<sup>1</sup>

While the proposals for Negro republics in the United States and South Africa are similarly utopian, significant differences between them should not be ignored. Moreover, although the idea of such a republic in South Africa was equally as impracticable as a separate Negro republic in America, the former was a more practical idea. The Negro peoples of South Africa, unlike their American counterparts, constitute an overwhelming majority of the population and, at least in their historical memories, had previously experienced political, social, and economic organization independent of the colonialist powers. Furthermore, the manifest power of nationalism, as witnessed in Europe's previous hundred years, suggested that Africans could achieve some form of independence in the foreseeable future. Against the varied array of independent African states, which did eventually emerge, the Soviet proposals do not appear so far-fetched.

The most crucial practical problem confronting Soviet leaders with regard to the African situation was the same one they faced in America: identification and recruitment of Negro leaders. It was all very well to embrace in Moscow Lenin's observation that countries with a proletarian dictatorship might directly aid non-industrialized societies toward socialism. It was yet another matter to expect Africans to trust leaders whose skin color they identified with their colonial oppressors. Black leadership was all the more imperative given the preponderance of the Negro population. This factor also meant that the appeal for black and white unity, so prominent in the American strategy, was subordinated to nationalism, which clearly had a stronger basis for a real mass movement.

Since the global scenario suggested to Soviet theorists that the American Negro was a more advanced group than the African in terms of revolutionary consciousness, the direct use of American blacks in leadership positions in Africa still seemed plausible to the Soviets. And, indeed, the example of George Padmore's activities proved that such intervention could be very effective, with or without Soviet backing. On the other hand, it must be noted that at the very moment it elevated Padmore to prominence in 1929, Comintern announced its shift away from the notion that American Negroes would be the vanguard of revolution in Africa. Thus, it was already clear to Soviet leaders by the time of Comintern's Hamburg Conference of Negro Workers in 1930 that they must rely upon African Negroes to lead their own revolution in Africa.

Padmore was, nevertheless, a pivotal figure for the Soviet policy, for what he symbolized as well as for what he did. He and James Ford played guiding roles in the formation of the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers, which became the most important formal agency for promoting revolution among Negro populations around the world. Even though Padmore did not enjoy field grade rank in the Red Army, nor command hundreds of secret agents, as one source contends, his influence was considerable.<sup>2</sup> Ranging from his office in the Kremlin, to travels to Western Europe, and secret trips to Africa, Padmore established contacts which proved vital to Moscow's ties both with African events generally and, more importantly, with the budding African liberation movements.

With respect to Comintern's objectives in Africa, it is significant that there were more African than American Negro leaders present at the Hamburg conference. Among those in attendance were Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya, E. F. Small of Gambia, and I. T. A. Wallace-Johnson of Sierra Leone. After the conference, several of the Africans accompanied Padmore to Moscow to attend the Fifth Congress of the Red International Labor Union. Soviet access to African leaders had been facilitated by Comintern's virtual control of the League Against

Imperialism, which had been formed at the World Anti-Colonial Conference held in Brussels in 1927. The calling of the conference itself had been instigated in part by Comintern, working through the German communists who organized the conference, and it had attracted an impressive representation from black Africa among a sizeable Third World contingent. One prominent figure at the conference sessions was Lamine Senghor, a leading West African nationalist, who died in November 1927 after a brief imprisonment by the French upon returning home. The Soviet support given the League Against Imperialism is another illustration of Soviet acknowledgement of the necessity of a role for nationalism. Another non-communist organization aiding Soviet efforts in Africa was the nationalistic, Paris-based League for the Defense of the Negro Race, which showed kinship to the Garvey movement and existed under various other names in the 1920s and 1930s. The league was a chronic source of discomfort for French authorities in colonial Africa. The Negro Welfare Association based in London similarly plagued the British. Despite the Soviet concession to nationalism, another problem the communists faced in Africa as well as in America, was the need to rely heavily on the Negro bourgeoisie for leadership rather than on the black masses. The key black spokesmen turned out to be those educated in European culture, often in Europe. This fact, in part, dictated the tactics employed by communists involved in the liberation movements.<sup>3</sup>

The main tactic Comintern implemented through its various agencies was literary propaganda. This meant not only disseminating Comintern's newspapers and pamphlets for its organizations such as Padmore's Committee of Negro Workers, but also providing funds for distributing periodicals such as the League for the Defense of the Negro Race's *La Voix des Negres* (Voice of the Negro), labor union materials, and political flyers. For non-communist organizations, the Soviet leadership did all it could to shape the views of the leaders, including, on occasion, provision of financial support. The period during the late 1920s and early 1930s was a very favorable one for this tactic. The depression deeply affected the great colonial powers and, therefore, their African holdings. Meanwhile the Soviet Union, not yet as embroiled in the world economy, could not only decry the ills of capitalism, but hold itself up as a shining example the African peoples should seek to emulate when they built their independent states. To this end, the Soviet leaders were able to use even the racial incident involving Robert Robinson and the three white American workers to glorify the Soviet attitude against racism.

Scholars who have argued that Soviet policy toward black Africa during this period was based on expediency dictated by current Soviet needs have compelling evidence for their case. Until the mid-1930s

the effects of the German-Russian accord, signalled by the Treaty of Rapallo, were felt in Africa, as former German colonies were spared the critical attention the French and British colonialists received from the Soviets. In a dramatic turnabout in the mid-1930s, Germany came to be considered the major threat to the interests of world communism, and the Soviet Union decided to cooperate with England and France in common opposition to Germany's new fascist regime. This new stance became official doctrine at the Seventh Comintern Congress in 1935.

The most conclusive evidence that the new stance signalled a change in the struggle against African colonialism was George Padmore's involuntary departure from the party. Also, the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers, Comintern's main executive agency in this area, was temporarily disbanded. Padmore made it clear on more than one occasion that the main reason for his treatment by the Soviets was his insistent emphasis on the struggle against colonialism. This position was not consistent with the new, moderate Soviet approach. For Negroes around the world, yet further doubt was cast on the status of anti-colonialism among Soviet priorities when the Soviet Union, despite its vigorous vocal support for Ethiopia against invasion by racist Italy, sold fuels to Italy. The Nazi-Soviet pact in 1939 could, of course, only make the situation all the more uncertain. And, indeed, documents now available show that Soviet discussions with Germany, concerning spheres of influence, included the partitioning of Africa. In these talks, Soviet spokesmen were willing to agree to Hitler's control of Central Africa and Mussolini's territorial ambitions in the north and northeast, in exchange for support of Soviet aspirations in the Indian Ocean.<sup>4</sup>

In the years just preceding the war, the apparent break which these developments showed in the Soviet commitment to the creation of independent black African states is perhaps the main reason for the general false impression held that Soviet involvement in Africa began only after the war. This situation was prolonged during the war by the necessity of Soviet alliance with the other great powers. The Russians also participated in the various summit conferences which attempted to design the postwar globe. Finally, owing to the nature of the new Soviet involvement in world affairs, Comintern became one of the war's casualties. This, in effect, removed what had been the main vehicle for Soviet activities in Africa.

When in the 1950s the Soviet Union again directed concerted attention to black Africa, it found that the liberation movements had progressed even further along their strongly nationalistic lines. Now, it was the Soviet leadership's turn to accuse black African leaders of collaborating with colonial regimes because, in some cases, they

entered into electoral politics and became involved with non-communist parties.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, the Soviet leaders could have taken some satisfaction in the earlier contributions they had made and upon which the black leaders had continued to build. For example, Soviet encouragement of the Africans to promote their political interests through organized labor had been highly beneficial.<sup>6</sup> Continuity with what Comintern had initiated was also manifested in the presence and wide-ranging influence of George Padmore, the communist outcast who had become almost legendary on his own through continuing what he had begun under Comintern. When Ghana became independent in 1957, it was a fitting tribute that he became an official adviser in the government of his former protege, Kwame Nkrumah.

However, although the considerable Soviet contribution to the African liberation movements was appreciated by Africans despite the suspicious Soviet behavior in the late 1930s and 1940s, the Africans correctly felt that they were winning their liberation themselves. Therefore, when the Soviet Union approached Africa in this new era of independence, it was still as an outsider, albeit without the stigma of having been one of the colonial powers, who, at the time, were being ousted. The first step toward insuring that communism would have a dominant influence in the emerging free Africa would be the establishment of positive relations with the new independent states while continuing to support those liberation struggles still in progress. Heads of African states now visited the Soviet Union frequently and were accorded the appropriate official formalities. Even leaders of liberation movements not yet in power were warmly welcomed. At the Twenty-fourth Communist Party Congress in 1971, for example, the Guinean leader Amilcar Cabral spoke, as did Agostinho Neto of the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola. There were also delegations from the Mozambique Liberation Front and other African revolutionary parties. It is significant that such full recognition of the importance of black Africa did not occur in the United States (the other principal exponent of universal democracy) until the late 1970s.

At the beginning of 1956, Ethiopia was the only black African country with which the Soviet Union had diplomatic ties. By 1966 there were twenty-five, and the number has continued to grow. The approach chosen to establish these connections has followed the same pattern that had been set during the entire century of Russian ties with Africa: The Soviet Union offered technical assistance in exchange for goodwill and the hope of future communist allies in world affairs. The impact of this strategy became ever broader under Leonid Brezhnev, as Soviet surrogates from the Warsaw Pact, Cuba, and North Korea, also provided aid to African states. By the end of the 1970s, non-military advisory personnel sent to sub-Saharan Africa was estimated by United States intelligence to number around eight thousand. At



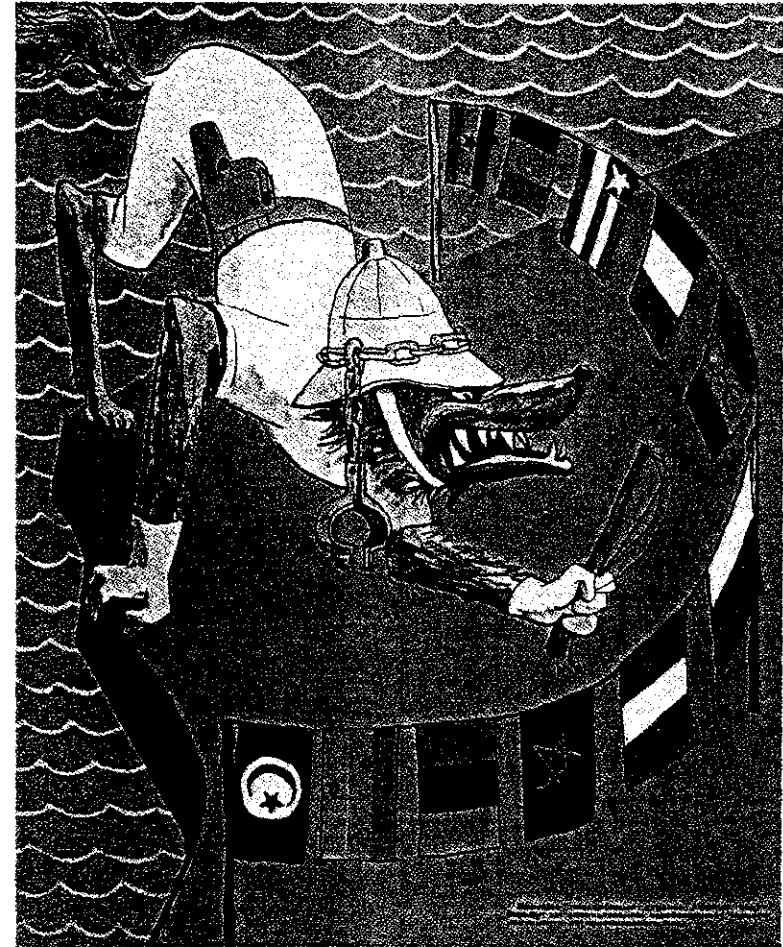
Kwame Nkrumah, who once considered the Soviet political structure as a model for West Africa. (Courtesy Moorland-Spangarn Research Center, Howard University)

the same time, there were probably over forty thousand Cuban and ten thousand Russian military personnel there. In the period from 1955 to 1978, an estimated ten thousand Africans, mainly from Somalia, Tanzania, and Ethiopia,<sup>7</sup> were trained in the Russian military system.

One of the main forms of assistance to Africa has been in the area of education.<sup>8</sup> This aspect of Soviet policy deserves special attention for two reasons. It has brought thousands of black Africans to the Soviet Union for periods of up to six years and it has, incidentally, led to allegations that racism has manifested itself in the Soviet Union against the Africans. While the attendance of foreign students from



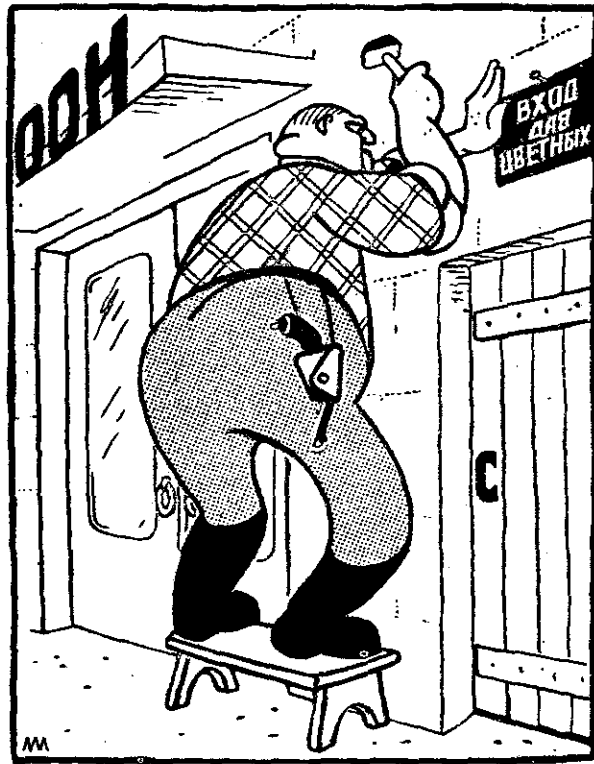
"The Colonizers: He isn't yet mature enough for independence." Reprinted from *Krokodil*, 30 July 1960.



"They have him surrounded." Reprinted from *Krokodil*, 10 April 1962.

communist countries at Soviet universities began soon after World War II, Asian, African, and Latin American countries joined the program only in 1958. The political schools founded in the 1920s had not survived Stalin's regime. Most of the students were now attending regular Soviet universities. Meanwhile, on the international plane, Africa was becoming the main area of concentration for all communist countries promoting educational and cultural exchange. The formation of the Africa Institute in 1959 was an indication of this new interest within the Soviet Union.

The creation of this special institute within the Academy of Sciences



"Entrance for colored—This is the way the American racists wanted the entrance to the UN to look." Reprinted from *Izvestiia*, 15 October 1960.

demonstrated the Soviet awareness that Russia needed to learn more about this part of the world if she was to succeed in gaining dominant influence there. Soviet leaders, therefore, drew upon the tradition of African studies which extended back to tsarist times and adapted it to new purposes. African language studies had experienced especially strong continuity. N. V. Yushmanov had taught Ethiopian linguistics and Hausa at Leningrad University as early as the 1930s. In the same era, D. A. Ol'derogge taught Swahili and Zulu there. Ivan Potekhin, the first director of the Africa Institute, studied Swahili under Ol'derogge while completing his studies in social anthropology. These two scholars combined efforts to edit an ethnographic survey, *Narody Afriki* (Peoples of Africa), published in 1954, which outlined the basic Soviet approach toward Africa in the Cold War era. It was directed against both colonial rule and "bourgeois" scholarship, which characterized African culture



"They (Mobutu, Tshombe) are coming into power (Congo sovereignty trampled underfoot)." Reprinted from *Krokodil*, 10 October 1960.

as inherently inferior. In this, the Soviet position was a step ahead of Western scholarship, which at times stated explicitly that Africa had no history. However, while subjecting African history to the same Marxist analysis by which they scrutinized all other history, communist leaders still failed to offer Africans a picture or plan consistent with African perceptions of reality. The Africa Institute was far more successful within the Soviet Union, training many more specialists and spreading the awareness of Africa among the general public. The latter is facilitated by the fact that, more than in the West, Soviet scientific scholarship has been systematically published for a popular audience as well as for scholars.<sup>9</sup>

Taking stock of the new world situation, and the irrelevancy of

ideology to some of the African settings, the Soviet leadership shifted priority away from the training of communist cadres to the preparation of leaders for non-communist organizations, such as trade unions, student agencies, and professional academies. Toward that end, for example, trade union schools for Asians, Africans, and Latin Americans were founded both in Soviet bloc nations and in Africa. However, the main institution founded to advance this new approach was the Friendship University established in Moscow in 1960. The initial enrollment in 1961 showed the largest number of students (191) to be from Latin America. The region next most represented was Africa with 140.<sup>10</sup> The emphasis placed on black Africa became evident not only in the composition of the student body, but also in the university's name change in 1961 to Patrice Lumumba University, in honor of the slain Congolese leader.

The course descriptions and admission requirements for the university, announced in 1960, reveal why the new Soviet education program became very popular for students from the developing nations. The subjects in the curriculum included engineering, agriculture, medicine, mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology, economics, law, history, literature, and Russian language. The course of study in medical training lasted five years; it spanned four years for all other fields. Anyone under thirty-five years of age was eligible for admission regardless of sex, race, nationality, or religious conviction. Students from Asia, Africa, and Latin America were invited to submit applications either directly to the university or through Soviet embassies or consulates abroad. Those having less than a high school level of preparation might be admitted into a special preparatory program for up to three years of preliminary training. All students lacking a knowledge of Russian would be so enrolled for up to a year.

The government assumed all the student's educational expenses, including housing and medical care. In addition, it paid for the student's travel from home to Russia and back, provided a monthly stipend for living costs, and financed an annual vacation. Under such terms it is not surprising that, between 1961 and 1966, the number of university students from African countries in the Soviet Union increased six-fold to about four thousand students, with the largest contingent at Lumumba University. In 1960 alone there were over forty-three thousand applicants for the five hundred slots available. By way of comparison, it can be noted that this number of African students was still lower than the number studying in the United States, and was not even half the number in Britain and France. As foreign students in the Soviet Union began to number in the thousands, they were placed in various schools and institutes throughout the country according to their planned fields of specialization. At the same time,

the program grew to include students who received scholarships provided by their own governments and who were partially aided by the USSR. However, mainly those who attended Lumumba University were directly and principally funded by the Soviet government.

The new Soviet policy appeared to be progressing well until an incident occurred in 1963 which was highly unusual in the Soviet Union and which jeopardized the program's reputation. It began with the mysterious death of a twenty-nine-year-old Ghanaian medical student, Edmond Asare-Addao, who was found dead near a train track on the outskirts of Moscow in sub-zero weather. African students who knew him claimed that he had been murdered by Russians who objected to his proposed marriage to a Russian woman. Soviet authorities conjectured that he had been drinking and that he had collapsed and frozen to death. In response, about five hundred African students scuffled with police in staging the first mass protest in Red Square since the late 1920s when Trotsky's supporters had objected to his removal from leadership status. Among the placards carried by Africans was one that read, "Moscow, a second Alabama," and another which said, "Friend today, devil tomorrow." The march ended when a delegation of students was received by the minister of higher education. The students demanded investigation of Asare-Addao's death and expressed general complaints about racial hostility from Russians.<sup>11</sup>

This episode turned out not to be totally unique. In fact, already in 1960, a group of Somalis abandoned their studies in Moscow because, they alleged, "the Russians consider us an inferior race and treated us accordingly."<sup>12</sup> In April 1965 in Baku, the unexplained death of another African student led to protest and the departure of some students when their requests to be moved to another university were refused. Most of these students were Kenyans. They complained of intolerable race discrimination, and some said they had been attacked by gangs. Baku has continued to carry rumors of mysterious African deaths. In November 1969 a Kenyan student was found murdered in Kiev, and the Kenyan *Daily Nation* reported on November 22d that other Africans in Kiev went on strike demanding more personal security. Yet *Newsweek* reported another such death in its issue of September 16, 1985.

Similar ripples of discontent surfaced in Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria, where other sizeable communities of African students existed. About seventy Africans left Bulgaria in 1965 complaining of racial discrimination and segregation. One recurrent issue in the 1960s among the African students there was the refusal of the authorities to allow African students to form their own separate union.<sup>13</sup> There was a similar demand involved in the 1963 protest in Moscow. However, since the 1970s the authorities have been more responsive to such requests from the students.



Through occasions such as the social depicted here, the Soviet government has sought to convince African students that there is no racial discrimination in Russia. (SOVFOTO)

African students have published numerous accounts of their experiences in the Soviet Union. If we keep in mind that most of those who published were those who had negative experiences, an examination of some of these writings can provide the basis for a better understanding of an ostensibly racial problem. One such writer was Michel Ayih-Dosseh from Togo, who studied at Moscow University from 1958 to 1960. One of the first ten Africans to study at Moscow University, he came with positive preconceptions, but he left bitterly disillusioned, complaining of racism, injustice, and a lack of freedom. He was sent home after two years, having been a leader in an African students organization of which the government did not approve. According to him, the organization was prohibited because it was organized on a regional basis. While the government permitted organizations defined by country, there was only one country with more than two students there at the time. In 1961 Ayih-Dosseh published a warning to other Africans that communism in practice was not consistent with its theory and cautioned against choosing the Soviet Union as a model.<sup>14</sup>

Another student in this same group was Andrew Amar from Uganda. Amar had initially gone to Russia on his own, without a scholarship.

He noted that the Soviet government gave preference to students applying directly from their native countries, without having visited any other Western countries. Amar had been studying in England from 1957 to 1959 and had been active there in an African students' organization. After some early bureaucratic difficulties, he was eventually admitted to Moscow University, and, curiously, without ever filling out any forms. Furthermore, he was granted one of the regular nine-hundred rouble-per-month scholarships and an extra winter clothing allowance. Russian students, who received only about a third as much as the foreigners, were resentful. Most African students in Moscow at the time lived in the Russian Language Institute. Each dormitory room included at least two Russians. A major grievance for Amar was that he felt the African students were used by the Soviet government for political purposes. He recounted that the Africans were ordered to greet Krushchev's motorcade whenever he was returning home from some state visit. Then the whole scene would be photographed. Amar left the Soviet Union in the summer of 1960 and resumed his studies in England.<sup>15</sup>

Another member of this first group of African students left the most detailed account of what they experienced. Everest Mulekezi and a cousin had travelled all the way from their native Uganda to Cairo seeking access to an education. There they were enthralled by a Soviet embassy official's description of the new program, promising in addition to everything else a free trip home every other year. Mulekezi had once been offered a one-year scholarship at an American university, but was denied a passport by British officials because he lacked the money for travel.

Upon arrival in Moscow, Mulekezi was surprised to discover that the thousand or so foreign students were housed a mile away from the university, separate from the main student body, although they had Russian roommates. He was also disturbed to find that their five-story dorms had guards at the doors and that all students were required to show passes in order to enter the dorms and the campus. This practice also restricted their contacts with Russians they might meet outside the university. Mulekezi generally had a favorable impression of the Russian people, finding them among the friendliest he had ever met. However, he also recalled racial incidents, including intimidation and beatings.

Meanwhile, he quickly concluded that the educational program was a ruse and that he and the other Africans were being used as "stooges." He described one celebration of "Uganda Day," where:

In our name a stranger called for a vote on a resolution demanding immediate independence for Uganda, severance of all ties with Great Britain, and alliances of friendship with the Soviets. Before we could open our mouths, a roar of approval went up. Cameras snapped as the



Russian actors gathered around to congratulate us on our "action." Tape recordings were made for broadcasts to be beamed back home. Suddenly it was over, and we Ugandans were left dumfounded and angry.<sup>16</sup>

There were similar fetes held for Nigeria, Guinea, and the other African states, as well as an "All-Africa Day." In Mulekezi's opinion, most of the black African students there at the time were anti-Soviet. The pressures placed upon them, both in the classroom and outside, served only to harden their negative reactions. Hence their efforts to organize their own student union against government wishes. They also enraged the authorities by attracting Russian students to jazz music, which was considered decadent by official Soviet standards, and by engaging the Russians in long discussions, which included much anti-Soviet debate.

Mulekezi surmised that the decisive development precipitating his departure from the Soviet Union was the government's decision to open Friendship University. The students were under the impression that it would be for foreigners only; they objected to this as harmful segregation. The black students' union appointed one of their own, Stanley Okullo from Uganda, to write a letter to the Ministry of Higher Education protesting the discrimination they had suffered. Okullo was thereupon expelled from the Soviet Union for "immorality, drunkenness, and joining the imperialist camp." This led Ayih-Dosseh, Amar, Mulekezi, and other members of their union to leave Russia. Mulekezi, studying at an American university a year later, estimated that there were about one hundred African students who had also left Moscow and were wandering in Europe, not as fortunate as he in finding a way to continue their education.

One student who studied in a city other than Moscow, Nicholas Nyangira, encapsulated his impressions in the title of an article appearing in the *New York Times Magazine* on May 16, 1965, "Africans Don't Go to Russian to Be Brainwashed." Nyangira was one of twenty-nine Kenyans sent home before finishing their courses, following the protests which were mounted in the wake of the unexplained African death in Baku, capital of the Azerbaijan Soviet Republic, in April 1965. After his registration and receipt of a passport in Moscow, Nyangira had been sent to Baku. He recalled being disappointed by what appeared to be slum conditions there, accompanied by a scarcity and poor quality of food. This Caspian Sea port with its majority Azerbaijani population was quite different from European Russia. The stipend in Baku was eighty roubles per month, a sum he found to be inadequate. However, he noted that the average Soviet citizen was paid only seventy roubles per month.

Although the Africans were welcomed by a large Komsomol gathering upon their arrival in Baku, they soon encountered great hostility.

They were refused service by restaurants and taxis. They noticed that Russian men were cruel to Russian women seen talking to Africans. On occasion, local youth would attack Africans with bottles and stones, and officials would take no action on African complaints. Nyangira added, however, that the Russians were somewhat friendlier than the Azerbaijanis.

Nyangira also found the quality of education deplorable. He said that *Pravda* was the textbook for language study and the technique featured much rote learning. Also, sixteen to eighteen hours per week of Marxism-Leninism was mandatory. Nyangira incurred the ill will of Komsomol by refusing to make certain anti-imperialist speeches. Lectures were often preempted by "spontaneous" demonstrations, that is, except the lectures on Marxism-Leninism. Nyangira also complained that in some cases students with five years of education were grouped with others with twelve; both would presumably be trained as doctors or engineers in another four or five years. Some of the African students soon concluded that their training in Baku was strictly indoctrination. They began to protest by boycotting lectures. They were then refused contact with their embassy and at times found their mail had been read or seized. They were eventually expelled and sent home, rather than to another Soviet city as they requested.

These personal accounts are fairly representative of the type of publicity this Soviet policy received abroad during its beginning phase in the early 1960s. Numerous articles on the subject can be found, for example, in the *New York Times* from 1960 through 1963. The picture that emerges is that of a program which featured both special, favorable treatment of African students and very real encounters with racist attitudes in the Soviet Union. Displaying their passionate desire for education, hundreds of African youths travelled hundreds of miles, sometimes on foot, to make contact with the Soviet orbit, often leaving their native region illegally. Notwithstanding the legitimacy of the complaints such as those enumerated here, the majority of the students apparently achieved their educational objectives in Russia. What is less clear, however, is whether they returned home afterwards and whether their having been trained in the Soviet Union worked to Soviet advantage. Their Soviet academic credentials appear to be respected in the socialist states, but are a liability in pro-Western regimes. There is, of course, no complete answer to these questions at present, since the training program and the process of state formation in Africa are still in progress. There are now approximately six thousand graduate and undergraduate students at Lumumba University, with the largest contingent from Africa. Each year, six thousand more apply for seven hundred available openings.<sup>17</sup> Several thousand other foreign students continue to study at other Soviet institutions.

Meanwhile, the presence and nature of whatever racism there is in the Soviet Union continues to raise important questions for the future of Soviet links with black Africa. In response, Soviet leaders mounted a concerted effort to erase the effects of the events of 1963. In 1965, a new campus was opened for Lumumba University in a different part of Moscow where there was no prior contact with foreigners. African student unions organized in accordance with nationality also became acceptable. African protests against indoctrination at the expense of their regular education have apparently ceased. It is not clear how many other measures were taken. Some success is evident in that there have been few incidents since 1965 suggesting significant African discontent in the Soviet Union. However, the foreign press continues periodically to detail some cases. For example, the *Washington Post's Potomac* magazine in January 1976 cited an occasion when African students in Kiev rioted after the Czech government withdrew a scholarship from a Czech woman when she married a Nigerian.<sup>18</sup>

Considering the relatively stable situation that has been achieved regarding what seemed to be such a volatile racial issue in 1963, it would appear that only part of what the Africans complained of could truly be attributable to racism. A large part of what occurred was a result of a clash between the expectations of the Africans and the Russians from the program. There was, of course, an element of cultural shock on both sides.<sup>19</sup> This was especially true of the Russian public, which had not been prepared in any way for the African presence and usually found the Africans inconsistent with their preconceptions. This may help explain why the Africans in the south of Russia, further away from the outside world, and among the non-European nationalities, encountered more hostility. Instead of the primitives they anticipated, the Russians encountered Africans who were often more sophisticated in Western dress and manner than they. Moreover, rather than being humble and grateful toward their Soviet hosts, some were arrogant, even belligerent in their insistence on being allowed the freedoms they thought appropriate. For their part, the Africans had already had some exposure to Europeans. However, they entered the Soviet Union with no sound concept of Soviet life. Taking at face value the Soviet promise that the program had no strings attached, they accepted benefits superior to those provided most Soviet citizens and then had the temerity to make even further demands.

It would seem that this circumstance was the basic cause of the antagonism which developed between the general Soviet public and the African students. The Soviet government might have helped matters by explaining to the public that not all of the students were on Russian stipends. But the government preferred to boast of its generosity. The material advantages afforded the Africans continue to

be a source of resentment among the Russians. That this economic factor can lead to racist attitudes is quite apparent when one considers that Russian women, as well as men, might be attracted to African students because of their larger stipends and access to foreign currencies and rare goods from abroad. Widespread resentment of a group easily identified by color can easily evolve into racist sentiment even though it may not have been racist at the outset. In any case, it would appear that such racism as exists in the Soviet Union is of the individual, rather than the systematic, variety. Racism has not been made official policy, as has historically been the case in many other countries.

However, as one African who studied for seven years in the Soviet Union observed, even the official Soviet stance may represent a dangerous flirtation with racism. In the Soviet news, entertainment media, and educational system, the oppression and misery of people of African descent around the world is highlighted. There is no coverage of great achievements by black Africans or black Americans who live in capitalist nations, for obvious ideological reasons. As a result, there is little opportunity for the Russian public to see evidence showing blacks to be their equals in intellectual ability.<sup>20</sup> It would seem then that the Soviet public is conditioned more toward pity than respect for their African brothers and sisters. Firmly cautioned against the evils of racism, the Soviet public may inadvertently be led to believe in a false inferiority. When the factor of skin color is part of this equation, racism is inescapable. Those inclined toward racial biases, buoyed by the usual skepticism the public has for official pronouncements, will find it all the easier to denigrate the darker races.

Andrea Lee, a black American who accompanied her husband during his ten months as an exchange student in Russia in 1978-79, elicited the following comment from an Ethiopian she met:

Most of my African classmates hate it here because of the climate, because we live here under miserable conditions, and because the Russian *narod*, the masses, call us black devils and spit at us in the streets.<sup>21</sup>

Lee was apparently not recognized as black by Russians because of her light complexion. She was, therefore, privy to the most candid expressions of racial attitudes by Russians. She observed several clear signs that strong negative racial feelings toward blacks as well as other non-Russian nationalities persist in Soviet society.<sup>22</sup>

The issue of racism is by no means merely academic for Soviet interests. It has particular significance owing to the rivalry between the USSR and China for influence in Africa.<sup>23</sup> That the Chinese are themselves colored enhances still further the appeal they already have in African eyes for being non-Western and former victims of Western colonialism. However, even the hint of Soviet racism would be

disastrous for Soviet objectives in the so-called Third World in general, and in American Negro communities in particular.

The resilience of the Soviet role in black Africa can be explained largely in terms of its diversity. As the years have passed, that role has evolved to combine diplomatic ties, trade, military training and supply, joint economic ventures (such as fishing and communications), and scholarship aid. It is not likely that failure could occur in all of these areas at once. This lesson was perhaps learned in the 1960s, when, in a number of instances, individual leaders backed by Moscow fell, and Soviet fortunes with them.<sup>24</sup> While the Kremlin still may err in choosing sides in civil conflicts, as in its backing of Joshua Nkomo over the victorious Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe, the consequences for its influence in an entire region will not be as great.

It is still too early to make a reliable assessment of Soviet achievements in black Africa. Nevertheless, a few observations concerning the pattern of developments may be instructive. In comparing the Soviet role in Africa to that in America, it seems apparent that the Kremlin's understanding of black Africa was, from the very beginning, much more sophisticated than its grasp of black America during the same period. Perhaps the most important reason for this was the greater direct contact between Russians and prominent leaders from the African Negro population than from the American.

However, this more sophisticated understanding of Africa has not led to greater certainty of Soviet success. There has been a high degree of unpredictability in the fate of Soviet efforts. The areas wherein the most effort was invested have not been those where the greatest success has been achieved; and success has often proved ephemeral. The initial Soviet choice to concentrate its critical attention on British and French colonial Africa was sound for still other reasons besides the vagaries of Russian foreign policy that have been mentioned earlier. These colonial areas had the highest degree of organized labor and a larger class of educated blacks. It was through these two channels (labor and education) that Comintern and its successors could best penetrate into Africa. However, nationalism has been so strong that it precludes dominant Soviet influence even in those emergent African states which espouse socialism, whether Leninist or some other type. They insist upon the right to develop an independent form of socialism, as characterized by Euro-communism, or by Algeria's pragmatic state capitalism. At the same time, the African socialist states see no inconsistency in borrowing their state model and material support from the East while simultaneously taking capital and technology from the West.<sup>25</sup>

Although some African states have maintained close ties with the Soviet Union, including long-term agreements, these relationships

have proven to be tenuous.<sup>26</sup> The sudden break in 1977 with Somalia is a case in point. This resulted, at least in part, from the resumption of the centuries-old courtship between Russia and Ethiopia, who still possesses some of the same allurements that drew the Russian tsars to her, the foremost being her strategic location. Also, reminiscent of Eastern Orthodoxy, there is again an ideological linkage: the new military regime in Ethiopia has proclaimed itself socialist, like its Russian ally.<sup>27</sup>

On the whole, the Soviet experience in black Africa has shown that the communist appeal is greatest to revolutionary movements before they assume power and head a state. This explains the continued Soviet influence in Angola and Mozambique and less Soviet prominence in more stable African states. Given the many causes of unrest on the continent, this also means that the prospects are very good for continued and successful Soviet involvement, especially surrounding the intransigent, racist Union of South Africa.<sup>28</sup> It is very likely that much of Africa will eventually adopt some form of socialism. It is equally improbable that any will adopt the official Soviet version of communism. The Africans view socialism as a useful means of organizing and unifying on some type of national scale. However, they insist upon using or not using it only as they see fit. They appear responsive to Leopold Senghor's admonition to stay close to their own cultural roots while borrowing from modern advances.<sup>29</sup> Future Soviet endeavors in black Africa will have to address this reality. There is indication that they already have begun to do so. In 1979 the new director of the Africa Institute, Anatoli Gromyko, counted over a dozen "socialist-oriented" states in Africa, but admitted that existing social and economic structures prevent their immediate transition to socialism.<sup>30</sup>