African Youth: The Target of Soviet African Policy *

By Roger E. Kanet

At the beginning of 1956, the Soviet Union had diplomatic relations with only one country in sub-Saharan Africa—Ethiopia—but by the end of 1966, twenty-five countries south of the Sahara had relations with the Soviets. This enormous increase in Soviet contacts with Africa has been the result of both the rise of independent African countries and a concerted effort on the part of the Soviets to increase their contacts and influence in Africa. According to Soviet writers, the goal for the new states of Africa is complete political and economic independence, which can be attained by the Africans only with the support and assistance of the Soviet Union and the other Communist countries. The Soviets have been attempting to cut Africa off from its ties with the West and to bring it into close relationship with the Communist states, in the hope of creating an Africa composed of Communist states. In implementing their policy, the Soviets have been acting on two levels—an upper level of official government relations and a lower one based on influencing promising elements among the populations of the African countries. First, there are formal diplomatic ties, state visits, contacts in the United Nations, and foreign trade and economic assistance. Secondly, there are contacts through various front organizations and cultural cooperation, including the training of African students in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.

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In many respects these two basic levels of Soviet policy seem to contradict one another, for the first calls for friendship and cooperation with existing African governments, while the second aims at the eventual overthrow or replacement of these governments and the establishment of Communist regimes. However, the two levels of policy are joined in the Soviet expectations of future developments in Africa. According to Soviet calculations, economic development, carried out by the progressive elements in the African countries, will complete the tasks of the national liberation movement and lay the groundwork for the future socialist revolution. The training of Africans as union leaders, student organization officials and scientists will both speed up the process of economic development and form a corps of Africans who will be dedicated to a real social revolution when the time is ripe.

Since Soviet policy toward Africa is based on expectations of future developments, it is understandable that the Soviets have placed great emphasis on the training of an African elite, as well as the development of cadres around which future Communist movements can be built. Because the leaders of Africa see education as one of the primary goals of their governments and as an absolute essential for the future development of their countries, the Soviet Union and other Communist countries have an opportunity to implement a policy based on the training of an elite for these countries. In the remainder of this article, we shall examine Communist training programs for the functionaries of African labor unions, youth and women's organizations and various other mass organizations and then shall look at the programs established for the education of a national elite of scientists, technicians and engineers. The former is based on the indoctrination of the future leaders of African mass organizations and aims at preparing a group of men and women who will eventually take over the leading roles in their countries. The second type of training places less emphasis on ideological training and has as its primary goal the creation of an intelli-
gentsia with attitudes favorable to the Soviet Union and to Communism.

The training of officials for underdeveloped countries is by no means a new phenomenon in the Soviet Union, for already in the 1920s the Communist University of the Toilers of the East was established in Tashkent for the training of students from Soviet Central Asia, Southeast Asia and Africa. Two other institutions for the preparation of revolutionary leaders were founded in the Soviet Union during the course of the first decade of Soviet rule—the Lenin University and the Sun Yat-sen University, but during the era of the great purges in the mid-thirties, when most of the faculty and students of these universities were arrested and/or executed, the schools were closed. Until the mid-fifties and the change in the Soviet approach to the developing countries, almost all Soviet training of foreign students was that of professional revolutionaries devoted to the aims of Communism.

Since the mid-fifties, the Soviets have expanded the concept of preparing cadres for future work in the developing countries. Although a small number of Communists from Africa are still being trained for revolutionary activity, the emphasis has been shifted to preparation of functionaries for non-Communist African organizations. By far the largest amount of this work is done among trade union officials from African unions, for the Soviets see the unions as a potential force for social transformation in Africa. Because of the important functions which the Communists hope the unions will play, they have placed great emphasis on the training of the officials who will set the future policies of these unions.

The first and most important of the trade-union schools for

officials from developing countries was founded in Budapest in 1953. Louis Saillant, the general secretary of the World Federation of Trade Unions, characterized the work of the school as a preparation for the class struggle.\(^2\) The students come from Asia, Africa and Latin America for three-month courses. From 1953 to 1955, over 140 union officials were trained there and in a course held in the summer of 1959 there were thirty-eight students from Africa. A list of the lectures held during each course gives some idea of the orientation of the whole training program:

1. *The history of colonialism*: its development and inevitable collapse, the birth of the working class;
2. *The struggle for liberation*: the national liberation movement, the role of the working class and the trade unions;
3. *The economic and social problems of the new developing countries*;
4. *The role of the trade unions and the forms of their organization*: the democratic trade union, its methods of work and leadership;
5. *Unity*: prerequisites for the success of the struggle of the working class;
6. *The meaning, themes and types of propaganda in the struggle of the working class*;
7. *Different types of union action*: the role of the trade unions in the organization of the struggle of the workers for the attainment of their desires;
8. *The role of the trade unions in the defense of social security, within the bounds of present labor rights*;
9. *The position of the farm worker and the small farmer*: the organization of the masses of farm workers, the close ties between the working class and the small farmer;
10. *Means for the defense and guarantee of the rights and freedoms of the trade unions*;
11. *The tasks of the trade unions in the struggle for peace and peaceful coexistence*;
12. *The historical necessity for the foundation and development of the WFTU*: its role in the recreation of unity, international solidarity, social progress, peace and national independence.\(^3\)

Besides the school in Budapest, there are numerous other training centers throughout Eastern Europe for African union officials.


officials. At the school that was opened in Prague in the summer of 1961, the course of lectures is composed of three series which deal with the Marxist-Leninist interpretation of history, society, colonialism and economic development.\(^4\) But, not only have the Communists set up schools in Europe to train the future leaders of African unions, youth organizations, and so forth, but they have even established training centers in Africa, where Communist instructors from Europe do much of the teaching. In 1959, the African trade union federation, U.G.T.A.N., established a workers' university in Dalaba, Guinea, with the assistance of the W.F.T.U. Diallo Seydou, the general secretary of U.G.T.A.N., recognized the close ties of his organization with the W.F.T.U. Speaking of the plans of the African unions, he stated in a speech in 1960:

    We will be successful. We are not alone. There are other forces in Africa and in the whole world which are struggling with us. Our brothers of the growing W.F.T.U. have shown us great assistance and we will never forget it. You know that even here in Dalaba there is a school for trade union cadres, which was set up by the U.G.T.A.N. with the fraternal assistance and cooperation of the W.F.T.U. Many of us have attended that school.\(^5\)

Since the construction of the school, the ties to the World Federation of Trade Unions have remained strong, for lecturers from schools in Eastern Europe have come to offer courses in Guinea. Besides the school in Dalaba, a workers' university was opened in Conakry in 1961, where students from all over Africa are trained as union officials. The faculty of this school is composed of German, French and English officials of the W.F.T.U., as well as of some Africans.\(^6\) In November 1961 a school for labor leaders was established in Mali by the National Union of the Workers of Mali. It is not clear exactly what assist-

\(^4\)Yaroslav Tehle, “Shkola dlia afrikanskikh profsoiushnikh aktivistov v Chechoslovakii,” Vsemirnoe profsoiuznoe dvizhenie, no. 11-12 (1960), pp. 75-76.


\(^6\)Müller, op. cit., p. 215.
ance the Union received from the Communists, but the entire emphasis of the school is on political and ideological training and on the necessity for democratic centralism in the labor movement—ideas very similar to those preached by the Communists. In an interview with a correspondent of the W.F.T.U. journal, in 1963, a number of graduates of the school outlined the tasks of the labor unions in Mali and in the rest of Africa in terms which agreed entirely with the general Soviet program for developing countries.⁷

A number of other training centers have been established in Africa with Communist assistance, like the ideological institutes in Ghana and Kenya—both closed in 1966—the school for political education which the Soviets have built for Mali and whose teachers were trained in the Soviet Union, and the National School of Journalism in Conakry which was built with the help of the Communist-run International Organization of Journalists in 1961.⁸

This brief and incomplete examination of the Communist training program for African cadres shows that the Soviet Union and the East European countries have been attempting to expand their training programs into every phase of African society. Some of the students who have come to Eastern Europe for training were already members of the Communist Party or were sympathetic to Communism. Many of them have been recruited at various World Youth Festivals or by Communists in Western Europe where they have been studying. Although a number of Africans have left Eastern European universities and training schools in disgust, the large majority of them has remained. Whether the Communists will be successful in indoctrinating the future leaders of Africa to a commitment to Com-


munist, or even to Soviet-type economic development, is a ques-
tion which will be answered only by future developments in
Africa. What is clear, however, is that the Communists are in-
vesting great efforts in their training program in the hope that
they will be successful in recruiting more African followers.

In the five years from 1961 to 1966, the number of university
students in the Soviet Union from African countries increased
more than six times to about four thousand. In the long run, this
recruitment and training of African students is probably the
most important part of Communist policy toward Africa, for
its purpose is to increase the number of Marxists and Marxist-
sympathizers in Africa. Unlike the university training which
Africans receive in the West, the training in Eastern Europe
and the Soviet Union is strongly colored by ideological and po-
litical considerations. The education which the foreign student
receives in the West includes no structured attempt to inculcate
in him a political philosophy, nor is he bombarded by a con-
tinuous barrage of propaganda. Although this aspect of training
in Communist countries has been strongly criticized by Africans
who were dissatisfied with the education they received there,
it has also had the desired effect on many students.9

The Soviet Union began its program of training students
from the developing countries in the mid-fifties, but it was
greatly expanded only after 1960. From forty-six students from
the developing countries in the academic year 1956-1957, the
number rose gradually to 929 in 1959-1960 and then expanded
to 1667 one year later. By the beginning of the academic year
1965-1966, the number of African students alone had reached
about four thousand.10 When compared with the number of

9See Michel Ayih, Ein Afrikaner in Moskau, Cologne, 1961, pp. 71-75.
10See U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, Office of
and W. Vance Grant. This is Bulletin, no. 4 (1965), p. 163; U.S. Department
of Health, Education and Welfare, International Education Relations, Educa-
tion Around the World, no. 44, Washington, 1960; Communist Affairs, 1, no.
6 (1963), 4.
Africans studying in the United States and Western Europe, the number in the Communist countries is not great. However, the purpose of the education is quite different, for the Communists make a concerted effort to convert Africans into Communists. Furthermore, the Communists in the Western countries also work energetically with foreign students, who are often lonesome and eager to find the friendship and companionship which Communist front organizations offer them. In both London and Paris Communist-dominated student organizations are very active among African students.

Communist training of an African elite is accomplished at the regular universities of the Soviet Union or Eastern Europe and at new universities and institutes established especially for students from the developing countries. There is also on-the-job technical training for engineers, technicians and other specialists at factories and plants in Europe or at the projects being constructed in Africa. Besides the interest in influencing the political views of African students, the Communists have another purpose in expanding their educational aid to African countries, which is closely connected to the emphasis on economic development as the proper path to socialism for Africa. It is clear that the Soviet Union cannot profess to encourage industrialization without assisting in the training of the personnel necessary to develop modern industrial-based economies. The Soviet leaders realize that there is a dearth of the trained personnel needed to manage and operate the vast projects and enterprises which are being constructed by the governments of Africa—often with Soviet or Eastern European assistance—to help develop their economies. Moreover, African students have been eager to grab the opportunity for a free education which is offered by the Communist countries. For example, there were more than five thousand applicants for two hundred scholarships which the Soviets offered to students from Kenya in 1964, and four years earlier, when the Soviet government announced

the opening of the Peoples’ Friendship University, it received more than forty-three thousand applications for the little more than five hundred places.\textsuperscript{12}

Until 1960, all academic training of foreign students was done at the regular universities of the various Communist countries, and the courses of training which the students followed were the same as those offered for Soviet, Polish, German or Czech students. Most Africans began their studies at a language school where political indoctrination was interspersed throughout the language instruction. According to one African student who left the Soviet Union in 1960, the students’ political views were tested during classroom discussions and the students were “sorted out into different categories according to the stages of their political rather than their academic ability.”\textsuperscript{13}

In 1960, the Soviet government established a special university for students from the developing countries. The reaction of some of the Africans who were then in the Soviet Union was quite unfavorable, for they saw this as a move to segregate further the African and Asian students from the Russians.\textsuperscript{14} The university, which opened in October 1960 and was renamed Lumumba University the next spring, had an initial enrollment of 597 students and, by 1966, the number had risen to about 3500—almost one-fourth from Africa. The University offers courses in six specialized fields: (1) education, (2) agriculture, (3) medicine, (4) physics, mathematics and natural sciences, (5) economics and law, and (6) history and philology. In an article explaining the purpose of the new university, the rector, S. Rumiantsev, stressed the fact that “the productive forces

\textsuperscript{12}\textit{Africa—Political, Social and Cultural}, I, no. 7 (1964), 177A. One reason for the large number of applications was the method the Soviets used to recruit students. Rather than going through foreign governments, as they now do for the most part, they placed advertisements in newspapers. See “Those Foreign Students,” \textit{East Europe}, XII, no. 3 (1963), 25.

\textsuperscript{13}Andrew Amar, \textit{A Student in Moscow}, London, 1961, p. 39.

\textsuperscript{14}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 26.
of society cannot develop, neither can popular gains be de-
defended from the aggressors without a national intelligentsia, an
intelligentsia possessing a good knowledge of modern science
and technology, an intelligentsia full of the spirit of genuine
patriotism." In other words, political training is just as impor-
tant as specialized training.

The Soviets have attempted to overcome some of the basic
problems which they faced in dealing with foreign students,
such as the lack of knowledge of Russian, and complaints about
obligatory ideological indoctrination. In a number of cultural
agreements with African countries, the Soviets have received
permission to set up Russian language courses in Africa for stu-
dents who will be traveling to the Soviet Union for further
study. To counteract accusations by numerous Africans that
they were being forced to take courses in Marxism-Leninism,
the Soviets attempted to present a new image and to initiate a
new style in the political education of the youth of the develop-
ing countries in Soviet universities. Khrushchev set the tone
of this change in a speech at the inaugural ceremonies of the
Friendship University on November 17, 1960, when he stated:

> Of course, we will not force any student to accept our views,
our ideology. A philosophy of life is an extremely voluntary matter.
If you wish to know my political convictions, I will not hide the fact
from you that I am a Communist and am deeply convinced that the
most progressive ideology is Marxism-Leninism. If any one of you
becomes convinced that you favor this ideology, we will not be
offended. However, we will not be grieved if you do not become
Communists . . . I repeat that, if anyone of you becomes, so to say,
sick with this 'illness' of the times—Communism—I beg you not
to blame it on us.\(^{16}\)

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\(^{15}\) S. Rumiantsev, "New Center of Modern Education and International
Brotherhood," *World Marxist Review*, no. 8 (1960), 86. See Jane King,
"L'Université de l'amitié des peuples Patrice Lumumba," *Tiers Monde*, V,
no. 17 (1964), 140. Of the 597 students who entered Lumumba University in
1960, 228 completed the course of studies in 1965—thirty-eight of these were
Africans. "Bolshikh uspekhov pervym vypustnikam Universiteta Druzhby."
VII, no. 7 (1965), 20.

Accordingly, courses on Marxism-Leninism are supposedly voluntary. However, since most subjects—especially those dealing with social and cultural life—are strongly influenced by ideology, the Soviets have decided merely to take a different approach to their attempts at introdoctrination. Trustworthy Soviet students are given the task of overseeing and influencing foreign students. In a number of Communist countries, student organizations for foreign students are now permitted, but they are closely controlled and used to influence foreign students. However, the changes have apparently not equaled the promise. In an article published in the *New York Times Magazine* in May 1965, Nicholas Nyangira, a Kenyan who had been studying in Baku, complained of the blatant indoctrination with which the Africans in Baku were presented:

Our main reason for discontent was the intensified Communist indoctrination. This turned into thorough brainwashing. The pressure exerted on us to join political movements was too much.

We knew that we needed education but we did not leave Kenya to go to the Soviet Union only to study Marxism-Leninism or revolutionary tactics. We were uncertain whether we had been chosen to learn or to be trained as Communists. Our aim is still to learn. Our problem is to find scholarships.

Institutes similar to the Lumumba Friendship University have been established in other Communist countries—e.g., the University of November 17, established in Prague in 1961. Here many of the courses are taught in English, French or Spanish, but the Czechoslovak government has also set up eight language schools for foreign students. There is a similar school—the Herder Institute in Leipzig—for foreign students in East Germany, and the Polish government plans to concentrate its students from Asia, Africa and Latin America in a single university.

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17Müller, op. cit., p. 242.


However, in spite of the numerous benefits which African students have received—especially the possibility of obtaining an education free of cost—many of them are unhappy and a large number have left the Soviet Union and other Communist countries before finishing their studies. One of the major complaints of the Africans has been that the Russians and other East Europeans are racists. Michel Ayih of Togo writes:

My disappointment concerning . . . racial equality, about which the susceptibility of a black student is the strongest, was as great as my other illusions. Instead of finding a country of unlimited human fraternity, I found myself in the heart of a world dominated by the most elementary and primitive racial reaction . . . . Before coming to Moscow I had lived in the West and I can vouch that I had never, by any means, found such systematic racial discrimination. This situation was so revolting that it led to numerous fights and brawls between blacks and whites, not only in Moscow, but also in Warsaw.20

Ayih indicates that one of the reasons for the hostility of some Russians was the fact that foreign students received much larger scholarships than did the Russians—in fact, more than four times as much. However, according to most Africans, the money did not cover everything, for the cost of books and winter clothing took up a very large percentage of the money.21

Another complaint of the Africans concerns the lack of freedom to choose the courses which they wish to take. Students who wanted to major in history or international affairs were told that it would be better for them to study medicine, and all were required, at least at the beginning of the “exchange program,”

20Michel Ayih-Dossey, “Introduction,” in Branko M. Lazitch, L’Afrique et les leçons de l’expérience communiste, Paris, 1961, p. 6. According to students who have been in the Soviet Union, Africans have been called “apes,” been made fun of because of their color, beaten up for dancing with Russian girls, and so forth. Ibid., pp. 10-11; Ayih, Ein Afrikaner in Moskau, pp. 103-114; Amar, A Student in Moscow, pp. 34-35; S. Omor Okullo, “A Negro’s Life in Russia—Beatings, Insults, Segregation,” U.S. News and World Report, XLIX, no. 5 (August 1, 1963), 59-60.

21Ayih, Ein Afrikaner in Moskau, pp. 134ff.
to take courses in Marxism-Leninism. However, the issue which caused the Soviets the most problems was the desire of the Africans for an African student organization. Even in 1958, when the first ten Africans in the Soviet Union attempted to found such an organization, they were first given a run-around and then refused permission to have their own organization. For the next two years the Africans struggled to have their student federation recognized, but after much argument, the association was forbidden once again. One thing that greatly angered the Africans was Soviet refusal to permit them to stage a peaceful demonstration before the French embassy to protest the French atomic-bomb tests in the Sahara, although on other occasions they had been required to demonstrate against American policy. They were finally told that they could not hold the demonstration because it might hinder the rapprochement between the U.S.S.R. and France and might lessen the chances for success of the impending visit of Khrushchev to France. In the aftermath of discussions and recriminations—including a letter which the leaders of the illegal African student organization sent to Khrushchev, outlining their complaints—three of the officers of the student organization were expelled from the country.

African discontent reached its climax in December 1963, after the death of a Ghanaian student, who the Africans maintained had been murdered because he planned to marry a Russian girl. A Ghanaian medical student who saw the body reported that it showed obvious signs of a struggle, although the official Soviet verdict stated that he had been drunk and had frozen to death in the snow. On December 18, 1963, a crowd of about five hundred African students staged a protest demonstration.

22 Ayih-Dossey, "Introduction," p. 10; "Deux années de lutte des étudiants africains à l'Université de Moscou," Est et Ouest, XIII (February 1,15, 1961), 7 and (February 16-28, 1961), 12.

23 Ayih, Ein Afrikaner in Moskau, pp. 69-84, 146-157. For the approximate text of the letter to Khrushchev see ibid., pp. 113-115.
in Red Square. In the course of the demonstration the Africans fought with Soviet police and a full-scale riot almost broke out. According to one account, no similar mass protest had occurred in the Soviet Union since the mid-twenties. Similar occurrences have taken place in other Communist countries. In Bulgaria, for example, African students and Bulgarian police clashed in the streets of Sofia on February 12, 1963, after the All-African Students' Union had been banned and its leaders arrested. The Ghana Times of February 14 compared the event with the riots at the University of Mississippi the previous fall and stated that Africans were "shocked and dismayed at Bulgaria's display of 'racial prejudice.'"

The number of Africans who have left the Soviet Union and other Communist countries is quite large. There are no exact statistics on the subject, but a West German newspaper reported that up to May 1964, 597 African students had left universities in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union to continue their studies in West Germany. Of this number 312 had arrived in West Germany in 1963. In April 1965, twenty-nine of the two hundred Kenyans who had arrived in the Soviet Union the previous fall left the country.

It is still far too early to estimate the success or failure of the Communist training programs for developing countries, since most of the first students who took advantage of the free ed-

24Africa Diary, IV (1964), pp. 1552-1555 and Keesing's Contemporary Archives, XIV (1963-64), 1989-A. The Morning Post of Lagos, which is sponsored by the Nigerian Federal government, stated that if the demonstrations had been over a Nigerian student, rather than a Ghanaian, the Soviets would have responded with slogans like "neocolonialist" and "lackeys of the imperialists." Cited in Africa Diary, IV (1964), 1554.


26Cited in Communist Affairs, I, no. 5 (1963), 11.


28Nyangira. "Africans Don't Go to Russia to Be Brainwashed," p. 64.
ucation offered them in the Communist countries have only recently returned to their homelands. It would be extremely interesting to follow the careers of the graduates of Communist universities after their return to their native countries. Two things are clear, however. First, the educational program has been far from a complete success, as shown by the dissatisfaction of so many Africans who have returned from Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union with bitter memories of their experiences there. On the other hand, the Communists have not had a problem in finding students willing to come to Europe for their studies—although many of them arrive without the basic requirements for entrance into a university program. By bringing these students to the Soviet Union, Poland or Czechoslovakia, the Communists are able to focus all the means of their propaganda apparatus on them, in the hope of obtaining converts to their cause who will return to Africa as leaders of the "progressive" forces or, at least, as individuals favorable to the implementation of the plans which the Communists have outlined for the development of African countries.