

Cohn, Helen D., SOVIET POLICY TOWARD BLACK AFRICA: THE FOCUS ON NATIONAL INTEGRATION. New York, Praeger, 1972. xvii, 316 p. \$17.50

The African political mind has remained an enigma to the Western scholar for quite a long time and apparently continues to be just that as Africanists from all corners of the world come up with conflicting and sometimes bewildering predictions and expectations about the political future of that "Dark Continent." The Soviet scholar, realizing that he is hopelessly late to the scene, arms himself with the ideological baggage of Marxism-Leninism and hopes to catch up with and even overtake his Western counterpart in this result-oriented analysis of the African polity.

In its traditional satellite role vis-a-vis the Soviet governmental and party behavior on the international scene, Soviet scholarship ransacked the archives of Marxism-Leninism and came up with the concepts of proletarian internationalism, the right of nations to self-determination, national democracy as a transitional coalition of all the anti-imperialist forces in a given society and, most of all, it even recommended the "Soviet formula" for the resolution of the nationality questions which confront most African states. One could have imagined the Soviet Union exclaiming "Eureka" in the 1960's on the question of how to understand the complexities of the African societies and more importantly on how to shape the future development of that continent.

Like all Marxist-Leninist "sciences" the goal of Soviet African studies was not just to identify the social laws which govern the development of that society, but also to attempt some form of political engineering as to the future of its political institutions. But as Dr. Helen Cohn correctly pointed out the Soviets, at least in their inner convictions, have realized that they are just as knowledgeable about Africa now as they were when they initially entered this race. But Soviet dogmatism, national ego, and the determination to sustain the public image of the Soviet Union as the friend of Africa have made it extremely difficult if not impossible for her to pull out entirely from Africa. After all a good communist revolutionary is one who knows when to launch a frontal attack and when to time a strategic retreat.

Dr. Cohn in this book has provided a well-research insight into

the Soviet strategy and tactics in Black Africa, a strategy which in the words of the author varied "from a positive assessment during most of the Khrushchev era to one characterized by pragmatism and flexibility." (p. X) This eight-chapter study begins with a survey of Soviet attitudes toward African nationalism as a weapon in the anti-imperial struggle. There is a continuous debate over the proper role played by Soviet scholarship in its relationship with Soviet official policy. Whereas some schools of thought would see Soviet scholarship as a subservient and docile instrument for the rationalization of Soviet governmental and party policy, others would tend to assert the independence of Soviet scholarly efforts from any forms of governmental control. In the opinion of Dr. Cohn "[t]he truth undoubtedly lies somewhere between these two positions. Thus, although one cannot credit Soviet Africanists with a major role in policy formulation, one can quite properly speak of their pivotal role in this process. At times, they provide theoretical elaborations for previously adopted policies, while at other times their work may spark a policy reappraisal..." (p. 4). One, of course, would agree with the existence of such a symbiotic relationship between Soviet scholarship and Soviet policy. Such a feedback relationship is to be observed not only in Soviet but also in American or British scholarship. But what makes Soviet scholarship what it is, is that it seeks to do nothing else but to rationalize Soviet government and party policy either retrospectively, or prospectively because it believes that no "science" can afford to be non-partisan. In this context one can speak of the Soviet African studies as a "fighting" science which honestly sees its *raison d'être* as the continuation of the "klassovaia bor'ba" by other means. If Stalin's definition of a nation is an acceptable one from the Soviet point of view, the author sees the Soviet effort to designate most societies in Africa as nations as a "circumvention of ideology" (p. 18). Whether or not this is circumvention or a qualitative development of Soviet communist ideology is hard to tell particularly in view of the fact that the ideology itself is an amorphous synthesis of conflicting developmental theories. On the one hand Lenin tells us that Marxism is irreconcilable with nationalism because "Marxism puts forward in place of any form of nationalism -- internationalism." But on the other hand he tells us that any socialism-oriented nationalism is a good thing. The author sees such an attitude as an "opportunistic...approach toward Third World nationalism." (p. 20).

The author's analysis of the political factors which motivated Soviet African studies, particularly in the early 1960's is a very illuminating one. One could not agree more with the author's position that both the two-camp formula adopted by Stalin and Khrushchev's "zone of peace" concept had one thing in common -- that both strategies were designed to best further the cause of Soviet foreign policy at different times.

In Chapter 3 the author addresses herself to yet another particularly disturbing aspect of Soviet African studies -- the slowness with which the Soviet Union realized the importance of the national integration problem in Africa. She attributes this to three factors (pp. 41-42) to which one may add a fourth factor -- the intellectual bankruptcy of Soviet communist ideology. This latter factor was particularly demonstrated during the Nigerian-Biafran confrontation -- a conflict for the Soviet communist theoreticians had no official name: it was to them neither an international war (since it was not being fought between two nations), nor was it a civil war (since the essential class elements of a classical civil war were lacking here), nor was it an international civil war. They did not venture to call it an inter-tribal war officially. The Soviet Union, however, went ahead and fought on the federal side for reasons which have been very well presented by Dr. Cohn on pp. 35-36, 167-171.

Soviet attitude toward the possible solutions to African centrifugalism through such processes like national education, language, culture, the re-demarcation of African national boundaries, regulations of the powers of the tribal chiefs and the cooperation of their ethnic leaders, the re-organization of the political parties and other social organizations are also examined by the author. The prospects of a non-capitalist path of development for Africa is the object of inquiry in Chapter 6 while Chapter 7 appraises the potential impact of the various social strata in a traditional African society on this development.

Dr. Cohn, has in my mind, produced a highly useful research tool for anybody who is interested in the study of Soviet behavior in Black Africa. The materials used are very adequate and the scope of the problems that she covered is sufficiently broad. The work, however, is not without its flaws. The impression one gets from reading the entire work is that Soviet ideological postulates for Africa were suddenly concocted in the 1960's as a result of the crisis situation which resulted from the massive de-colonization of that Continent. An inquiry into the historical

origins of Marxist-Leninist ideological concern for the plight of colonial peoples should have been attempted here. Most students of Marxism-Leninism would agree that communist ideological concern for the backward nations and the oppressed nations of the world did not crystallize just in the 1960's. Secondly, more emphasis ought to have been placed on the second (and perhaps the more important) goal of the Soviet African Studies Program which is to exert some crucial impact on the future development of Black Africa. A Soviet social scientist does not just study a phenomenon for the sake of it, but rather studies it with the intention of changing the original status of that object. This difference between the "partiinost" of the Soviet African Studies Program and the "bourgeois intellectualism" of its Western counterpart should not be underestimated. These and other errors of emphasis do not, however, in any way derogate from the brilliance of this study.

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