

Scholarship and Propaganda

By Christopher Bird

IN 1959 HAILE SELASSIE visited the Soviet Union. From the moment he stepped from the plane in Moscow until the time of his departure, there was available to him one of several guides who could speak the Emperor's native language, Amharic. No doubt the Negus was impressed.

Equally impressed was the well-known Africanist Thomas Hodgkin who, during a visit to Leningrad University in 1958, met Soviet scholars engrossed in translating mediaeval Arabic and Hausa texts into Russian.¹ Not only had these materials never been translated into a Western language, but the documents, relating to the early history of Sudanese Africa, were not available in London or Paris.

Examples such as these are clear evidence of the effectiveness and the serious nature of the training programs developed in recent years by the Soviets in the field of African studies. For three decades after the Bolshevik Revolution the USSR showed little interest in Africa, from which it remained almost completely isolated until after World War II. Since the emergence of the post-war African independence movements, however, and especially since the first grants of independence to former British and French possessions in the 1950's, Moscow has sought actively to exert its influence on the African continent, and its political and economic commitments there have been growing at a rapid rate. With these new extensive engagements there arose the need for a great variety of specialists in African languages, culture, economics, and other related fields.

The development of a system of modern training institutions for specialists in an area as vast and heterogeneous as Africa requires a body of knowledge founded on a long tradition of study and the effort of several generations. It is a task that cannot be accomplished overnight or even in a few years. The Soviets may still be far

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from having established such a training base, especially one that would be adequate to their political ambitions in Africa, but they have already shown considerable progress. For this success they owe a large debt of gratitude to the old tradition of Russian interest and exploration in Africa, which began long before the advent of Soviet power, and on which contemporary Soviet Africanists have been able to draw.

Early Contacts

In the almost five hundred years since the dawn of the modern era, a very respectable number of Russian explorers, adventurers, priests, merchants, and diplomats have travelled to Africa and established political and cultural connections there. An early manuscript, *The Wanderings of the Holy Monk Varsonofii to the Holy City of Jerusalem in 1456 and 1461-62* (reprinted in Moscow in 1896), contains an account of a trip by Varsonofii and the merchant Vassily to Egypt, where the two Russians stayed over a month.² Both set down their impressions of Cairo, one concentrating on the city's churches and the other on its commercial life. Not long thereafter another Russian, Nikitin, visited West Africa, landing in the 1470's on the Somalian peninsula.

It was mainly Egypt and North Africa, however, that continued to draw Russian adventurers. Even their earliest diaries and travel notes contain a wide variety of observations on subjects such as animal husbandry, farming methods, and political affairs. One unusually enterprising 18th-century Russian traveller, Vasily Gri-

¹ Thomas Hodgkin, "Soviet Africanists," *West Africa*, October 3, 10 and 17, 1959.

² Unless otherwise indicated, the following historical account is drawn from M. V. Rait, "Russkie puteshestvenniki i uchenie v Afrike 15-nachale 20 vv." (Russian Travellers and Scientists in Africa in the 15th to early 20th centuries), *Vestnik istorii mirovoi kultury*, No. 2, 1960, pp. 98-109. For Russian political involvement in Africa during Tsarist times, see also Sergius Yakobson, "Russia and Africa," II, *Slavonic and East European Review*, Vol. XIX, 1939-40, pp. 158-174.

gorevich Barskii-Plaka-Albov, wandered over Europe and the Near East for almost twenty-five years, visiting Egypt for several extended periods. After his return, he wrote a large volume of commentaries on the geography, economics and ethnography of the areas he had visited. His book was published in 1778 in Saint Petersburg under the title *Travel on Foot to the Holy Places of Europe, Asia and Africa, Undertaken in 1723 and Terminated in 1747*. About a generation later, in 1776-77, a Russian naval officer named Kokovtsev explored the Atlas Mountains of North Africa, and later published two valuable books on the Algeria and Tunisia of his time.

In the 19th and 20th centuries the numbers of Russians visiting Africa increased rapidly. The orientalist O. I. Senkovsky went up the Nile to Nubia in 1820. He was followed in 1834-35 by A. S. Norov, who later was to become Russian Minister of Education. In the 1840's Russian medical doctors were sent to Egypt to study typhus epidemics. In 1847, a team of Russian engineers, invited by the Egyptian ruler Mohammed Ali, traveled to Upper Egypt to survey possibilities for gold mining operations there. One group, under the leadership of the engineer E. P. Kovalevskii penetrated as far as the Ethiopian border, exploring the course of the Tumat River on the left bank of the Blue Nile. In his books Kovalevskii later defended the equality of the black and white races and made interesting proposals for Russian trade with Egypt and Ethiopia. By the middle of the century the stream of visitors from Russia widened further. Supported by the Russian Geographical Society, scientists and explorers made studies of the geological formations of the Little Atlas mountains and of the ethnography and the fauna and flora of Algeria. N. N. Miklukho-Maklai, who later became famous as a descriptive ethnologist of Melanesia and for whom the USSR Academy of Sciences' Institute of Ethnography is named, visited Morocco and the Canary Islands.

But most significant among these Russian exploits, and certainly most important to an understanding of Soviet activity in Africa today, are the Russians' early contacts with Ethiopia. Their interest in that country was stimulated by two considerations: (1) the desire to prevent the extension of Italian, French and British power into Ethiopia—a region considered by the Russians as part of the Near East, and (2) an eagerness to establish relations between the Ethiopian clergy and the Russian Orthodox Church. (In the 1850's the Archimandrite Porfiry Uspensky and Bishop Kiril of the Russian church had proposed sending a religious mission to Ethiopia, but nothing came of this. By the 1880's, however, contact between the two churches was well established.)

The first major attempt to bring Russian influence to Ethiopia was made by the Cossack Ashinov, acting, apparently, on behalf of certain mercantile circles in Nizhny Novgorod who were interested in developing trade with Ethiopia and other African countries. He made several journeys to Ethiopia between 1886 and 1889, the last one of which ended disastrously. Ashinov had put his party of 174 people, including representatives of the Russian clergy, into the abandoned Italian Fort Sagallo, which he renamed New Moscow. Shortly thereafter the French government, worried lest a Russian settlement be permanently installed in an area of major interest to France, instructed French naval authorities to demand evacuation of the fort. Ashinov refused to comply with the request, and on February 18, 1889, the fort was shelled by a French cruiser. Several women and children were killed and many persons wounded. Ashinov and the survivors were then taken by the French to Cairo and returned to Russia.³

One member of Ashinov's group, however, a certain Mashkov, evaded capture and penetrated into the interior of Ethiopia. There, at Entoto, the old Ethiopian capital near Addis Ababa, he met the Negus Menelik. On his second trip to Ethiopia, in 1891, Mashkov was again received by the Negus, who this time gave him a letter to the Tsar requesting that a Russian artillery officer be sent to the African kingdom to "train Ethiopians in the use of arms." The Tsar sent his man, and the first precedent for Russian military and technical aid to Africa was established.

Several years later a geographical expedition was organized. The group, lead by the Russian explorer Alexander Eliseev, arrived in Ethiopia in 1895, and included a retired Tsarist officer, Nikolai Leontiev. One of the important results of this mission was the establishment that year of diplomatic relations between Russia and Ethiopia. After the outbreak of the Italian-Ethiopian war a year later, Leontiev became a military advisor to the Negus and subsequently served for a while as a provincial governor in Ethiopia.

The mounting contacts between the two countries stimulated an awareness of Ethiopian affairs in Russia and, especially after the Ethiopian victory at Adua in March 1896, a sympathy for their struggle against the Italians. The product of this sentiment was the dispatch in 1898 of a Russian field hospital to Addis Ababa which,

³ M. V. Rait, "Russkie ekspeditsii v Efiopii v seredine XIX-nachale XX vv. i ikh etnograficheskie materialy" (Russian Expeditions to Ethiopia from the middle of the 19th to the start of the 20th centuries and their ethnographic materials), *Afrikanskii etnograficheskii sbornik*, Trudy Instituta Etnografii Akademii Nauk SSSR, Moscow 1956, pp. 220-281.

again with Russian aid, was later built up into a permanent institution. The hospital was abandoned in 1918, but in 1947, on the invitation of Emperor Haile Selassie, the Soviets rebuilt it into a modern 200-bed medical facility. It is run and staffed by the Soviet Red Cross and Red Crescent Society to this day.

With the arrival of the 20th century, Russian explorations in Ethiopia—as well as elsewhere in Africa—expanded in scope and numbers. Russian geologists, ethnographers, zoologists and botanists now ventured farther afield, and every time an expedition returned home, new ethnographic material was added to museums in St. Petersburg and in Moscow, and new volumes of diaries and scientific observation appeared in print. A tradition of interest in Africa as well as a body of knowledge about the continent was thus built up in Russia, which after the revolution served the Soviets as an indispensable springboard for the launching of their own African studies program.

Africanist Training and Research Centers

The earliest attempts to organize African studies in the Soviet Union began in 1929 when a special African section was established at the Orientological Institute of Leningrad University. This small section has since grown into an independent Department of African Studies and one of the two principal Africanist centers in the USSR. The other, newer center, is the African Institute of the USSR Academy of Sciences in Moscow, established in 1960 under the direction of I. I. Potekhin, the top Soviet specialist on Africa. A brief account of the history of these two organizations will help illustrate the Soviet effort to develop a corps of Marxist Africanists.

Before World War II, instruction in the African field was confined to the Orientological Institute at Leningrad where in 1929 the first course in an African language—Swahili—was introduced by Professor D. A. Olderogge.⁴ Unfortunately, however, the major effort of his African studies section was concentrated on the political scene, with rather ineffective results. In the early 1930's the section was closed and only some of its activities were transferred to the Leningrad Institute of History, Philosophy and Linguistics (LIFLI) where a Department of Semitic Languages and Literatures had been opened under A. P. Riftin.

Meanwhile, Olderogge, Riftin and N. V. Yushmanov, an Africanist specializing in Semitic-Hamitic languages,

⁴ The data on the development of Africanist studies at Leningrad University are based on *Uchenye zapiski Leningradskovo Gosudarstvennovo Universiteta* (Scholarly Communications of Leningrad State University), No. 296, 1960, p. 123 ff.

had written a study explaining the need for better training facilities in the field of African languages. As a result, two cycles of study were organized at Leningrad University in 1934/35: one in Bantu languages, in which Swahili, Zulu and several other disciplines were offered, and the other in Semitic-Hamitic languages, offering courses in Hausa, Arabic and Amharic, as well as a general course in comparative African linguistics. Of the first student group to graduate under this program in 1939, three men and two women completed the Bantu cycle and one man and two women finished the Hamitic cycle. These were the first Africanists trained in the Soviet Union.

DURING WORLD WAR II Leningrad University was shut down, but rebuilding of the program began again in 1945. At the present time about 35 courses in Africanistics are being offered at Leningrad. The program is divided into four areas of specialization: (1) Bantu Languages and Literature, (2) Amharic Language, (3) Hausa Language, and (4) History of Africa.⁵

The expansion of the African studies program has been accomplished in the main during the past seven years.⁶ It was stimulated primarily by the Soviet leadership itself which, having decided on massive political and economic engagement in the newly rising countries of Black Africa, realized that it lacked adequately trained personnel to put the program into effect. In May 1955 the complaint was voiced in a leading editorial of the party's authoritative journal, *Kommunist*:

One should note that on the whole studies of African countries are thus far quite inadequately organized. The small cadres of Africanists are scattered. The countries of the African continent are being studied basically only in the Institute of Ethnography of the USSR Academy of Sciences. . . . The study of the history, economics and culture of the African peoples . . . and the unmasking of colonial policies of the imperialists in Africa is one of the most important tasks of Soviet orientology.⁷

⁵ In addition to Leningrad University, several other Soviet institutions of higher learning now offer course work in African studies. These include the universities of Moscow, Odessa, Kiev, Kharkov, Tbilisi and Simferopol. See T. P. Melady & John A. Bekler, "The Soviet Cultural Offensive in Africa," *American Mercury*, February, 1960.

⁶ For additional information on the Soviet training program in the African field, see Mary Holdsworth, *African Studies in the USSR*, St. Anthony's Papers, No. 10, Southern Illinois University Press, 1961, pp. 89-101. Needless to say, the Soviets still have far to go to catch up with the academic resources of Western Africanist institutions. Indeed, it would not be very surprising if in the near future the Soviets tried to exploit them for the training of their own students.

⁷ *Kommunist*, No. 8, May 1955, p. 77.

The following year a conference was called by the Institute of Ethnography to develop a coordinated program of scientific research in the African field, in which the Institute of World Economics and International Relations was to take a prominent role. Nevertheless, this plan proved unsatisfactory, and in 1960 an African Institute was organized in the Academy under the direction of I. I. Potekhin. The Institute is divided into four departments—history, linguistics, culture, and contemporary problems—but the six-year plan of study (1960-65), adopted at the first session of the Institute's Learned Council, makes it plain that most of the work will be devoted to historical studies.⁸ Special attention is to be paid to the history of the nations of the Congo basin, the Arab connection with East Africa from the 10th to the 18th century, the history of the Sudan Republic, and contemporary African history.

Other special themes will be taken up in the course of the six-year plan. A large group of workers will be studying colonialism and its history from the 19th century to the present, with particular attention paid to the Africans' "struggle against imperialistic expansion." The Zulu wars will be studied and African resistance to French colonial penetration in the 19th century. Other study projects will concentrate on economic development in the new African states and the socio-economic processes in African society; the peasant traditions, the agrar-

⁸ N. R. Ismagilova, "Obsuzhdenie plana nauchno-issledovatel'skoi raboty Instituta Afriki AN SSSR" (Evaluation of the Scientific Research Work Plan of the African Institute of the USSR Academy of Sciences), *Voprosy istorii*, No. 10, 1960, pp. 144-46.

. . . many institutes and scholars do not participate in solving the most important practical problems of the building of communism and occupy themselves with abstract themes and, in fact, separate themselves from life. . . . The work of Soviet Orientologists is still far from satisfying the demands which present-day life sets before them. . . . It is a matter of honor for our orientalists that they should produce works . . . which would promote a further creative elaboration of questions connected with the foreign policy of the Soviet Union in relation to the countries of the East. . . . Orientologists-Africanists in Moscow, Leningrad and the union republics are to intensify their activities in the study of the varied and complicated problems relating to African history, ethnography, economics and philology. . . .

—Editorial, *Problemy vostokovedeniia*, No. 1, 1959.

ian question, the town populations of tropical Africa, the condition of the workers, and the working class movement. Finally, a special effort will be made to study the ethnic problems of Africa, so as to lay the basis for a "correct nationality policy" for that continent.

The Institute plans to maintain close links with other Soviet institutions conducting related work in the fields of the social sciences, biology, geology and agriculture. But, most important of all, it intends to support all phases of its work by sponsoring field trips to Africa by individual scholars as well as complex scientific expeditions. Already candidates for advanced degrees are given the opportunity to make short survey trips to Africa. Soviet Africanists are evidently well aware that only through first-hand observations can they avoid the many errors of judgment to which they had been led in the past by ideological assumptions unsupported by the facts of African life.

Soviet Approach to African History

The stress put on historical studies at the African Institute is in consonance with the specific political orientation of Soviet Africanology. Its main task is to attack Western colonialism, to denounce "neo-colonialism" (*i.e.*, any economic and political relationships between the West and the newly independent African states), and to show the past of African nations in a new and more glamorous light by rewriting the work of Western "bourgeois" historians.

The first theme is developed by emphasizing that African progress was extremely slow during the period of Western tutelage. Under the heading "neo-colonialism," any form of Western economic aid and technical assistance,⁹ as well as all military and political ties with the West, are attacked as imperialist schemes detrimental to African interests. Unlike the first two themes, which underlie Soviet propaganda in all parts of the underdeveloped world, the third theme is being applied only to Africa.

Soviet Africanists maintain that Western scholarship on Africa has been downgrading African history by virtually limiting it to the period beginning with the establishment of colonial rule and ignoring such seats of early civilization in Africa as the Not River valley in Northern Nigeria (during the first millenium B.C.), as well as the history of Nubia, Maroe, Axum, Ghana, Mali, Imverena, Angola, Songhai, Monomopatar, Bornu,

⁹ See statement by V. A. Sergeev, representative of the USSR at the first session of the United Nations Committee for Industrial Development (March 29, 1961), USSR Mission to the U.N., Document No. 15/16.

Kanem, Kongo, Benin, and the Hausa and Yoruba governments. Soviet historiography is to bring back to light the accomplishments of the African past and thus give the Africans a new sense of pride in their countries and a new faith in their future.

Few will, of course, dispute that early African history has suffered from neglect—in the West, in the USSR and in Africa itself.¹⁰ But the Soviet allegation that Western historiographers have been “trying to hide” the African past is obviously contrived, and nowhere else is this falsehood more clearly exposed than in the work of the Soviet Africanists themselves, who even in their more recent articles on pre-colonial African history feel invariably obliged to refer to sources published by Western scholars.¹¹ By imputing to Western writers a willful black-out of Africa’s early history, the Soviet propagandists are merely trying to turn to their own political advantage the legitimate dismay of many thoughtful Africans over the ignorance of much of Africa’s pre-colonial history.¹²

What is more, the products of Soviet research are unlikely to reflect in an unbiased manner the complexities of African social, cultural and economic conditions, which under the best of circumstances are so extraordinarily difficult to express in the vocabulary related to Western (and Soviet) experience. The African Institute’s six-year plan makes explicit the tendentious nature of Soviet Africanology, and it is difficult to see how the Moscow Africanists can avoid dissolving their findings in the deceiving simplicities of Marxian dialectics. This conclusion is further reinforced by an interview given recently to an American reporter, Marvin L. Kalb, by I. I. Potekhin, the head of the Institute. Said Dr. Potekhin:

People thought Africa had no history before the imperialists arrived merely because Africa had no written language south of the Sahara. They thought Africa was inhabited by primitive, bloodthirsty savages. . . . This was the view of Africa propagated by your bourgeois historians. This is not our view. We are going to uncover the truth.

¹⁰ The political reawakening of Africa in the postwar period dramatically revitalized African scholarship in the West. This is attested not only by the many new books about Africa published in recent years but also by the appearance of new scholarly periodicals in the field. The latest addition is the *Journal of African History*, published quarterly by Cambridge University Press.

¹¹ See, e.g., G. G. Diligenskii, “Severo afrikanskie goroda v IV veke” (North African Towns in the Fourth Century), *Vestnik drevnei istorii*, No. 3, 1959, pp. 74-100.

¹² Cf. the speeches before the United Nations General Assembly by the delegate from Mali, Mr. Aw, and the delegate from Liberia, Mr. Dosamu-Johnson (United Nations General Assembly, Provisional Document A/pv. 931, Dec. 1, 1960).

“Will this truth be explained in terms of Marxism-Leninism?” he was asked.

There is no other truth . . . and I can assure you that no one working in this Institute has any other truth. . . . There is no other truth, and it is within this framework that we shall write the history of Africa. The falsifiers and distorters are finished. Their work is over; now the time has come for the only truth.¹³

Publishing Activity

One of the basic means used by newly developing countries to forge ahead quickly in science and technology is the “leapfrog” method—i.e., a quick acquisition and assimilation of knowledge developed over a long period of time elsewhere. The Soviets have thus successfully leapfrogged over several decades of development in a number of fields, and they are now using the same method, implemented through an intensive translation program, in the African field.

As early as 1941, they published in Russian W. Fitzgerald’s handbook, *Africa, A Social, Economic and Political Geography of its Major Regions*. Later, by translating such classic works as *Afrique Septentrionale et Occidentale* by Professor A. Bernard, and *Afrique Equatoriale, Orientale et Australe* by Professor F. Maurette, they supplied their Africanist students with basic materials otherwise unavailable in the USSR.

This kind of work has become even more intensive in recent years. In 1959, for instance, R. J. Harrison Church’s *West Africa, A Study of the Environment and Man’s Use of It* and Robert Capot-Rey’s *Le Sahara Français* were published in Russian. Several works on individual countries were also selected for translation. *Le Maroc, Bilan d’une Colonization*, by A. Ayche, which appeared in Paris in 1956, was available to Russian readers in 1958, as was Charles Issawi’s *Egypt at Mid-Century*, which had been published in English in 1954.¹⁴

A number of strictly technical Western publications relating to Africa have also been translated into Russian. The publishing house of the Soviet shipping industry, to cite one example, brought out a Russian edition of the African section of *Ports of the World*, a mariners’ friend of long standing published in England. If anyone had any doubts in 1957 whether Soviet ships would soon be

¹³ *The Reporter*, April 13, 1961, p. 37.

¹⁴ It will be interesting to see whether such other fundamental works as *Portuguese Africa* by James Duffy, *Nigeria-Background to Nationalism* by James S. Coleman, *Tropical Africa* by George Kimble, *Nationalism in Colonial Africa* by Thomas Hodgkin, *French West Africa* by Virginia Thompson and Richard Adloff, and *The Politics of Inequality* by Gwendolyn Carter will also be included in the Soviet translation program.

visiting tropical African ports in quantity, he could have well asked himself why such a specialized handbook would need to be published in 4,000 copies.

Similarly, translations of Western travelogues are now being offered in increasing numbers to the Soviet public. In 1957, for instance, the book *Zwischen Rif und Draa*, written in 1955 by the German geographer Horst Mensching, came out in Russian, despite the complaint in the Russian preface that "the author . . . avoids making any critical comments about the French and Spanish colonialists who at that time still ruled in Morocco."

This year the translation process will be partially reversed, for the Soviets will be translating into English what they consider their capital work on Africa and the first Marxist treatment of the subject: *Narody Afriki* (Peoples of Africa), a volume edited by I. I. Potekhin and Professor Olderogge. The translation will undoubtedly become a basic text for the several hundred African students studying in the Soviet Union and other Communist countries.¹⁵

Increased publishing activity is notable also in the fields of poetry, fiction and popular informative literature. Translations into Russian of the works of African writers and poets are appearing with increasing frequency, and lately African themes have found their way into several works of Soviet fiction. Popular pamphlets on various parts of Africa are proliferating rapidly.

Within the same context mention should be made of specialized periodical literature. Here, too, the ever-widening Soviet interest in Africa is evident. A review of Soviet periodicals received in the U. S. Library of Congress for 1950 reveals that less than 100 articles about Africa appeared during that year in not more than 40 journals. By 1956, some 400 such articles were published in about 80 journals. In 1960, approximately 140 periodicals carried more than two-and-one-half times the number of titles published in 1956. It is significant that in the category of academic and professional journals, articles relating to Africa are no longer limited to periodicals in the social science fields and international relations. For the first time, articles devoted to African problems have begun to appear also in magazines specializing in the natural sciences and engineering. Thus, *Ekonomika Selskovo Khoziaistva* has published a piece on Tunisian agriculture.¹⁶ The soils of Central Africa are treated in *Poch ovedenie*.¹⁷ Oceanological investigations, undertaken in 1958 near the mouths of the Niger and Congo rivers, have been reported in detail in the bulletin of the

¹⁵ According to reliable estimates, some 1500 students from about 25 different African countries studied in the Soviet bloc during 1960-61.

¹⁶ No. 31, July 1960, pp. 120-22.

¹⁷ No. 6, June 1961, pp. 19-25.

Baltic Oceanographic Institute.¹⁸ Similar examples can be found in journals specializing in mining, geology, construction, microbiology, health, nutrition and others.

Organs of Popular Agitation

In addition to scholarly and professional publications, magazines of a more popular nature also give increasing attention to African reporting. Chief among these is *Afrika i Azia Sevodnia*, a didactic and propagandistic journal put out by the Academy of Sciences. In this manner the results of basic Soviet research in the African field receive supplementary use in political agitation programs.

Much of this kind of material finds an outlet in the Association for Friendship with African Peoples, a propaganda organization set up in Moscow in 1959. The membership of the Association includes a wide spectrum of personalities, from the Rector of Turkmen State University and many prominent writers and artists to Soviet Heroes of Socialist Labor, and even institutional members such as the Armenian University, the Georgian Geographical Society, the Institute of Ethnography of the Academy of Sciences, the Moscow Agricultural Academy and a number of factories and collective farms. The association has been active in organizing lectures on African subjects; there has been a lecture by I. I. Potekhin, an evening devoted to African poetry, and evenings given to such themes as "Soviet-Ethiopian friendship" and "friendship with the peoples of Uganda." It also endeavors to indoctrinate Africans about the virtues of Soviet life and culture, with special emphasis on such traditional Communist propaganda subjects as the condition of non-Russian nationalities and Soviet industrialization.

In short, the Association (together with the Soviet-African Solidarity Committee, a sister organization somewhat more limited in scope) is an integral part of the widely-based, centrally directed Soviet program to develop close relations between the USSR and the newly emerging states of Africa, and to open as wide as possible the doors to Soviet influence on that continent. If one may make a parallel in military terms, then the Association in its cultural and agitational activities in Soviet cities—corresponding to the activities of the Soviet cultural missions in Africa—represents the foot soldiers in this African campaign; the training programs at Lenin-grad University and other institutions are the war colleges; the Moscow African Institute is the general staff; and I. I. Potekhin is its chief. It is a seriously conceived campaign, and no one need doubt its political goal.

¹⁸ No. 5, 1958, pp. 91-99.

An End to Concentration Camps?

By Paul Barton

SINCE STALIN'S DEATH the Soviet leadership has made no attempt to deny the existence of an enormous network of concentration camps in the USSR during his rule. On the contrary, the leadership has itself implicitly admitted that the so-called "corrective labor" camps should be removed. When it comes to hard facts, however, very little official information has been given out either about the past infamies of the camp system or about the alleged reform efforts of the last decade.

The recent 22nd CPSU Congress was illustrative in this respect. In the sweeping tide of Khrushchev's renewed attack on Stalin and Stalinism, dozens of top party officials and lesser delegates took the floor to denounce the terroristic excesses of their late master and to call some of his crimes by their right names. Yet while numerous references were made to Stalin's methods of arbitrary arrest and condemnation, and lurid details revealed concerning the execution of certain better-known victims, virtually nothing was said in all of these tirades about the fate of the millions who ended up in the concentration camps. Perhaps epitomizing this "blind spot" at the Congress was a rather pathetic speech by an old woman who had spent some 19 years in prison and in the camps: while she roused tumultuous applause by describing her daily "conversations" with the spirit of Lenin, she said never a word about the lot of the human beings in the camps.¹

Throughout the lengthy Congress, moreover, not so much as a hint was heard of what had become of the concentration camps. Among the speakers were regional party secretaries in whose jurisdictions vast camp complexes have been located (such as Karaganda in Kazakh-

stan and Kolyma in the Far East); while these men could have revealed the present situation of the camps, they preferred to censure the "consequences of the cult of personality" *in abstracto*.²

The general policy of silence concerning the camps is perhaps not so surprising if one bears in mind the major role they were assigned in Stalinist society. Never were they conceived of simply as prisons for recalcitrant individuals. Stalin made them part of his effort to remold the Soviet social structure by eliminating whole categories of people from the general community. At the same time, the exploitation of the huge camp populace through forced labor—officially termed "socially useful" work—became an important economic function in the building of Soviet society: under conditions of indescribable hardship, prisoners were forced to participate in the construction of navigable canals, power stations, roads, and railways; in the development of mines; and in various types of industrial production. Still other purposes at which the camps were aimed were the colonization of distant regions and the Russification of national minorities deported from their home areas *en masse*.

In short, the concentration camp system was made a permanent institutional feature of Soviet society. It would be hard for Stalin's successors to dispense with it even if that were their intent. Still, it is fair to inquire whether progress has been made toward the declared aim of eliminating the "corrective labor" camps, and to question just how sincere this aim is in view of various contradictory developments that have come to light.

Despite the relative dearth of official information in this area, certain avenues of investigation have been possible. In the first four years after Stalin's death, a valuable source of information was the testimony of a number of foreign prisoners released from Soviet camps and permitted to return to their own countries. These repatriates

¹ Speech by D. A. Lazurkina, reported in *Pravda*, Oct. 31, 1961.

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² Speeches in *ibid.*, Oct. 25 and 31, 1961.