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<https://doi.org/10.36906/2311-4444/22-2/02>*Roland Y.J., Martynova E.P.***SOVIET SOCIALISM VS AFRICAN SOCIALISM:
PROMOTION OF SOCIALIST IDEAS IN THE AFRICAN STATES
IN THE 1960-1970S***Роланд Я.Ж., Мартынова Е.П.***СОВЕТСКИЙ СОЦИАЛИЗМ VS АФРИКАНСКИЙ СОЦИАЛИЗМ:
ПРОДВИЖЕНИЕ СОЦИАЛИСТИЧЕСКИХ ИДЕЙ В АФРИКАНСКИХ ГОСУДАРСТВАХ
В 1960-1970-е ГОДЫ**

Abstract. The article examines the issues concerning the perception and promotion of socialist ideas on the African continent in the 1960s and 1970s. The purpose of this article is to show how socialism was perceived and interpreted in African countries that chose the "socialist way" of development, namely Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, Algeria, Mali, Guinea, Senegal, Ghana, Tanzania, Angola, Mozambique, Sudan and Ethiopia. The author set the task to show the reasons for the failures in the promotion of Soviet socialism in Africa. Attention was focused on the analysis of difficulties and obstacles in the promotion of socialism in the economic, political and cultural spheres. The work is based on the information of a survey conducted by the author among representatives of the African intelligentsia from different countries, many of whose representatives studied in the Soviet Union. The research showed that, despite the fact that the USSR spent an active policy in Africa, developing economic, military, political, educational cooperation, it was unable to implement its plans for socialist construction on the continent. This can be explained by the fact that after independence, Africans developed their own views on the socialist system. Perceiving socialism at the level of ideology, African leaders could not accept the socialist economic system. It was impossible to fully accept the Soviet model, since it did not correspond to the realities of African life in many ways. The fact that many African leaders studied in the West also played a role. The materials contained in the article can be used in educational and training activities, as well as for a better understanding of why Soviet socialism could not gain a foothold in Africa.

Keywords: USSR, Africa, Soviet socialism, African socialism, perception of socialism, promotion of socialism.

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Аннотация. В статье исследуются вопросы, касающиеся восприятия и продвижения социалистических идей на Африканском континенте в 1960-1970-х годах. Цель работы – показать, как социализм воспринимался и трактовался в африканских странах, которые выбрали «социалистический путь» развития, а именно Египет, Тунис, Марокко, Алжир, Мали, Гвинея, Сенегал, Гана, Танзания, Ангола, Мозамбик, Судан и Эфиопия. Автор поставила задачу показать причины неудач в продвижении советского социализма в Африке. Внимание было сфокусировано на анализе сложностей и препятствий в продвижении социализма в экономической, политической и культурной сферах. Работа основывается на данных опроса, проведенного автором среди представителей африканской интеллигенции из разных стран, многие представители которой получали образование в Советском Союзе. Исследование показало, что, несмотря на то, что СССР проводил в Африке активную политику, развивая экономическое, военное, политическое, образовательное сотрудничество, он не смог реализовать на континенте свои планы по социалистическому строительству. Это можно объяснить тем, что после обретения независимости африканцы развивали свои собственные взгляды на социалистическую систему. Воспринимая социализм на уровне идеологии, африканские лидеры не смогли принять социалистическую экономическую систему. Принять советскую модель полностью было невозможно, поскольку она во многом не соответствовала реалиям африканской жизни. Определенную роль сыграло и то обстоятельство, что многие африканские лидеры получили образование на Западе. Материалы, содержащиеся в статье, могут быть использованы в учебно-просветительской деятельности, а также для лучшего понимания того, почему советский социализм не смог закрепиться в Африке.

Ключевые слова: СССР, Африка, советский социализм, африканский социализм, восприятие социализма, продвижение социализма.

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Introduction. The problems of perception of Soviet socialism in African countries and attempts to build a socialist system on the continent were the subject of research in several foreign works, namely A. Klinghoffer, M. Ottaway, and Z. Laidi [1-3]. Z. Laidi analyzed the situation in states with a “socialist orientation” (Congo, Tanzania, and Angola). In his opinion, these countries, although they intended to adopt socialism, failed for various reasons. Thus, the president of Tanzania wanted to create a unique society that would copy the Chinese model. In the Congo and Angola, revolutionary movements and civil wars prevented the implementation of the Soviet model [3, p. 683-686]. Russian researchers have written little about the assessments of Soviet socialism on the Black Continent.

The purpose of this article is to show how socialism was perceived and interpreted in countries that chose the “socialist path”. These are Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco and Algeria in North Africa; Mali, Guinea, Senegal, Ghana, Tanzania, Angola, Mozambique, Sudan and Sub-Saharan Ethiopia. The tasks that we have set ourselves are to show the difficulties in the economic, political and cultural spheres in promoting socialist ideas in African states.

In the period from September 2018 to November 2021, we conducted a survey of representatives of the African intelligentsia from different countries: French speakers (Ivory Coast, Mali, Senegal, Guinea Conakry, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Benin, Cameroon, Gabon, and Congo Brazzaville), English speakers (Ghana, Nigeria, Tanzania, Zambia), Portuguese speakers (Angola, Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau) and Arabic speakers (Morocco, Egypt, Sudan, Mauritania and Algeria). A total of 50 people were interviewed: 30 men and 20 women aged 50 to 75 years. The list of respondents included former students who studied in the USSR in the 1950s-1990s. They were living witnesses of Soviet socialism, since they had been in the USSR for quite a long time (five to six years). The survey was conducted via e-mail, video conferencing (Skype) was used for clarification. A serious, but surmountable problem for us was the search for such students. Thanks to the Internet and social networks, we were able to find a significant number of people to interview who responded to a request to share their memories of their student years. We asked the respondents to answer the following questions: 1. What can you tell us about Soviet socialism? 2. Why do you think it was not possible to build socialism according to the Soviet model in African countries?

Discussion and results. Until the mid-1950s, the Soviet Union had little interest in Africa, since the Soviet leaders did not see prospects for a socialist revolution on the continent, because it was almost completely controlled by the European imperialist powers, in addition, the proletarian consciousness of the small working class was low, and the peasantry was under the political control of the tribal leaders. Vigorous activity in African countries was launched by the Soviet Union in the late 1950s. The USSR reoriented its foreign policy, consistently striving to expand its participation, influence and opportunities on the African continent [4, p. 415-464]. It is important to note that in addition to economic, military and educational assistance, the Soviet Union intended to spread its socialist ideology to the African continent. Many African leaders, as well as ordinary people from different countries, highly appreciated the military-technical, economic, political and educational assistance from the USSR, and the ambitions to build socialism in Africa according to the Soviet model turned out to be unfulfilled. Some researchers believe that the social, economic and political conditions of Africa exclude the application of the Soviet economic model, and that attempts to reproduce this model there were just a long series of costly mistakes [5, p. 150].

It should be noted that any study concerning African society cannot be carried out without taking into account its colonial past. The fact is that during the years of colonialism, processes of acculturation took place among Africans, i.e. they perceived the living standards, culture and ideas of the colonizing

countries. Our informant from Guinea pointed this out: “We Africans were forced to forget our history, to abandon our customs to the detriment of the culture of the colonizers. Today it is very difficult for us to find our personality, our guidelines”. F. Bobin emphasized that from the point of view of Europeans, they came to the continent, on the territory of which there was no writing, culture and history. Consequently, the colonialists performed an important civilizing mission, including the spread of Christianity, and the African population had to accept it with gratitude in order to get out of the state of “savagery” and «primitiveness» [6, p. 159-160].

After liberation from the colonial yoke in the 1960s and 1970s Africans became acquainted with the two main theories that dominated the international arena - capitalism and socialism. The choice of ideological orientation by African countries largely depended on their intellectual leaders, who received higher education either in the West (in Europe or the USA) or in the USSR. Africans understood the importance of education for decolonization processes. The Special Conference on the Development of Education in Africa was held in Addis Ababa in May 1961. Its Final Report noted that “Africans saw education as a means by which their aspirations could be satisfied” [7, p. 261]. In the words of our respondent from Benin: “At that time, it was extremely important for African leaders to prove themselves on the international stage through the availability and quality of their qualified personnel and intellectuals. They believed that educated Africans could become the basis for the socio-economic development of their countries”.

Understanding this, the USSR launched a mass admission of African students to its universities in the second half of the 1950s. This was not only assistance in the training of qualified personnel for the newly-free countries, but also an important way of ideological education of African students in the spirit of communism-socialism. We must not forget that many African countries gained independence thanks to the financial and military support of the USSR. Thus, it can be said that Africans were ready to «marry» socialism, since many African leaders sent their students to study in the USSR.

Let us pay attention to the fact that the socialist system attracted the attention of Africans both in the colonial period and in the course of gaining independence. This can be seen from the results of the study of J. P. Ndiaye. He gave interesting data about surveys among African students studying in France in 1961. It turned out that 25% of students highly appreciated the USSR, 20% – China, 12.4% – Israel, 12% – Cuba and 8% – France, while the United States was far behind, gaining only 3.3% of approval responses [8]. As you can see, the socialist system aroused the disposition of a significant part of the Africans. The reasons underlying the admiration of the USSR were the rapid Soviet progress in all areas (35%), communist ideology (22.3%) and scientific achievements (18.5%), primarily in space exploration. At the same time, 37.8% of students believed that “full-fledged socialism” was the best economic system for the development of Africa [8, p. 228-229]. In the words of our respondent from Mozambique: “We knew that different countries have different attitudes towards socialism, so it was important for us to know about different types of socialist system. We were more inclined towards Soviet socialism because of what we knew about the USSR, since it provided us with various assistance and cooperated with our countries”.

However, in African countries, not all intellectuals expressed enthusiasm for Soviet socialism. Among those who were educated during the colonial period in the West, such ideological currents as negritude and pan-Africanism arose and spread, the main ideas of which were reduced to ideas about the values of the black race and the struggle for the rights of Africans. Therefore, after gaining independence, some African leaders preferred to adhere to original doctrines, which, in their opinion, were more in line with African realities. One of our Senegalese respondents commented on this: “The fact that we were martyred during the colonial period and the fact that we found out that the history of Africa was falsified and that we had our own cultures that we learned about while studying at universities, we found it necessary to adhere to our own ideals”.

K.A. Diop, who carried out a comparative study of the social and political systems of Africa and Europe, expressed the opinion that Africa before the colonial period was a socialist society long before the arrival of Western and Arab imperialists [9]. In his opinion, in the 1960s socialism was not supposed to be a foreign term for Africans. In those years, not without the influence of the concept of Negritude, the idea

of African socialism was born. It was diffused by African leaders such as former presidents Leopold Sedar Senghor in Senegal, Modibo Keita in Mali, Ahmed Sekou Toure in Guinea, Julius Nyerere in Tanzania, Kenneth Kaunda in Zambia and Kwame Nkrumah in Ghana, and pro-independence leader Amilcar Cabral in Guinea-Bissau. In July 1959, shortly before Senegal's independence, Léopold Sedar Senghor presented a report on African socialism to the founding congress of the African Federation Party. In his opinion, the latter adopted some elements of Marxism. Senghor considered the theory of K. Marx to be outdated and unsuitable for the African continent, since it arose in the context of European society in the 19th century. In addition, the Senegalese leader rejected atheism, as well as the concept of class struggle, believing that the latter contradicts the African tradition of unanimity and reconciliation [10, p. 18-19]. Inspired by the work of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin [11], Senghor developed the theory of “existential socialism”, in which he combined the Marxist concept with the spirituality inherent in Africans, as well as with the cultural values of the black world. He believed that by developing the productive forces, Africans could be provided with an affluent society. J. Droz rightly noted that Senghor combined socialism with the concept of negritude, the victory of which for him was the victory of socialism [12, p. 321-346].

In Kenya, the Kenya African National Union (KANU), President Jomo Kenyatta's party, took a democratic socialist line. However, the essence of «socialism» became the subject of fierce internal discussions in KANU as early as the 1960s. Tom Mboya published in 1965 a document that became the party's charter. The Kenyan version of socialism allowed for a mixed economy, assumed a democracy adapted to African traditions. The issue of Kenyan socialism has become a subject of debate. Many doubted even Kenya's choice of a socialist path of development [13, p. 131].

It is known that in Dakar in 1962 and in Tunisia in 1975 Socialist congresses were held, at which ideas about social equality expressed by the great thinker of the 18th century Jean Jacques Rousseau, were discussed [14, p. 83]. In this regard, here is the statement of one of our Senegalese respondents: “African socialists tried to combine European socialist teachings (including utopian socialism of the 19th century, populism, Marxism) with the peculiarities of historical development and local cultural and religious traditions of Africa, and sometimes with Islamic or Christian socialism. African socialism is a form of economic management that involves the rational use of resources in the “traditional” African way, in contrast to classical socialism”.

Such an African perception of socialist ideas provoked criticism from Soviet observers. I.I. Potehin, who was a leading Soviet specialist on Africa, believed that there could be no such thing as “African socialism”, since there is only scientific, true or Marxist-Leninist socialism, which has the same characteristics, regardless of where it is built [15, p. 84]. In his opinion, only the concept of “African path to socialism” is acceptable. As A. Klinghoffer noted, from the point of view of Soviet scientists and politicians, the “African socialism” proclaimed by many African leaders was in fact not socialism [1, p. 197-198].

It must be remembered that in colonial Africa, socialist ideas were spread among the intelligentsia by Europeans; so many leaders were inspired by the European model of socialism. However, the revolutionary movements that arose during this period were intertwined with national movements. For example, in Morocco, nationalist students in the early 1930s supported the French socialist lawyer, grandson of Karl Marx, Rene Jean Longuet [14, p. 83]. Therefore, among young Africans there was a serious choice between socialism and the national liberation movement. In Tunisia, there were two currents among the socialists. One was guided by the rather radical ideas of communist syndicalism (CGTU), the other, softer, assumed the active work of public organizations, cooperatives, and cooperation with the administration [14, p. 83]. The communists, although they competed with the nationalists, united with them to control the labor exchanges [14, p. 83].

A certain attention to the perception of socialist ideas was rendered by the religiosity of Africans. Our North African respondent remarked: “The idea of a clash of civilizations associated with the Great Religions did not come up today. We, for the most part, had different views on fully accepting Soviet socialism, because, on the one hand, we had pan-Arabism, and on the other, pan-Islamism. These are the

currents to which we belonged”. It can be assumed that an important factor hindering the adoption of the Soviet socialist model in Africa was ethno-religious diversity. A respondent from Ghana pointed out: “Today in Africa, in the era of the 21st century, it is difficult for Africans to achieve unity both in their countries and in Africa as a whole. This is tempered by ethnic and religious differences that can divide even brothers”.

Perceiving socialism at the level of ideology, African leaders failed to accept the socialist economic system. African states after gaining independence experienced a lack of financial and material resources for economic development, despite the availability of natural resources. Many African countries maintained contact with the colonial countries and a capitalist economic system was established in them.

In the early 1960s, the majority of the African population had no idea about the development of the Soviet Union and life in it. Therefore, it was necessary to acquaint Africans with the country, to form a positive image of the socialist system. At first, the USSR began to strengthen its positions in the countries with the most active anti-colonial struggle: Ghana, Guinea and Mali. It was in them that the first Soviet embassies in West Africa were opened. Soviet propaganda paid much attention to such art as cinema. In the memoirs of the diplomat A.B. Karelin says that in 1960 he and two projectionists were sent by the USSR Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Guinea in order to help develop the cinematic infrastructure there. Prior to this, the inhabitants of Guinea did not know Soviet films, which had not previously been shown due to censorship [16, p.75]. We can say that on the part of the Soviet Union it was a desire to spread through films its “cultural diplomacy” to new territories and in this way “introduce” socialism into the “hearts and minds” of the African population. In the early 1960s The USSR pursued a cultural policy, including the active display of Soviet films, in Guinea, Ethiopia, Ghana, the Republic of Mali and Morocco. It was assumed that this would contribute to the perception of the Soviet political and economic model [17, p. 459].

Our respondents from Guinea-Conakry and Mali expressed their opinion about Soviet cinema: “Cinematography and the tastes of the townspeople in the capitals of Africa had already taken shape by that time. American, French, Egyptian and Indian films were successful among African audiences. Film companies that were famous in colonial times retained their popularity. Distributed Soviet films were not successful”. Many of our sub-Saharan African respondents noted that Soviet films were not attractive to viewers. This was because they were not translated into African languages, so it was impossible to understand them, since the population of Africa was mostly illiterate, duplication in European languages didn't save the situation.

The Soviet Union encountered in Africa two types of elites that emerged after liberation from colonialism: radical and moderate. The former believed that it was necessary to finally break off relations with the colonial countries and turn to the USSR, which not only was not a colonizing country, but cooperated and provided assistance in various regions of Africa, while not expressing a desire to plunder natural resources and interfere in the governance of African states. The moderates had a different idea. They believed that Africans are free enough and can enter into any relationship with any country (even with colonizing countries). They continued to cooperate with the former metropolitan countries, signing agreements with the USA, France, Belgium and others.

The political atmosphere created by the African elites determined the possibilities for the introduction of socialist ideology in African countries. If the leader was radical, the country established relations with the USSR and focused on socialism. An example is the country of Ghana and its leader K. Nkrumah. The theory of Nkrumahism he developed consisted of three main components: the concept of the African personality, pan-Africanism and socialism. If the first two elements were a sacred constant and symbolized African identity, then socialism was used opportunistically, it became «African» or «scientific» depending on the situation [18, p. 621]. It should be noted that the pro-Soviet African governments did not have time for programs because they were attacked by armed groups backed by the colonizing country. So, on February 24, 1966, during a trip to China, Nkrumah was overthrown as a result of a military coup, which may have been provoked by the United States.

The African variants of socialism differed from the Soviet one in that there was no one-party system on the black continent. In the Soviet Union from the beginning of the 1920s to 1990, the party (under various names – RCP (b), VKP (b), CPSU) operated under a one-party system and had a monopoly on political power, which contributed to the establishment of autocratic regime in the country. This status was fixed constitutionally: in Article 126 of the Constitution of 1936, the Communist Party was proclaimed the “leading core” of state and public organizations of workers, and in the Constitution of the USSR adopted in 1977, the CPSU was, according to Article 6, proclaimed the leading and guiding force of Soviet society in general [19, p. 67]. In Africa, most of the revolutionary movements supported by socialist African leaders who had mostly studied in the West, especially in France, preached a multi-party system. This is the case, for example, in Ivory coast, where leader Laurent Gbagbo, who is close to the French Socialist Party, was a supporter and founder of a multi-party system.

Conclusions. Our study showed that, despite the fact that the USSR pursued an active policy in Africa, developing economic, military, political, and educational cooperation, it was unable to implement its plans for socialist construction on the continent. This can be explained by the fact that, after independence, Africans developed their own ideologies. And although they positively perceived socialism in the Soviet Union, they considered it impossible to fully accept the Soviet model, since it largely did not correspond to the realities of African life. In attempts by the USSR to spread socialism on the African continent, mistakes and miscalculations were made. Getting an education in the USSR did not always end with the re-education of young people in a socialist spirit. Soviet leaders ignored the colonial past of the states, underestimating the degree of cultural and ideological influence of the metropolitan countries on the African elite and urban residents. The Soviet cultural presence was not enough, as illustrated by the failures of Soviet cinema on the continent.

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