

# RUSTIN

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USSR frequently is at the forefront of resolutions against imperialism and colonialism, nothing can obscure the fact that the USSR, itself, is the world's last great remaining colonial empire. The USSR, in fact, is a continuation of the centuries-old Russian Tsarist Empire and today includes in its clutches such nations as the Ukraine, Lithuania, Armenia, Georgia, Latvia, and Estonia. The peoples of each of these nations, as well as of such Soviet satellites as Poland, Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria, continue to be denied their elementary right to self-determination.

In their overtures to Africa and the Third World, the Soviets have sought to exploit the carefully constructed myth of the USSR as a racially tolerant society. Recent evidence, however, leads to an entirely different conclusion.

A study just released by the Rand Corporation, a respected research institute which conducts studies for the U.S. government and for private organizations, indicates that racial prejudices are extremely pronounced in the Soviet military and have resulted in violent conflicts and discrimination against minorities. The fundamental source of such conflict is between yellow Central Asians, most of whom are Moslems, and white Europeans. According to some of those interviewed in the Rand report, military officers encourage racial and ethnic conflict because it is easier to control a multi-racial and multi-national force whose

members are divided by barriers of prejudice, language, and culture. In essence the Soviet military is applying the tactic of "divide and rule" which has so successfully fragmented opposition in the Soviet Union as a whole.

For decades the Soviets have been able to suppress reports of incidents involving racial and national conflict in the USSR. They have been successful in doing so because totalitarian dictatorship makes it possible for the authorities to effectively stifle the free flow of information. In recent years, however, self-published underground newspapers issued by democratic activists in the USSR, have begun providing a clearer picture of the nature of Soviet reality. Reports of racial incidents involving Soviet citizens and black African students attending Soviet universities have also reached the West with increasing frequency.

From this small but impressive assortment of evidence it is possible to conclude that the USSR confronts serious problems of racial, religious, and ethnic prejudice. In large measure such prejudice is the product of the official government policy of anti-Semitism, of state opposition to religious and cultural freedom, and of the attempt by the Soviet government to Russify the entire population of the USSR, i.e., to impose the Russian language on non-Russian peoples. In part the ethnic and racial prejudice which is so widespread in the USSR is the product of an imperial ideology masking itself behind slogans of "friendship among nations" and "internationalism."

As the nations of Africa and of the Third World become more acquainted with the realities of the Soviet system and of the large gap between Soviet rhetoric and performance, there will be a further erosion of the USSR's influence in the Third World. This is a healthy and necessary development which can play a significant role in furthering the democratic transformation of the Third World. Such a process can be aided by the counter-example of firm American commitment to racial justice at home and by a consistent American policy which speaks out against apartheid and racial injustice the world over.

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