

Andreas Hilger (Hrsg.), Die Sowjetunion und die Dritte Welt. UdSSR, Staatssozialismus und Antikolonialismus im Kalten Krieg 1945–1991 (Schriftenreihe der Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte, Bd. 99), Oldenbourg Verlag, München 2009, 293 S., brosch., 24,80 €.

During the Cold War the relations between the Soviet Union and the countries of the Southern hemisphere constituted a burgeoning field for historians, but notably for political scientists, who left us a whole library of books about the „struggle for the third world“. Yet the demise of the Soviet Union and the abrupt dismantlement of the Soviet-South ties, removed from the field its geopolitical reasons for existence, and as a consequence it almost fell into oblivion. This collective volume edited by Andreas Hilger marks a significant step against this trend. Bringing together new historical research, it revisits those older sore questions and reaffirms the historical interest for what used to be the very controversial ties between the Second and the Third World.

As Hilger puts it in his introduction, the volume assembles thirteen diverse case studies and covers a vast array of themes, without favouring a particular dimension of the Soviet-South relations, be that the political, economic or the cultural one. The chronological spectrum extends from the early Soviet involvement in the Middle East and the recognition of the Israeli state (1948) to the invasion of Afghanistan (1979/80). This is rather in favour of the reader, who has the opportunity to follow the evolution of the Soviet Third World policy from Stalin to Breznev. In her opening paper, Wiebke Bachmann shows how Jewish politicians capitalised on Moscow's anti-British mood and on its ideological and geopolitical convictions and obtained the Soviet support and recognition. Il'ja Gajduk focuses in his contribution on a major turning point of the Soviet Third World policy – Khrushchev's denunciation of colonialism and his propositions at the 15th UN Assembly (1960) – and demonstrates that the Third World reception of the Soviet friendship offensive did not meet the expectations of the Soviet leadership. The last two essays of the volume, Radoslav Yordanov's one on the Soviet military involvement in Ethiopia and Bernhard Chiari's contribution on the invasion of Afghanistan, extend the analysis on the more assertive period of the Soviet Third World policy. Both authors provide thoughtful, yet divergent interpretations concerning the Soviet decision-making: Yordanov attributes the pro-Ethiopian involvement, among others, in the influence of Soviet advisors at the Horn of Africa, while Chiari seems to have a strong point when he says that the invasion was decided by the leadership despite the many realistic accounts pointing to the concrete difficulties that the communist rule could face in Afghanistan.

From Ethiopia to Afghanistan the geographical spectrum of the volume is considerable, yet Asia is clearly at the centre of attention. Especially Indochina is at the focus of two excellent papers, the first one by Céline Marangé and the second by Bernd Schäfer. Drawing mainly from French, but also from US, Chinese and Russian diplomatic archives, Marangé offers a brilliant account of the Soviet-Chinese-French negotiations during the Geneva Peace Conference for Indochina (1954). She demonstrates that both communist powers, USSR and China, promoted their own interests, the Soviets bargained a peace settlement in Europe and the Chinese the exclusion of Americans from Indochina, while they secretly searched a compromise with the French against the Vietnamese will. Schäfer focuses on the period from 1970 to 1975 and, using mainly GDR archives, he demonstrates how the lack of a coherent Soviet and Vietnamese policy, as well as the Chinese opportunism, facilitated Pol Pot's grip of power. Beyond these two papers on Indochina, Ragna Boden's contribution on the relations between Moscow and the Communist Party of Indonesia is also a brilliant one. Her paper constitutes an excellent introduction for scholars interested in the Soviet attitude vis-à-vis “oriental” communism and vice versa.

Soviet foreign policy and decision-making are generally predominant in the volume. Historians familiar with the Soviet-Arab relations will have the occasion to read a fine analysis of Galia Golan concerning the Soviet stance, fears and bluffs during the 1967 and 1973 Arab-Israeli wars. The role of the KGB in the rise to power of Salvador Allende in Chile is the subject of Christopher Andrew's and Kristian Gustafson's contribution. The two authors convincingly point out that not only the KGB, but also Chilean political forces solicited the Soviet involvement. Distinct, because it doesn't focus on the USSR, yet very interesting is also Ulrich van der Heyden's contribution on the attitude of the GDR towards South Africa. Heyden demonstrates that GDR politicians dismissed official contacts with the apartheid regime, yet they did not take measures to prevent the export of East German products through western European countries.

Beyond diplomatic relations and political decisions, three papers approach the Soviet-South relations through different perspectives. Hari Vasudevan focuses on the Soviet-Indian economic cooperation before and after the 1971 Friendship Treaty. He points out that despite the several positive effects the Soviet aid also had problematic, ineffective or backward aspects, which finally did not pass unmarked by Indians. Elizabeth Bishop contributes with an essay of gender history of the Soviet-Egyptian relations, in which she underscores that Soviet and Egyptian masculinity constituted essential elements in the representation of anti-imperialist politics and of the Soviet-Arab partnership. Finally, in their contribution on the "Patrice Lumumba" People's Friendship University in Moscow, Rossen Djagalov and Christine Evans analyse the symbolic dimensions of the experiment and confront them with the tough reality of racism in the Soviet Union.

From above, it is clear that the volume embraces a large number of topics. All papers are meticulous and demonstrate an excellent knowledge of the literature and of the historical stakes. The lack of a rigid, all-encompassing analytical framework helps the reader to realise both the variety and the complexities of the Soviet-South relations. Different and divergent conclusions from case to case are stimulating and prove that more archival research is terribly needed. At the same time major aspects of the Soviet-South ties, such as the cultural relations, the scientific and technological cooperation or the developmental aid deserve more historical attention. In that sense, while on the one hand all papers contribute to our understanding of the Soviet-South relations, on the other, they invite us to realise the complexities and to refrain from generalisations. All these are insights that the volume provides to the reader.

Constantin Katsakioris, Voula

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