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Moscow is currently making a determined bid to bolster the Afro-Asian Peoples' Solidarity Organization (AAPSO), which originated in a conference in Cairo, held in 1957, with the encouragement of what is now the foremost Soviet international "front" organization, the World Peace Council (WPC). AAPSO's relations with the WPC have become considerably closer since 1967 when the Chinese - who shared control of the AAPSO with the Russians and Egyptians - boycotted a Council meeting and later withdrew from the organization.

The greatly expanded work programme of the AAPSO approved at its 11th Council Meeting in Baghdad on March 24-28, 1974, indicates that the Soviet Union has some important new tasks for the organization over which it has had increasing influence in the last few years.

During 1974-75, the AAPSO will hold 13 conferences and meetings including an international seminar on the Indian Ocean (in Colombo in May, 1974); a conference "in support of the Eritrean people" (Nagadish, November); the first session of the AAPSO Executive Committee (Brazzaville or Frankfurt, October), and a women's conference some time in 1975 at a venue to be arranged. And the AAPSO Council has further recommended that the Permanent Secretariat go ahead with plans for an additional two seminars and conferences including a second seminar on oil and energy to be held in Baghdad.

Visits to the "liberated areas" of Angola, Mozambique and Cuba, Havana are planned; and the organization will also participate in three conferences, including a WPC-sponsored "Conference on Peace and Justice in the Middle East" in Rome in September this year.

Although the organization has never published its accounts, it does not seem likely that so ambitious a programme could be approved unless considerable extra funds had been made available by the Soviet Union. It is thought that the Russians have four main objectives in giving the AAPSO a new lease of life:

First they may be seeking to increase the influence of the AAPSO in an attempt to infiltrate the non-aligned movement by the "back door", particularly after Moscow's apparent failure to win support for its policies at the Search Summit Conference of Non-Aligned States held in Algiers in September, 1973.

Second, they appear to see the AAPSO as a useful vehicle for gaining a firm foothold in the liberation movements, and third, they may be seeking to line up the militant anti-Israeli Arabs, Syrians and Palestinians against Egypt whose recent policies have been viewed with growing concern by the Soviet leadership. Finally, the strengthening of the AAPSO can also be seen as a bid to prevent China from gaining support in the non-aligned movement, especially as the Chinese found many defenders

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at the Algiers Conference - although not represented - and the Russians suffered several setbacks.

The Soviet Union is known to be unhappy about changes of emphasis in Egypt's economic and foreign policies and the rapid improvement in Egypt/US relations as evidenced by the re-establishment of diplomatic links between the two countries. Liberalization in Egypt's economic sector has apparently given the Russians doubts about the Soviet Union's place in Egypt's future plans.

The fact that the AAFPO's Egyptian Secretary-General Tawfik El Behal - who has held that office since the organization's formation - was pushed "upstairs" to the position of President by the recent Council meeting may have been a possible first step towards moving the AAFPO headquarters from Cairo to a more "friendly" venue - Baghdad being the most likely choice.

Although no new Secretary-General was announced, Nuri Abdel Kassem Hussein, an Iraqi Communist, must be considered a strong contender for the post. A former Secretary-General of another Soviet "front", the International Union of Students (IUS), he was named to the AAFPO Permanent Secretariat in August, 1972. Another possible successor is an AAFPO Secretary, Dr. Prakash Fallick (India), a former WPC Secretary who represented the AAFPO at the Steering Committee meeting of the World Congress of Peace Forces in Moscow on February 9-10 this year.

The importance of the role being assigned to the AAFPO was underlined by what was an exceptionally high turn out for a Council Meeting: the attendance at the 18th session of over 400 delegates representing 79 "world solidarity organizations and liberation movements" from 47 countries was comparable to that for the AAFPO's 3rd Conference held in Cairo in January, 1972.

Acceptance of seven new member organizations\* is a further sign of the strengthening process going on within the organization.

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\*The Council of Solidarity and Peace (Ghana); the National and Liberation Congress (New Zealand); the Seychelles People's United Party; the Social Development Movement of Black Africa (SESDA); the Afro-Arabs Solidarity Committee (Upper Volta); the liberation movement of Sao Tomé and Principe, and the Democratic Party of Mozambique.

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