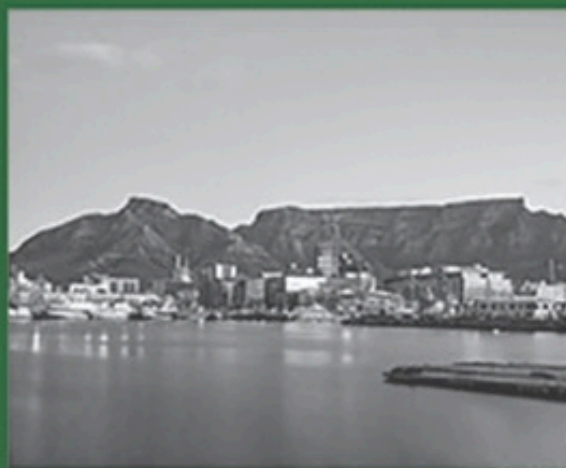


FROM CAIRO TO CAPE



VLADIMIR SHUBIN



From Cairo to Cape

By Vladimir Shubin

Review by Keith Gottschalk

Unisa Press, 2026, 314 pgs, R380, also available as an e-book

Vladimir Shubin stands alongside Father Trevor Huddleston as one of those few international activists who devoted virtually their entire adult life to fighting for the liberation of Africa. His well-deserved Order of the Companions of O R Tambo (awarded by the President of South Africa in 2005) and the Order of the Red Star, (awarded by the Soviet Union) give belated recognition to this.

This book – his fifth – is rare if not unique in the English language literature. It gives the viewpoint and witness of a Soviet/Russian insider to six decades of struggle and lobbying to decolonise Africa; six decades of interaction with the national liberation movements. Today most of the personalities it discusses have passed on. Scholars are indeed fortunate that Vladimir Shubin is still alive, still an active scholar at 87 years old, able to write up his memoirs on so many historical and living personalities and events.

Shubin's crowded life has had twin careers. One is the genial extrovert known to two generations of African liberation movement cadres as an indefatigable organiser, the very active representative of the International Department of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union



(CPSU). The other is Dr Vladimir Shubin the scholar, whose post-doctoral research is written up in at least five books. He is the activist-scholar *par excellence*.

Shubin does not consider it out of the ordinary, and barely-mentions in passing, that he speaks Russian, Farsi, Pashto, Arabic, English, and “broken” French. Indeed, his first post-school employment was as an officer-interpreter for Soviet military personnel in Egypt. In personal contact, Shubin is a mine of information on dialects in Russian and other languages.

What major themes does this book elucidate on?

First, although this reviewer has an undergraduate major in comparative government, he needed every sentence of the author’s summary of the kaleidoscope of state bureaucracies in the Soviet Union and the Party.

Second is the role and workings of the Afro-Asian Peoples’ Solidarity Organisation, the Soviet Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee, and various peace committees: in Soviet official lexicon, “public organisations”. These “acted under the firm control of the International Department of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union”. (p. 73)

This book ... gives the viewpoint and witness of a Soviet/Russian insider to six decades of struggle and lobbying to decolonise Africa; six decades of interaction with the national liberation movements.



These are what one Polish anti-communist wittily nicknamed GONGOS – Government-organised Non-Governmental Organisations. Their longevity alongside the state and party bureaucracies make them significant actors in their own right.

Shubin is the rigorous, empirically focused historian par excellence. Repeatedly, this book runs strictly factual corrections of numerous other publications and websites, both Western and Soviet alike.

Of course, the Washington DC arena of power also includes what are formally private foundations, but embedded in power, with a revolving door of ex-state participants, regardless of whether their funds overtly or covertly come from state, quasi-state, or corporate sources.

Third, inevitably this narrative of six decades of events and dynamics is set against the cold war background in Asia and Africa, that is competition between the then two world powers, the USA and its colonial allies versus the Soviet Union.

Fourth, readers will also note what is not included, as in Shubin's earlier books. There are no arguments about Marxist theory here. The theoretical disputes between Western Marxism and liberalism, each running in academe for most of a decade before inevitably fizzling out, are conspicuous by their absence. The same for recent debates on the "Washington consensus". Shubin is the rigorous, empirically focused historian *par excellence*. Repeatedly, this book runs strictly factual corrections of numerous other publications and websites, both Western and Soviet alike.



Fifth, another absence is any dwelling upon the inevitable discomforts and privations of military life. Shubin barely mentions in passing that he and his young wife lived in over 20 addresses during six years during his postings in north Africa and elsewhere (p. 68).

Sixth, Shubin is firm in refuting infamous canards of anti-communist propaganda. Inevitably, he is smeared as a colonel or major in the KGB, simply because he was a high-ranking activist in the International Department of the CPSU. He repeatedly refutes the claim that the CPSU ran the South African Communist Party, which in turn allegedly controlled the ANC. He notes that the USSR gave much more funding to the ANC than to the SACP.

Seventh, he reiterates the obvious point that while Thabo Mbeki amongst other celebrities received military training and other education in the Soviet Union, they of course retained their own views on communism and the USSR, which remained in their post-1994 economic and other policies when in power in South Africa.

Last, it must be mentioned in passing that the UNISA Press needs to take more care in the printing of their books. This book has its pagination printed on the inside of each page up to page 134, thereafter on the outer margin of each page.

This book is indisputably essential for every scholarly library of African studies, history, political studies, and international relations.

Keith Gottschalk is an adjunct professor in Political Studies at the University of the Western Cape.



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