

CHOU EN-LAI'S AFRICAN TOUR

Now in the backstretch of his African tour, Chou En-lai has apparently made good progress toward achieving Peiping's modest objective: improving the Chinese Communist image in the area. Chou's shrewd handling of various national leaders during his month on the road has thus far made a favorable impression on his hosts.

Nasir [REDACTED] was surprised by Chou's quiet intelligence and his apparent willingness to accept the principle of nonalignment. Nasir also said he was relieved that Chou did not "attempt to mount an offensive" against the Soviet Union. The Chinese premier has in fact avoided public polemical thrusts at Moscow, but there are reports that in both Cairo and Algiers he sought to undercut the Soviets by a steady stream of innuendo and subtle persuasion.

Other African leaders have been favorably impressed by Chou's reasonable and easygoing manner. While he has defended the Chinese positions on the Sino-Indian border impasse, the nuclear test ban, and the convening of Afro-Asian and nonaligned conferences, Chou still appears to have had some success in erasing the image of a militant and obstructionist China. The joint communiqués issued at the conclusion of each of his African stops have avoided most controversial issues, and it has become apparent that in the search for common ground Chou has attempted to minimize differences and play up the importance of earlier contacts.

Despite his adroitness in dealing with his hosts, Chou's tangible achievements have not

been dramatic. Although Chinese propaganda has hailed the Tunisian visit as a major diplomatic victory, Peiping's success there appears to be only a qualified one. Chou's brief stopover in Tunis came after a nine-day side trip to Albania, and was apparently arranged only after the African tour was well under way. Nevertheless, President Bourguiba's reception of Chou was not enthusiastic, and he made it clear to his guest that the establishment of diplomatic relations--a step he had announced as imminent as far back as 1958--does not mean Tunisian endorsement of many Chinese policy positions nor even the early appointment of a Tunisian envoy to Peiping.

Chou now is on the West African leg of his tour, visiting Ghana, Mali, and Guinea--all of which have long recognized Peiping. After leaving Conakry on 27 January he is scheduled to swing through East Africa, stopping in Tanganyika, Kenya, Uganda, Sudan, and the Somali Republic.

The Chinese were expected to return to Peiping in mid-February. [REDACTED]

His itinerary has been flexible throughout the tour, and he now is reportedly considering at least two other African stops--Zanzibar and Ethiopia. The foreign minister in Zanzibar's new left-wing government has long maintained close ties with Communist China. At the close of their tour, the Chinese leaders are committed to state visits to Pakistan and Ceylon. [REDACTED]