

Bolshevism and the Individual Leader

By Howard Swearer

"The Soviet Communist Party, more than any civilian organization known to history, depends upon the personalities of those who rule it from the top."*

NOWHERE IS THE confusion engendered by Marxism-Leninism's dual claim to be both a scientific analysis of social development and at the same time a guide to action—*i.e.*, by its concurrent determinist and voluntarist aspects—more clearly revealed than in dealing with the role of the leader in history. Moreover, no other issue better illustrates the gap between Communist theory and and practice. Because of the dogmatic handling of theory and the official insistence on the unity of theory and practice, the role of the leader, for Communists, is not just an esoteric matter of historical methodology to be discussed at conferences of historians. Destalinization raised in blunt and unavoidable form the question: What influence did Stalin have on the historical development of Soviet society? The question is a perilous one and has evoked bloc-wide debate because most of the obvious answers threaten the legitimacy of the Soviet system and the Marxian analysis as propounded by Soviet theoreticians.

Marxism and the Role of the Leader

The roots of present Communist theoretical and practical difficulties over the role of the leader are deeply embedded in the Marxian concept of historical material-

* Leonard Schapiro, *The Communist Party of the Soviet Union*, New York, Random House, 1960, p. 590.

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ism, according to which the laws of historical development can be scientifically derived and projected into the future through an analysis of the changing modes of economic production and resulting class conflicts. Coupling this with Marx's thesis that "it is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but on the contrary their being that determines their consciousness," it is evident that the hero in history has been pulled from his pedestal. Engels provided the classical statement of Marxist doctrine on the role of the individual in history, a statement that is still cited by Soviet theoreticians as the last word on the matter:

That a certain man, and precisely that man, arises at a particular time in a particular country is, of course, pure chance. But eliminate him and there will be a demand for a substitute, and this substitute will be found, whether good or bad, but in the long run he will be found. That Napoleon, just this particular Corsican, should have been the military dictator made necessary by the exhausting wars of the French Republic was chance; but if a Napoleon had been lacking, another would have filled his place. This is proved by the fact that the man has always been found as soon as he became necessary: Caesar, Augustus, Cromwell, etc.¹

In other words, history operates through great men, but these leaders emerge in response to a definite social need arising from economic necessities, and their personalities will be suitable to carry out the particular, historically necessary function.

It should be noted that Marxism, in pointing out the limits placed on men by their environment and the complex interweaving of causal factors in historical development, served as a useful counterweight to such concepts as Carlyle's overdrawn and romantic thesis that only

¹ *Osnovy Marksizma-Leninizma*, Moscow, 1959, p. 190, citing K. Marks i F. Engels, *Izbrannye pisma*, Gospolitizdat, 1953, pp. 470-71.

great men are of consequence. Also, unlike other deterministic historical methodologies such as those of Hegel, Spencer, and Condorcet, Marxism must be credited with some concern for empirical evidence and with at least an attempt to explain the role of great men who carry out the necessary laws of historical development.²

The attention of the early Russian Marxists was perforce focused on the role of the individual because they were competing for leadership of the Russian revolutionary movement with the *Narodniki* (Populists), who placed greater emphasis on the influence and responsibility of the "critically thinking" individual and less on the inevitable movement of social and economic forces. George Plekhanov, in an essay published in 1898, defended Marxism against the *Narodnik* charge that it completely negated the role of the individual by swallowing him in the inexorable flow of historical development.³ In doing so he gave the theoretical formulation of the issue some further twists which might have led to revisionist heresy had he followed his analysis to its logical conclusion.

Plekhanov acknowledged that "by virtue of particular traits of their character, individuals can influence the fate of society"; and, furthermore, that the appearance and disappearance of influential persons may be "accidental."⁴ He noted, for example, that Mirabeau's death was historically accidental and influenced the course of the French Revolution. Even when Plekhanov asserts that "the character of an individual is a 'factor' in social development only where, when, and to the extent that social relations permit it to be such,"⁵ this is a far cry from Engels' contention that each society produces its historically necessary leader. Few would deny that a leader must be influenced by, and work with, inherited habits and institutions; but—as Plekhanov implies—different leaders "accidentally" selected by history may handle the crust of custom differently and, by their actions, may initiate different developmental trends.

Evidently discerning the dangers of this line of reasoning, however, Plekhanov beats a hasty and not always consistent retreat to orthodoxy. He states that an "*accident is something relative* [which] appears only at the point of intersection of inevitable processes."⁶ More important, he dogmatically asserts that in the last

analysis these inevitable processes are always economic, and that "no matter what the qualities of the given individual may be, they cannot eliminate the given economic relations if the latter conform to the given state of productive forces."⁷ Plekhanov concludes that "talented people can . . . change only individual features of events, but not their general trend; *they are themselves the product of this trend*."⁸ Thus, after a promising beginning, he comes round full circle to take refuge in a dogmatic reassertion of the validity of historical materialism: in the "last analysis" leaders cannot basically affect the historical process.

LENIN, THE REVOLUTIONARY activist, by his personal actions and driving will, as well as by his theoretical innovations concerning the role of the professional revolutionary party, the primacy of "consciousness" over "spontaneity," and the telescoping of revolutions, cut deeply into the determinism of Marxism. In the first decade of this century, Plekhanov accused Lenin of rejecting the concept of "an economic necessity which calls forth in the proletariat a demand for socialism"; and Trotsky prophetically charged him with advocating methods that would lead to the substitution of the party organization for the party, the Central Committee for the party organization, and finally the dictator for the Central Committee.⁹

Lenin himself did not admit to the charge of perverting historical materialism and continued to assert the primacy of economic factors and the impossibility of "making" a revolution until historical forces had matured. A similar capacity for self-deception—or perhaps historical humility—was also displayed by the post-revolutionary Trotsky. In his *History of the Russian Revolution* (1930) he attempted to demonstrate the inevitability of the various stages of the revolution, even asserting that the major actors were historical stereotypes whose counterparts could be identified in other revolutions. However, his detailed recounting of events so clearly underlined the prominence of Lenin's role and his own admiration for Lenin's leadership that it implicitly undermined the book's theoretical premise.

Thus, the events of the revolution itself subjected the orthodox Marxist treatment of the leader and his role

² Sidney Hook, *The Hero in History*, Beacon Press, 1957, chapt. V.

³ George Plekhanov, *The Role of the Individual in History*, International Publishers, 1940.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 41-42.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

⁹ For an excellent discussion of the assertion of voluntarism over determinism in Communist ideology and practice, see: Robert V. Daniels, "Soviet Power and Marxist Determinism," *Problems of Communism*, No. 3 (May-June) 1960.

to evident strain.¹⁰ Then, during the 1920's, Stalin, building on the Bolshevik organizational principles bequeathed by Lenin, proceeded to fulfill Trotsky's 1904 prophecy by adeptly and ruthlessly consolidating the party's control over the Soviet Union and the international Communist movement, and at the same time his own personal control over the party. By 1929 this twin process had proceeded to the point where Stalin could launch the "second revolution" of forced-draft industrialization and collectivization—a revolution which enabled him to establish the Stalinist totalitarian system.¹¹

It was at this point that Communist theory on the role of the individual began to catch up with practice, although there never was an official repudiation of the orthodox Marxist position. In part, the shift of emphasis to the significance of individual endeavor was a natural consequence of the developing cult of Stalin, who now became the *Vozhd* (leader) and who obviously was not the kind of man to wish to share power and glory even with impersonal laws of historical development. Greater concern with the role of the individual was also a necessary psychological and philosophical accompaniment of the "revolution from above"; for, in a very real sense, Stalin's policies were an attempt to pull Russia out of its historical rut and accelerate the slow pace of advance ordained by "natural" economic laws. The Soviet people were commanded to storm the economic barricades under the battle order fixed by Stalin. Marxism, it was now declared, provided "the foundation for the active, operative, creative role of the subjective factor in history to transform possibility into actuality."¹²

Once this became the new orthodoxy, the position of the individual was re-evaluated in one field after another. M. N. Pokrovsky's ultra-Marxist school of historiography, which portrayed history merely as the playing-out of predetermined economic forces through class struggles, was condemned in 1934 as vulgar economic materialism. Historians were ordered to write "in an animated and entertaining form with an exposition of the most important events and facts in their chronological sequence and with sketches of historical personages."¹³ The way was now opened for the glorifica-

tion of Russian patriots and Czars in history, literature and the theater. In psychological theory, the view of the individual as a kind of human geiger counter registering impulses generated by social and economic forces was rejected, and man acquired consciousness, purpose, and some capacity to affect the course of events.¹⁴ As a corollary, he was also held responsible for his actions. Pedagogical theory and practice soon fell into step. The *Short Course*, though asserting that Communist policy does not depend "on the good wishes of outstanding men," in effect denied limitations on the leader by singing paeans to Stalin and rewriting history for his benefit.

Destalinization

So long as Stalin ruled, inconsistencies and even direct contradictions in Communist theory concerning the role of the individual could be publicly repressed since exegesis is the prerogative of leadership. However, when the heirs of the great *Vozhd* decided to renounce him, the doctrinal contradictions could no longer be simply ignored. Since 1956, a number of theoretical explanations of the "cult of personality" have been advanced,¹⁵ but the most definitive and carefully reasoned official analysis was offered in *Fundamentals of Marxism-Leninism*, published in 1959.¹⁶ This work attempts to explain, on the one hand, how the orthodox Marxist characterization of the rule of the individual remains valid, how great leaders are a fundamental feature of the socialist system, and how the Soviet Union survived Stalinism essentially unscathed; and, on the other hand, how the Soviet Union became afflicted with the "cult of personality" and what harm resulted.

Given the incompatible nature of these elements and the practical political implications involved, it is not surprising that the theoretical synthesis fails to be convincing. The work begins with an affirmation of the important role of the leader in society:

Leaders work out and formulate the policy of a class, a state, a party, organize its enforcement, and direct the activity of thousands and millions of people.

of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks.) "On the Teaching of Civic History in the Schools of the USSR," May 16, 1934.

¹⁴ Raymond A. Bauer, *The New Man in Soviet Psychology*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1952, chap. 6.

¹⁵ The most notable being: Khrushchev's secret speech to the 20th Party Congress; the Central Committee Resolution of June 30, 1956; Khrushchev's October 17, 1961, report to the 22nd Party Congress.

¹⁶ *Osnovy Marksizma-Leninizma*, *op. cit.*, pp. 187-94.

¹⁰ Sidney Hook forcefully argues that Lenin's role in the Russian Revolution was decisive. See Hook, *op. cit.*, chap. X.

¹¹ For a discussion of the impact of industrialization on the development of Stalinism, see: Alec Nove, "Was Stalin Really Necessary?," *Encounter*, April 1962, and a comment by Hugh Seton-Watson, "Really Necessary?," *ibid.*, May 1962.

¹² M. B. Mitin and I. Razumovsky, *Dialekticheskie i istoricheskie materialism*, Moscow, 1932, Vol II, p. 405.

¹³ Daniels, *op. cit.*, p. 14, citing the decree of the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR and the Central Committee

A Garland of Stalinisms

The Sun . . .

The heart of every Soviet citizen is warmed by his love of Stalin. In all languages of the world, humanity glorifies his name, the name of the promoter of popular happiness, of the head of working humanity.

—Pravda, December 10, 1949.

The Father . . .

He is friend of the sun
He will disarm all his foes.
Your name is on our lips,
Your heart is in our hearts,
Your will in our deeds.
Stalin, the father, has sixteen daughters—
Sixteen loving Republics.

—Pravda, December 11, 1949.

The Ubiquitous . . .

Stalin! Always we hear in our souls his dear name. And here, in the Kremlin, his presence touches us at every step. We walk on stones which he may have trod only recently. Let us fall on our knees and kiss those holy footprints.

—From *Zemlia Russkaia [Russian Land]*, book published by Komsomol, 1946.

Author of Creation . . .

O Great Stalin, O Leader of the Peoples,
Thou who didst give birth to man,
Thou who didst make fertile the earth,
Thou who dost rejuvenate the centuries,
Thou who givest blossom to the spring . . .

—Pravda, August 28, 1936.

Omnipotent (?) Sire . . .

I love a young woman with a renewed love and I shall perpetuate myself in my children—all thanks to Thee, great educator Stalin. . . . And when the woman I love presents me with a child, the first word it shall utter will be: Stalin.

—Pravda, February 1, 1935, quoting a writer by name of Avdienko.

That naughty Yossif . . .

. . . I feel no more than in my twenties since Stalin taught me to understand the meaning of life and art. . . .

—Izvestia, December 2, 1936, quoting a venerable Soviet actress.

He drives . . .

Stalin is the driver of the locomotive of history.

—Pravda, December 26, 1939.

He personally . . .

. . . foresees and determines the plan for the development of our country for long historical periods. . . .

—Pravda, December 21, 1949.

. . . examined all the main questions of Soviet technical history. . . .

—Radio Moscow, December 28, 1949.

. . . attended to gas conversion in Moscow.

—Moscow Bolshevik, April 9, 1949.

. . . [was responsible] for planting eucalyptus trees on the coast of the Black Sea, cultivating melons in the Moscow region and extending the cultivation of branched wheat. . . .

—Pravda, December 21, 1949.

. . . bestows daily attention on the development of public health. . . .

—Medical Worker, November 5, 1952.

. . . inspires Soviet male and female physical culturists to achieve new successes in sport for the glory of the great socialist Homeland.

—Pravda, May 26, 1952.

He is . . .

. . . the greatest Marxist, the great Leninist, the brilliant continuer of the great cause of Marx-Engels-Lenin. . . .

—Soviet State and Law, No. 4, 1950, p. 79.

. . . the greatest scholar of our epoch. . . .

—Pravda, November 25, 1946.

. . . the creator of the Soviet Armed Forces, the great military leader of modern times . . . the creator of the progressive Soviet military science. . . .

—N. Bulganin in Pravda, December 21, 1949.

. . . the greatest man on our planet.

—K. Voroshilov, in Stalin and the Armed Forces of the USSR, Moscow, 1951, p. 81.

. . . the best that humanity possesses. For Stalin is hope; he is expectation; he is the beacon that guides all progressive mankind. Stalin is our banner! Stalin is our will! Stalin is our victory!

—Nikita Sergeyevich Khrushchev, as quoted in Pravda, January 31, 1937.

The leader, however, "is not an accident in the historical process, but is an objective necessity." He is not an independently creative force, for he always corresponds to the needs of a particular class or state and is occupied with putting into effect the laws of social development. In this manner, the role of the party and its current First Secretary is justified.

However, we are then told that some leaders operate against the objective laws of history. These are the leaders of the reactionary classes, the "Hitlers and contemporary imperialist politicians," who undertake "adventurous" actions. Marx and Engels, it should be noted, believed that capitalist leaders were, for the most part, acting out a historically necessary role. True, on occasion, a leader might not be in accord with contemporary economic and social forces and therefore might retard the natural course of social evolution for a time. This phenomenon, of course, was considered especially likely to occur in a fully matured capitalist society just prior to the revolution; but it could only be a temporary aberration, for otherwise the whole Marxian analysis of the instrumental role of the leader would have been brought into question. According to the *Fundamentals of Marxism-Leninism*, however, all Communist leaders are by definition "progressive", and all others "reactionary"; in sum, the orthodox view of the role of the leader in history now applies only to "progressive" societies and their leaders.

More surprises are yet to come as the authors turn specifically to the "cult of personality." They state flatly that "the cult of personality *contradicts* Marxism-Leninism" (*italics added*). They thus shift the ground of the argument and, in so doing, involve themselves in a serious methodological error—*i.e.*, a confusion of descriptive and normative theory. Up to this point the authors had claimed Marxism-Leninism to be a valid description of the role of the leader in society (or at least in "progressive" societies); now they state that the cult of personality, *as actually practiced by Stalin*, is contrary to Marxism-Leninism. In the latter context, obviously, Marxism-Leninism is used in the sense of a guide or a norm; but what does this do to the ideology's claim to represent actual historical truth?

What impact did Stalin have on Soviet society? We read that he abolished democratic procedures, underrated the capabilities of the people, and in general "introduced into the socialist movement phenomena contrary to its nature." Yet, we are assured, "these negative phenomena did not change the socialist nature of Soviet society"; the inexorable laws of socialist development overcame Stalinism and continued to score successes, although these successes "would have been greater if it

had not been for the mistakes of Stalin." The further revelations about Stalin at the 22nd Congress must have raised questions in the minds of many Soviet citizens about the official designations of successes and failures and about the ranking of "primary" and "secondary" characteristics of society.

How was it possible for the cult of personality to appear, of all places, in the first socialist country? The answer is critical for the legitimacy of the Soviet system and its current leadership. Stalin, we are told, possessed qualities—he was "a good organizer and theoretician" and had "an iron will"—which fitted the needs of the working class. Unfortunately, however, he also was endowed with pernicious "secondary" traits: "rudeness, intolerance of the views of others, pathological suspiciousness, and capriciousness." These "secondary" traits came into play only because of the centralization of power, which was necessitated in turn by three unusual circumstances: 1) the construction of socialism in a backward country, 2) capitalist encirclement, and 3) the cruel class war and attacks by enemies of the party.

THIS EXPLANATION IS not without meaning, but it raises a number of further questions. What criteria determine which personality traits are primary and which are secondary? Moreover, were the supposedly secondary traits ascribed to Stalin the result of structural defects in Soviet society (or were they, perhaps, remnants of a bourgeois mentality lingering in the recesses of Stalin's personality)? The extenuating circumstances listed above did indeed encourage Stalin's consolidation of power; but then, centralization of authority is also good Leninist doctrine. After all, it was Lenin who pushed through the resolution of the 10th Party Congress in 1921 against factionalism in the party. Moreover, Stalin constructed his political machine in the 1920's, before the "construction of socialism" really began; in fact, the consolidation of power was a precondition for the frenetic industrialization drive. Finally, the special circumstances cited were nowhere foreseen in original Marxism for the simple reason that the revolution it envisioned was to be worldwide and was to occur when capitalism was ripe for the plucking and industrialization already far advanced. This may be petty theoretical quibbling, but after all the Soviets claim that their revolution was guided by Marxist principles.

The admission that centralization of power enabled Stalin's pernicious traits to come into play points, to be sure, in the right direction. We are, however, given no analysis of the political structure logically required

to explain this development. Soviet ideologues beg the question by applying the Marxian categorization which makes the political structure secondary to the economic and social system—even though the major impact of Leninism, in both theory and practice, was to assert the primacy of the political will of the party and its leader. Furthermore, since centralization of power was a major precondition for the emergence of Stalinism, assurance is lacking that the cult of personality will not be (or is not being) repeated, notwithstanding Soviet claims that “Leninist norms” have been restored.

This troublesome theoretical problem, which Soviet ideologists never succeeded in resolving, again became acute in late 1961 and 1962 after the extension of the attack on Stalin at the 22nd CPSU Congress. It was the foreign Communist parties, however, which were most concerned with obtaining satisfactory explanations of the personality cult: Khrushchev was satisfied to use Stalin in a heavy-handed way as a scapegoat for all shortcomings in the Soviet Union—even for some which developed after the old dictator’s death—and to exploit the issue of Stalinism as a weapon against his political opponents. *Pravda* on November 11, 1961, glibly dismissed the fundamental question by remarking that “the cult of personality was a superficial boil on the perfectly healthy organism of our party.”

Some foreign Communist parties which had been pressing since 1956 for a “profound Marxist explanation” of Stalinism—especially the Italians and Poles—were obviously not satisfied with the Soviet answers.¹⁷ At one Communist party congress after another in late 1961, the issue of Stalinism was broached, but never squarely met. Gomulka essayed an explanation but did not go beyond previous Soviet statements. Togliatti, head of the faction-ridden and maverick Italian party, was no more ready than in 1956 to accept the ritualized Soviet formula on Stalinism. In November 1961 he told the Italian Party Congress that “the problem of Stalin is a grave and profound one transcending individual denunciations of inhuman actions and impinging on fundamental questions of the working class and Communist movement which inescapably must be tackled.”¹⁸

Foreign Communist leaders could not ignore the theoretical problem of the cult of personality because their own leadership of their respective parties was

brought into question and because Stalin had ruled the world Communist movement for so long that many of them were implicated as his lieutenants. Moreover, the very legitimacy of the Communist ideology and system was at stake, as the eminent Polish theoretician, Oskar Lange, implicitly admitted when he stated in December 1961: “. . . the worship of personality and everything it involves does not constitute some kind of unavoidable stage in the process of building socialism. . . .”¹⁹ Inevitably, destalinization has been closely connected with the growth of polycentrism and, in some parties such as the Italian, with demands for more internal party debate. The Chinese clearly perceived this connection and consequently were appalled by the dethroning of Stalin.

Even though many foreign Communists, in the absence of any thorough explanation of Stalinism, were apprehensive that it might be a cancer instead of just a “superficial boil,” their party leaders could probe no more deeply than the Soviets themselves for fear that this would lead to a dangerous investigation of the sources and exercise of political power in the Communist world. Only the Yugoslavs could suggest, for the most part cautiously, that Stalinism had its roots in bureaucratization—or, as Djilas put it in more extreme fashion, in the rise of the “new class.”

The Leader in Western Analyses

The role of the leader not only bedevils Communist politics; it also presents a difficult methodological problem for Western students attempting to present a balanced analysis of Soviet society. Not infrequently the personality, policy orientation, and *modus operandi* of the leader pale into insignificance in analyses which stress the operating characteristics of the system, the organizational push of the ideology, the imperatives of social and economic forces, or the tenacious cultural and anthropological heritage of prerevolutionary Russia. Social scientists legitimately focus their attention on institutions, both formal and informal, and look for identifiable, and to some extent, predictable patterns of development. Individuals add a capricious element, especially when they are powerful leaders about whom little is really known. Even analyses relying on the

¹⁷ For a description of the reaction of foreign Communist parties to Soviet explanations of the cult of personality in 1956, see: “Anatomy of Tyranny,” *Problems of Communism*, No. 4 (July-Aug.) 1956; Jane Degras and Walter Z. Laqueur, “The Aftermath of Destalinization,” *Problems of Communism*, No. 5 (Sept.-Oct.) 1956.

¹⁸ For a more detailed exposition of the reactions of foreign

Communist parties to renewed attacks on Stalin at the 22nd Party Congress, see: Alexander Dallin, “Long Divisions and Fine Fractions,” *Problems of Communism*, No. 2 (March-April) 1962; “De-Stalinization in Eastern Europe,” *ibid.*, No. 3 (May-June) 1962; *Survey* (London), No. 42 (June) 1962, devoted to “Polycentrism.”

¹⁹ Quoted in K. A. Jelenski, “Poland,” *Survey*, *loc. cit.*, p. 60.

concept of totalitarianism and methodologies stressing the organization and use of power often tend to treat the leader as a kind of *deus ex machina*—although their emphasis on the concentration of power and on the lack of restraints upon the leadership necessarily point up the importance of the characteristics of the particular leader.

Analyses of this sort certainly have their value in demonstrating that the leader cannot be considered in a vacuum. The leader must indeed interact with society, and the nature of that society inevitably colors his perspective and in effect places some restraints on him. Though the leader in the Soviet Union has far fewer limitations on his power than does his counterpart in a constitutional democratic state, the myth of the omnipotent totalitarian leader is just that—a myth.

On the other hand, there are those who devote their primary attention to the motives, drives and perspectives of the leadership. Perhaps the best known approach of this type is that which assumes that since the present Soviet leadership has been steeped in the doctrines of Marxism-Leninism-Stalinism, a careful reading of the Communist classics will elucidate the leader's thought processes and give clues to his *Weltanschauung*. This comes as close as we can get to putting the leader on the couch, so to speak, and undeniably has its value. However, it cannot treat with certainty a particular leader's particular reaction to a particular situation. Moreover, this approach is generally static, providing little scope for predictions of change, either in the psychological "code" or in the actual policies of the leadership. Finally, the conflicts within the Soviet leadership after Stalin's death and the current disputes within the bloc belie any firm unity of policy orientation and cast doubts on the assumption that, because Communists have a common ideology, it makes relatively little difference in historical development who the particular leader happens to be.

Again, some journalists and Kremlinologists tend to explain events and policies almost entirely in terms of the struggle for power within the Kremlin. This is certainly a crucial ingredient in policy formation in this highly politicalized society. However, the Kremlinologist is frequently so preoccupied with following the leadership struggle—a most tortuous, laborious and tricky "art"—that he fails to probe into the policy implications of the struggle; or he assumes that all policy is merely a by-product of the struggle—the froth thrown up by the turbid waters of the Kremlin political sea. This may lead to a type of power determinism that fails to give sufficient consideration to how power is used and how the policies espoused by various leaders

are related to outstanding societal problems. Even if we assume that policy preferences are motivated primarily by personal political considerations, it is clear that the power struggle inevitably tends to focus on policy issues as the contestants attempt to enlist political support and differentiate themselves from one another. Policy differences tend to harden into ideological disputes, thus reinforcing the intensity of the struggle. Victorious contestants sometimes may cynically reverse their positions: both Stalin and Khrushchev afterwards adopted some of the policies of the rivals they had defeated. Nevertheless, to an appreciable extent the leader remains burdened with the policies on which he rides to power.

In discussing the different approaches to the role of the leader in Soviet society, the author has to some extent overdrawn them in order to highlight the methodological issues involved. Actually, the best representatives of each approach are well aware of its limitations and either have consciously given excessive emphasis to their particular methodology for heuristic purposes or have balanced it by correctives.

The Leader and the Soviet System

More specifically, then, what is the impact of the Khrushchev leadership on Soviet development? The following attempt to explore this question briefly does not pretend to offer a comprehensive and balanced appraisal of post-Stalin Soviet Russia; nor is it predicated on the assumption that the force of leadership is the sole creative factor in societal development. A full analysis would have to consider a host of factors, including *inter alia*: the social and economic forces at play; the built-in dynamics of the various institutions, political, economic, administrative; the role of ideology; and, particularly, the impact of foreign affairs. Moreover, many of the Soviet policies of the interregnum period of the mid-1950's cannot necessarily be attributed to Khrushchev. Nevertheless, because of the highly centralized and all-embracing nature of the political system and the continuing stress on voluntarism in the official ideology, both of which inevitably lend greater force to the will of the leader than is the case in any pluralistic constitutional democracy, a major difference between the Stalin and Khrushchev eras is precisely the reflection of the differences between the two leaders. A Khrushchev cult has now replaced the Stalin cult and, like its predecessor, is already marked by exaggerations of Khrushchev's historical role. But some new ingredients have been blended into the current cult.

Ironically, the Marxian contention that the role of the leader is necessarily secondary because a society produces the kind of leader appropriate to its needs—or, to give the proposition a Plekhanovian twist, that while the emergence of a particular leader may be accidental, he can operate effectively only if his personal qualities conform to the society's character—is probably truer of Western democracies than of the Soviet Union because the members of a democratic society have a greater say in determining the choice of the leader. The Soviet leader, on the contrary, may tend to become relatively immune to societal pressures: certainly, in the Soviet Union today, few would argue that during his last years Stalin was completely in tune with the needs and aspirations of Soviet society at large. Moreover, it is still good dogma that the leadership should not merely hold onto the coattails of society but must “consciously” mobilize the forces of “spontaneity” to fulfill goals beyond the ken of the ordinary citizen. Society's needs are in effect to be *created* by the leadership. By way of illustration, Stalin's ruthlessness may have made him the appropriate person to lead the Soviet Union during the *Sturm und Drang* of collectivization and forced industrialization, but the decision to modernize in this fashion was not “historically necessary”; it was taken by Stalin for a number of reasons.²⁰ In a very real sense, then, whether consciously or not, he created the conditions that made his particular talents necessary.

TO COME TO THE recent era, Khrushchev is obviously a product of his environment and is in tune with it. His policies can be explained by reference to obvious needs of Soviet society (although here, again, some of these needs are created by his own policies, *e.g.*, the continued frenetic push for ever higher production). This does not necessarily mean, however, that some considerably different sort of leader with different policies might not also have been attuned to the society's needs, since a particular need may often be met in a number of ways. More important, a society's needs are rarely, if ever, wholistic; they are diverse and sometimes mutually conflicting, and they are espoused by differing groups—even in the “monolithic” Soviet Union. The forces and institutions of Soviet society in the mid-1950's might have ruled out many types of leaders, but they did not ineluctably call for a Khrushchev.

Khrushchev's opponents in the party Presidium certainly believed in the possibility of lines of development

²⁰ On this point, see: Nove, *op. cit.*, and A. Erlich, *The Soviet Industrialization Debate*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1960.

different from those laid down by him, and their programs undoubtedly appealed at least to some segments of Soviet society more than did Khrushchev's. The latter's political success does not necessarily mean that he was better suited to the times than his opponents; rather it indicates that he was a shrewder political operator. The precariousness of Khrushchev's position in June 1957 should give pause to anyone who believes that his victory was historically inevitable. Had, say, Malenkov, or Beria, or Molotov—all products of Soviet society—been successful in their individual bids for power, there can be little doubt that the Soviet Union would have developed somewhat differently. Moreover, over a sufficient period of time, the alternate development possibilities would not necessarily have been merely minor variations on a constant major theme of evolution. The Soviet leaders are not as goal-oriented as is sometimes believed, in large measure because the goals are so vague. At present, these goals largely boil down, in domestic affairs, to continued high production at the expense of all else. Although any successor to Stalin would have started with the same common heritage, it is not difficult to imagine that had one of Khrushchev's rivals gained predominance in his stead, the recent course of Soviet development could very possibly have been different.

THERE ARE AT LEAST three inextricably interrelated dimensions to an analysis of Khrushchev's personal impact on Soviet historical development: 1) the interplay between inner Kremlin politics and national policy; 2) the influence of Khrushchev's background and personal experience upon his actions as a national leader; and 3) Khrushchev's individual style of leadership. The present Soviet leader has shaped his policies with an obvious eye to buttressing his own political position; but his selection of issues and emphases have been influenced by his personal experience. His style of leadership, or mode of operation, is again closely connected with his political needs and previous experience, but it also derives from his physiological and psychological makeup. His enormous energy and drive are the products of a robust physique, an uninhibited personality, and the politician's usual dose of egoism.

Making no pretense at completeness or scientific analysis, let us examine three areas where Khrushchev's hand seems particularly evident. Perhaps the most egregious example is agriculture, which Khrushchev virtually made his private domain. Certainly, given the abysmal state of agriculture in 1953 as a result of Stalin's one-sided policies, something had to be done

to bolster production regardless of who assumed the leadership. Khrushchev had had wide experience with agriculture not only in the Ukraine but also as a Central Committee Secretary for several years before Stalin's death; moreover, he had definite and drastic ideas for agricultural improvement, as evidenced by his abortive proposal for *agrogorods* (agricultural towns) in 1951. It was quite natural, therefore, that he became the chief spokesman on farm problems in September 1953. Moreover, the seriousness of the agricultural situation made it an ideal issue for him to exploit in order to enhance his authority within the Presidium as well as in the country at large. With his bold programs for the virgin lands, for structural reforms, more incentives, and other improvements—necessarily entailing greater investment of all kinds in agriculture—he was able to seize the political initiative. We now know that his policies were attacked by several Presidium members, including Molotov and Malenkov, who probably acted out of a mixture of political and economic motives. It consequently seems safe to conclude that had someone other than Khrushchev been in charge, agricultural policies would have evolved along somewhat different lines.²¹

A second post-Stalin development attributable in considerable measure to Khrushchev has been the strengthening of the party and the extension of its controls throughout Soviet society, particularly at the regional and lower levels.²² By enlarging the scope of party responsibilities, Khrushchev as First Secretary increased his own powers vis-à-vis those Presidium members who were based in the state administration, the police, or the military. At the same time, by reason of past experience and outlook, he was more of a party *apparatchik* than any of his major rivals for power, and hence more likely to rely on the party apparatus as an administrative instrument. Had Malenkov, for example, emerged victorious instead of Khrushchev, it seems probable that he would have placed greater reliance on the technically competent industrial bureaucracy and less on the more politically oriented party machine.

Thirdly, Khrushchev has instituted a new style of leadership which might be loosely termed "totalitarian populism." He travels extensively, making contact with the masses and with lower officials, both to give instruc-

tions directly and to gather information. In 1961 he spent 32 days inspecting farms. He is less dogmatic, at least verbally, and recommends practical studies to see what will work. He calls for greater mass participation in combatting bureaucracy, eradicating "anti-socialist" activities and habits, and raising production. Khrushchev's "folksy" image is linked with policies to undercut the ossification of new social classes, *e.g.*, the 1958 educational reform, steps to broaden the party base, new wage policies. These measures, in conjunction with the lessening of terror, have had the effect of creating more ferment and conflicting pressures in Soviet society.

CERTAINLY THE KHRUSHCHEV style appears compatible with the requisites of the system in its existing stage of development; but that Khrushchev adopted this particular style can hardly be said to have been inevitable—especially since it meant a radical break with Stalin's methods. In part, Khrushchev's style derives from the restless and dynamic nature of the man. His long exercise of party power in the Ukraine, somewhat isolated from Stalin's direct influence, afforded him an opportunity to develop the techniques he now applies more intensively on a national scale. His often voiced pride in being a self-made man naturally affects his view of the development of a self-perpetuating middle class whose sons and daughters disdain physical work and have not learned the lessons of active participation in production. Finally, his leadership style is an effective political technique for solidifying his position and building up support among the lower administrative rank and file. More than once he has stolen the initiative from his political opponents by appealing directly to the masses, as he did in inviting public discussion of his industrial reorganization proposals in March 1957 when the party Presidium was badly split on the issue.

To emphasize only Khrushchev's departures from the Stalinist heritage would tend to make him appear a liberal or even a radical. In fact, he may more aptly be characterized as a dynamic conservative in the sense that he is attempting to conserve what he believes to be fundamental in the revolutionary heritage by modifying and adjusting leadership techniques and secondary institutions to conform to a changing economic and social situation. To have stood pat might have courted more radical upheavals, or stagnation. However, there is no assurance that over the long haul his alteration of methods might not to some degree affect his goals. This was precisely the fear of Molotov and other political opponents of Khrushchev who were more firmly wedded to the status quo.

²¹ On Khrushchev's agricultural policy, see: Alec Nove, "Soviet Agriculture Marks Time," *Foreign Affairs*, July 1962; my chapter, "Agricultural Administration Under Khrushchev," in a forthcoming book on Soviet agriculture to be published by Kansas University Press.

²² For a fuller discussion of this point, see: H. Swearer, "Changing Roles of the CPSU Under First Secretary Khrushchev," *World Politics*, October 1962.

To label Khrushchev a dynamic conservative is not to minimize his forceful actions nor the modifications he has wrought in the system. He certainly views himself as a purposeful leader who is consciously shaping society. If Khrushchev goes down in Soviet annals as primarily an impatient tinkerer with the system, this will be in some measure the result of historical timing. Both Lenin and Stalin lived in epochs that afforded them greater opportunity to shape historical development than Khrushchev has had, inasmuch as they were in charge of forging new political, economic and social institutions. After more than four decades, the forms and habits of Soviet society have crystallized. Khrushchev, to be sure, is not satisfied with many aspects of the established system and continues his efforts at social engineering; but his alterations do not cut as deep as those of Lenin and Stalin. Despite the continued lack of formal restraints on the exercise of his power and the repeatedly demonstrated compulsion of the leadership to interfere in all facets of the national life, Khrushchev is less of an architect of Soviet development than either of his two predecessors.

In part, this is because the institutions which confronted him had already become a legitimized part of the revolutionary heritage. He could criticize them for inefficiency, but not as pernicious institutions, whereas Stalin had been able to effect profound changes because these were directed against the ideologically discredited bourgeois heritage. Destalinization undoubtedly allowed some scope for Khrushchev's reformist instincts by tending to undermine parts of the Stalinist institutional legacy; however, he could push destalinization only with circumspection, for fear of undermining the legitimacy of the entire heritage. A frequent device for escaping from this cul-de-sac has been to drape a departure from Stalinist policy in the cloak of Leninism and to charge that Stalin perverted Lenin's policies.

KHRUSHCHEV'S REFORMIST TENDENCIES are also held in check by the influence of his own background and by his evident reluctance to tamper with the more fundamental features of the existing system. He will not countenance a dilution of the power monopoly held by the leadership and the party. The paramount domestic goal remains ever higher economic production. Despite some modifications and the public airing of still more radical proposals, the economy is still run primarily by administrative fiat. Khrushchev views reforms largely in terms of altered administrative techniques: one sweeping upheaval after another has hit the huge Soviet bureaucratic structures in recent

years—but still without solving the basic administrative problems. The mass participation Khrushchev has advocated should not be interpreted as a concession to demands from below for democratization, or as a step to institute a popular check upon the power of the political leadership. He is attempting, rather, to stimulate a carefully controlled degree of mass participation designed to promote active public support of his regime and to enlist the people more effectively in the task of fulfilling the leadership's goals.

Khrushchev also is basically a less decisive leader than his forerunners because of an altered political situation partly of his own making. It is clear, for instance, that in recent years there has been a good deal of pulling and hauling over policy issues within the ranks of the Soviet political elite. To be sure, the Stalin regime was not quite as monolithic in reality as it appeared from afar; but it is indisputable that under Khrushchev disagreements are being more forcefully and more frequently expressed in public. A number of factors contribute to this phenomenon, which may be loosely termed bureaucratic pressure-group politics. In part, it may be a hangover from the interregnum period when the top leaders were in open disagreement. It is also a result of Khrushchev's political methods. To enlarge his sources of information and build up support for his regime by giving lower-level officials a vicarious sense of participation in decision-making, Khrushchev consults a wider number of advisors, including administrators in the provinces. Thus, he necessarily encourages a more candid and less dogmatic discussion of problems. Officials are less reluctant to speak up because useful proposals may bring promotion, and because reprisals against dissidents, though still severe in terms of demotions, at least are not lethal. As a result, while Khrushchev's words may be final, he may frequently find himself acting as a mediator among various competing segments of the bureaucracy. Even his wholesale reforms have the mark of compromise, and more than one reform has become badly eroded when put into practice.

It is tempting to suggest that Khrushchev is waging a rearguard action against the forces of spontaneity in Soviet society, forces which must eventually bring vast changes in the system because—unlike in the West, where spontaneity is usually considered a conservative factor—the political and administrative structure is greatly out of step with social and economic development. In the last ten years it has been readily apparent that the Soviet leadership faced a welling-up of pressures for change—pressures from writers, historians, economists, and others who were more and more boldly

testing, and pushing beyond, the boundaries of orthodoxy. Yet, there are other spontaneous forces in the USSR which are deeply conservative, or even reactionary, as exemplified by those groups who have a vested interest in the system constructed by Stalin (note the continued attacks on Stalinists in the bureaucracy). And Khrushchev's sympathies undoubtedly lie, at least in part, with this latter group from which he originally derived. He perforce finds himself in the position of trying to maintain a dynamic balance between these two loosely defined and opposing sets of forces.

Finally, Soviet society in general has become more intricate, educated, and sophisticated (though this is certainly more true of the urban than of the rural population), and therefore less amenable to wholesale experimentation. Moreover, Khrushchev is more familiar

with existing conditions within the Soviet Union than was Stalin—a fact which paradoxically may restrict him in his exercise of power. If, as both Western observers and Khrushchev agree, Stalin was out of tune with society because he deluded himself by his own propaganda, was misinformed by fearful subordinates, and gleaned most of his information from reports by the police and his personal secretariat, his policy decisions were probably more clear-cut and sweeping than Khrushchev's, even when they were directives to hold the line. It is after all much easier to remain doctrinally pure and to divine the scientific laws of social development if one does not let himself become entangled in the complexities of practical social and economic problems, but instead remains—as the poet Tvardovsky put it—behind the “protected walls of the Kremlin.”

Books on Stalin

By Francis Randall

STALIN MAY HAVE been the most important man who ever lived. It is not surprising, then, that there have been more biographies of Stalin than of any other man, even Napoleon. Unfortunately, most of these are Soviet propaganda pieces published in more than 300 languages. Serious historians of Stalin's career were always frustrated by the lack of documents on Stalin's early life, and by the all-pervasive secrecy, distortion, and terror of Stalin's Russia, which made access to any valuable documents in the USSR completely out of the question.

Nonetheless, during Stalin's lifetime a few Westerners and Russian exiles were able to produce substantial lives of the Vozhd (leader) and histories of the Vozhd's Russia. Some will be required reading for scholars even after the Soviet archives are thrown open. Others, however, have little to recommend them.

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The first, which appeared in 1931, was *Stalin*, by Sergei Dmitrievskii,¹ a Communist diplomat who defected from the Soviet embassy in Stockholm during the purge of the Right opposition in the late 1920's. To Dmitrievskii the overwhelming element of Stalin's career was his struggle with Trotsky, which he traced back almost to the turn of this century. The book is not very accurate; Trotsky said that Dmitrievskii's account of Stalin's first meeting with Trotsky bothered him until he realized that it was a paraphrase of his own account of his first meeting with Lenin!

Dmitrievskii did not claim to know Stalin's private life, yet spoke of his “primitive mind,” and portrayed him as “a crafty Asiatic,” “a blind power,” who “rules Russia with bayonets” and wants to impose his Communist “faith” on Europe “at the tip of a Russian-Asiatic bayonet.” Stalin was seen as a super-Nicholas I. At the end of his book, the Five Year Plan, which had

¹ Sergei Dmitrievskii, Berlin, Holzzimmer Verlag, 1931 (in Russian).