

# The "Conflict Model"

by Robert C. Tucker

A VERY IMPORTANT controversy has emerged in Soviet studies in the West. This controversy is not only of theoretical interest but also has practical political bearing, for much may depend upon which of the two conflicting positions is acted upon by Western political leadership. Scholars of Soviet affairs are all agreed that in the Soviet Union political questions of any magnitude are decided within a fairly limited circle of politically powerful persons who may be collectively described as the "leadership," "ruling group," or "elite." However, disagreement exists regarding the *nature of the political process* as it takes place within this ruling elite, especially in the years since 1957.

Some specialists, most notably Mr. Boris I. Nicolaevsky, have always believed that Soviet elite politics is a ceaseless process of conflict behind the scenes, however harmonious it may appear on the surface at any given moment. But the general "model" of Soviet politics that developed in Western sovietology after World War II did not embody this view. While it did not exclude leadership conflict over policy and power, it failed to treat such conflict as a fundamental, normal, and centrally important fact of political life in the Soviet ruling group.

Recently this conventional position has increasingly come under challenge from a minority of scholars who have been developing what may be called a "conflict model" of Soviet leadership politics. It treats political conflict in the ruling group as a constant, and thus explains some of the familiar "zigs" and "zags" of Soviet policy in terms of the struggle between different groups and different policy lines for the ascendancy. This "revisionist" position (if I may so describe it) is represented in Mr. Linden's article, which reviews Soviet politics of the recent past in accordance with the "conflict model." In Mr. Rigby's "Rejoinder" we have, in essence, a critique of the revisionist position in sovietology from the standpoint of the conventional outlook. One great value of the exchange is that it begins an overdue and much needed process of direct critical confrontation of the two divergent positions.

IT SEEMS TO ME that revisionism won this round. Although I am not in accord with Mr. Linden on every specific point of interpretation (for example, I would

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ascribe a more defensive motivation to Khrushchev's apparently unsuccessful drive for the expulsion of Molotov and others from the party), I consider this article one of the most illuminating and important of recent years in the field of Soviet studies. A closely reasoned analysis based on a great range of factual evidence from Soviet sources, it shows—in my view—a perception of the contemporary Soviet political process that is basically in tune with the realities, whereas Mr. Rigby's reply does not. In what follows, I wish to explain some of my reasons for viewing the Rigby critique of Linden's article as weak and unconvincing.

It may be a sign of the inroads being made by the "conflict model" that Mr. Rigby begins with a long list of focal points of conflict in the Soviet system. Yet it quickly becomes apparent that he espouses the conventional rather than the "revisionist" position, for he rejects two propositions that are fundamental to the latter as presented by Mr. Linden: (1) the proposition that Soviet leadership politics of recent years has turned, in large measure, on a division and conflict between policy orientations that may be termed "Stalinist," "conservative," or "orthodox" on the one hand, and "reformist" on the other, with Khrushchev as a champion of the latter orientation (rather than a "centrist" as Mr. Conquest, for example, makes him out to be); and (2) the proposition that Khrushchev, although he is the top leader and most powerful single Soviet politician, is nevertheless unable autocratically to dictate the policy line of the Soviet leadership and, moreover, has been repeatedly faced with oppositional currents in the leadership that have forced him to retreat, backtrack, mark time, and maneuver. But what grounds has Mr. Rigby given for rejecting them?

He calls the first proposition a "simplified analysis of Soviet politics" based on a "simple dichotomy." Perhaps so, but is it any more "simplified" than analyses of politics in other countries according to a "conservative-reformist" dichotomy? Political scientists often work with such conceptual simplifications as general models into which all sorts of refinements, qualifications and complexities need to be introduced. Why should they not do the same in studying Soviet politics if the data indicate (as they seem to) the applicability of such a general model? As if in answer to this question, Mr. Rigby goes on to say that the "simple dichotomy" seems to him "both implausible *a priori* and inadequately supported by the evidence adduced." But why it is implausible *a priori* he does not say, and in what sense the evidence is inadequate he does not explain. Indeed, he says nothing more on this vital issue and devotes the rest of his article to the issue of Khrushchev's power. So I conclude that his rejoinder leaves the first of the two propositions mentioned above completely untouched.

Taking issue with the second proposition, Mr. Rigby pictures Khrushchev—with minor qualification—as a dictator *within* the Soviet regime, a leader in a command position in the ruling group, one who "... would not

tolerate any persistent posture of opposition involving basic questions on the part of *any* of his Presidium 'colleagues,' or any sign of a recurrent configuration of opposition on the part of two or more of them." As one argument for this view, he cites the power of a British prime minister over his own party, as shown in Mr. Macmillan's ministerial "purge" in 1962, and suggests that under conditions of Soviet authoritarianism and one-party government, Mr. Khrushchev's power must certainly be still greater in relation to *his* political associates.

This argument has a superficial plausibility, but it does not withstand analysis. A dictatorship is not necessarily an autocracy, although it *may* be one or, alternatively, may *become* one, as the Soviet dictatorship did in the late 1930's when Stalin, through the *Yezhovshchina*, imposed a reign of terror upon the party. That is to say, a system of government in which the regime stands in an authoritarian relation to the people is not necessarily one in which the top leader stands in an authoritarian relation to the rest of the ruling group. Conversely, the supreme leader in a democratic political system may, at certain times or in certain ways, be in a command position in relation to his own government or his own party; and, paradoxically, he may derive this power over his own political associates in part from the very institutions and practices of democracy. Thus, what power Mr. Macmillan had over the Conservative Party leadership (and we might do well not to overestimate it) derived in part from his ability to threaten Conservative M.P.'s with a general election at a time *not* of their choosing. In the absence of an opposition party and democratic elections in the Soviet Union, Mr. Khrushchev lacks this kind of leverage over *his* party colleagues. Of course, he has other kinds, but we have no right to assume, as Mr. Rigby does, that there is something in the nature of Soviet authoritarianism that gives Khrushchev greater power over other members of the leadership than a democratic political leader has; it could well be that in some ways he has less.

MR. RIGBY GOES ON to draw a general comparison between the "post-1957 Khrushchev" and the "pre-1937 Stalin," arguing that Khrushchev's present position is probably somewhat stronger than Stalin's was then, owing to his (Khrushchev's) "formidable concentration of formal roles," and that Stalin's position, in any case, was strong enough to enable him subsequently to carry out the *Yezhovshchina* (hence Khrushchev's must be comparably great). I would like to point out in reply (1) that Stalin in the early 1930's was not yet a dictator over the ruling group, but was subject to very serious opposition in the leadership—something which Mr. Rigby does not want to admit in the case of the post-1957 Khrushchev; (2) that the argument about Khrushchev's greater collection of formal roles (presumably referring to his being Premier as well as First Secretary of the party) carries little weight since, with the faithful and malleable

Molotov in the premiership, Stalin had no urgent need to take over that formal role in order to consolidate his power; and (3) that Stalin's ability to carry out the *Yezhovshchina* successfully was largely due to his having built up, in addition to a formidable personal political machine, a direct personal relationship of control over the secret police that appears to have no counterpart in Khrushchev's Russia, pre- or post-1957. For these and other reasons, Khrushchev's present position appears less strong than Stalin's was in the early 1930's. And this, to repeat, was *before* he acquired autocratic power over the ruling group.

Further, Mr. Rigby appeals to the June 1957 affair of the "anti-party group" as a source of evidence for his view that Khrushchev now "would not tolerate any persistent posture of opposition." He argues that, remembering June 1957, when a hostile Presidium majority sought to overthrow Khrushchev only to be "quickly and decisively defeated," no Presidium member now "could be foolhardy enough to make the *first move* towards the formation of such a grouping."

This interpretation of the June 1957 episode fails to make a vitally important distinction between (a) opposing Khrushchev's policy line and (b) trying to overthrow him. We know (from materials of the 22nd Party Congress, for example) that Khrushchev faced strong oppositional currents in the Presidium throughout the period from the 20th Congress in February 1956 to the middle of 1957, and that he was unable to prevent this. It was only when the Presidium opposition finally took steps to oust him from the top leadership that he ousted the opposition, and I am not sure that "quickly and decisively defeated" accurately describes what happened, considering that the crisis went on for about ten days and that Marshal Zhukov's support of Khrushchev may have played a vital role in the outcome. Viewed in this broader perspective taking in the period preceding it, the affair of June 1957, insofar as it offers a lesson for Soviet politicians, would carry the following meaning to them: It is realistically possible to oppose Khrushchev on important policy issues and to try to force him to retreat on them, but it is dangerous to plot or attempt his overthrow from power.

BUT HOW DANGEROUS? According to Mr. Linden's interpretation, with which I agree, the Khrushchev faction has unsuccessfully tried to punish the ousted oppositionists with expulsion from the party and worse. This, of course, suggests that the Soviet ruling elite would rather not make it *too* dangerous even to seek Khrushchev's ouster and fail in the attempt. But, in any event, the affair of the anti-Khrushchev group carries no implications as to the inadvisability of opposing Khrushchev's policy line in the Presidium (or Central Committee, etc.).

Since an unsuccessful attempt to expel the anti-Khrushchev group from the party implies limits to Khrushchev's power, Mr. Rigby seeks an alternative motivation for the

revived campaign of vilification against Molotov and the others at the time of the 22nd Congress and after. But his suggestions on this point lack cogency. It seems to me, for example, that since the Soviet system is still a dictatorship, Khrushchev has less need of "convincing the population of the genuineness of his break with the past," which Mr. Rigby suggests as a motive for the revived campaign, than of convincing the ruling elite of the inadvisability of ever again attempting his ouster.

We know from the June 1957 affair and its prelude that the pre-1957 Khrushchev was a *challengeable* leader, if not an overthrowable one. Those who, like Mr. Rigby, wish us to believe that the post-1957 Khrushchev is an unchallenged leader who need not contend with opposition in the party leadership must explain to us just what stable changes occurred in the power structure during or after June 1957 that transformed a challengeable into an unchallengeable Khrushchev. So far they have not done so.

## An Anti-Khrushchev Opposition?

*by Wolfgang Leonhard*

IN HIS INTERESTING article, Mr. Linden has dealt with two closely-related themes, both of which are of great importance to an understanding of the present and future development of the USSR. The first concerns Khrushchev's power position and above all the question whether and to what extent the First Secretary has succeeded during the last few years in realizing his political objectives: the second concerns the occurrence and nature of disagreements in the top party bodies, the course these controversies have followed, and personal groupings they engendered.

It is the central thesis of Mr. Linden's article that Khrushchev's position is by no means as secure as it is sometimes assumed to be. The argument runs about as follows: the power and prestige of the incumbent First Secretary depend to a much larger extent than had been true in Stalin's case on the success of his policies. It is true, to be sure, that in 1957 Khrushchev succeeded in removing the "anti-party group" and in bringing in his own supporters, but this victory was anything but final.

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Since then, he has had not only to pay continuous attention to the existing power relations in the leadership, but also to contend with serious opposition to the extent of occasionally abandoning his own plans. Furthermore, he tried, without success, to expel his leading opponents from the Communist Party, and he failed to realize, in the form and at the time he desired, his consumer goods program. In both cases, says Mr. Linden, Khrushchev was thwarted by a conservative grouping headed by Kozlov and Suslov. What is more, a number of important personnel changes—primarily those of May 1960 and October 1961—were put into effect against Khrushchev's will and resulted in a weakening of his position. In April 1962, he managed to depose Spiridonov, a protégé of the conservative Kozlov group, and to install his follower, Kirilenko, in the leadership, but in the autumn of 1962 he had to retreat once again before a new offensive of the conservatives. Only in the spring of 1963 (after Kozlov's stroke) and above all at the June Central Committee Plenum did he regain some of the terrain he had lost since May 1960.

In general, the correctness of Mr. Linden's thesis—*i.e.*, that Khrushchev is not an omnipotent ruler as Stalin was, and that in recent years he has had to take into account other forces in the leadership—can hardly be questioned. The frequent changes of position on important questions of domestic and foreign policy must surely be explained not merely by the fact that the Soviet government has frequently been confronted by "unplanned developments," but also by the fact that these "unplanned developments" produced diversity of opinion and even controversy in the higher party bodies and the top leadership itself. Issues such as the question of allocation of resources, destalinization, and the fate of the "anti-party group"—all cited by Mr. Linden—certainly played an important role in the debates. Furthermore, Khrushchev's polemics against "some comrades"—an expression almost always used when the views not just of "some comrades" but of important forces in the leadership are in question—have been so frequent in the past years and have involved so many important issues that their occurrence, to use a traditional Communist expression, could not have been "accidental." In short, the zig-zag course, the polemics, and the often important personnel changes in the leadership must be regarded not only as important indications of serious controversy in the top leadership but also as evidence that Khrushchev has occasionally found it necessary to defer to the views of certain groups in the leadership and to accept modification or postponement of his own aims.

So much for my agreement with some of Mr. Linden's basic propositions. When it comes to some of the evidence he cites, however, and—more importantly—to some of the conclusions he draws from it, we find ourselves at odds. Specifically, I should like to register my disagreement with Mr. Linden's interpretation of Khrushchev's intentions vis-à-vis the "anti-party group," and also with his views on the more general question of the