

A Degenerate Dynasty

MICHEL TATU: *Power in the Kremlin.*
(Translated from French by Helen Katel.)
New York, Viking Press, 1968.

Reviewed by Robert Conquest

TO SAY THAT THIS is the best political history of the USSR in the 1960's is not to pay much of a compliment, since there are no others that rate the label. But in addition to being unique, *Power in the Kremlin* is in itself a work of the highest excellence—a fact that does not have to be validated by comparison.

It is, of course, true, as Mr. Tatu says, that more information will eventually be forthcoming. As he puts it, "this reconstruction is only tentative. Some day, we may hope, archives will be opened—those of the Politburo and the Central Committee. The classic methods of historiography can then be applied and the present author for one will be delighted." For the foreseeable future, however, the "Kremlinological" method is surely the only way of approaching the problem of the relation between power and policy in the Soviet state. "At present," Mr. Tatu remarks, "there is in fact no other way of understanding what is going on in the centers of Soviet power;" indeed, he adds, the term Kremlinology" is in itself "an unconscious tribute" to the method of detection, interpretation and deduction on which researchers must rely.

Mr. Tatu has both of the qualities required for the task. On the one hand he has patiently sought out the fine detail of evidence. But, even more important, he has handled it with the skill and judgement, the open-minded boldness and the equally necessary refusal to jump to premature conclusions which mark the real master.

It was time we had such a history. It was also

time we were reminded once again of the dominating role of power in Soviet politics. In the author's words: "Experience has in fact shown that the importance of objective problems frequently depends on their relevance to power relationships." To compare Tatu's account with the majority of the works written during the Khrushchev period, which were based so frequently on the assumption that the First Secretary was in full control and meeting with no opposition (apart from a certain amount of friendly criticism on the part of his colleagues) is almost like comparing two different countries or epochs.

In the international sphere, the author gives extraordinarily profound and perceptive accounts of the U-2 crisis and of the more important Cuban confrontation of October 1962. Indeed, there is scarcely an area in which he does not contribute illuminatingly to our knowledge. He shows clearly that—contrary to the analyses of so many experts—the CPSU Central Committee did *not* play a decisive role either in the 1957 or in the 1964 crisis. He convincingly disentangles some of the problems which have puzzled all of us in connection with the succession of leaders of the Leningrad party organization, as well as of the Ukrainian CP. In the absence of other information, one has always been inclined to view the Leningrad apparat (for example) as a group of loyal Kozlov followers, or at least of people holding similar views on crucial problems such as destalinization. We should be grateful to Mr. Tatu for disabusing us of this rather superfi-

cial notion, and for demonstrating that the sequence Kozlov, Spiridonov, Tolstikov, represents a formal but not a factional continuity.

Mr. Tatu has observed the substance, not the formalities, of scholarship. He has not cluttered up his book with references, but it is almost always clear from the narrative where to turn for additional data or analysis. I might note, parenthetically, that the question of "scholarship" is a much muddled one. For instance, in an otherwise exceedingly amiable review in *The New Leader* (Dec. 2, 1968) of my own last book, *The Great Terror*, Professor Richard Pipes remarked that although in the book the purge had "come alive" under my apparently amateur pen "in a way that it does not in academic studies of totalitarianism," I had tended "to neglect the analytic." That is to say, though I had indeed traced the origins of the Terror to the nature of the one-party state set up by Lenin, and had gone at some length into the peculiarities of the Communist mentality and motivations, I had not formally established nor asserted the inevitability of the Stalinist terror. Even the couple of thousand references contained in my study were not enough to give me professional status. But to avoid drawing definite conclusions when the material neither imposes them nor suggests them seems to me to be the true historical method—indeed the true "scientific" method.

Nor is this the only field where a certain decadence in current notions needs to be remedied by a good deal of backpeddling. If one had to point to one central fault in modern academic attitudes, it is surely the attempt to import into areas where they are not suitable the discipline of the physical sciences, or the abstract generality of philosophy. As a result, we are beset with pretentious pseudosciences, or at best premature sciences (in the fields of sociology, psychology and literary criticism in particular), where a more modest and tentative approach might provide real insights.

THE PERIOD THAT Tatu covers—at least after the fall of Khrushchev—is in one way less interesting than earlier times. The degeneration of the Soviet ruling caste has reached the stage in which there are no longer powerful personalities with definite attitudes and programs, but third-rate, short-view, hidebound petty bureaucrats, concerned only about how best to enjoy the fruits of office. That even these third-raters can here for the first time be seen in a genuine political perspective, in

their tensions and disputes, is a major achievement of the author's.

The conclusion that seems to arise from the whole Khrushchev interlude is that no ruler can reform Russia, even in a fairly mild use of the word, unless he can crush the old-line apparat. Khrushchev made some progress in his direction, but not enough. His schemes went far enough to irritate, but not far enough to subdue the *apparatchiki*. Mr. Tatu shows in detail how these tactics led to the First Secretary's fall.

In the present circumstances, one looks to the even slightly more intelligent members of the Politburo in the hope that one or another of them may attempt (or be forced) to defend himself and fight for power by once again turning to the weapon of anti-Stalinism. There have lately been a few bare hints that something of the sort may be in the wind—e.g., the anomalous revival in Estonian Communist organs of attacks on the otherwise banned "period of the personality cult" and insistence on the "collegiality" of the Secretariat. This could hardly happen without encouragement of some faction at the center. Thus far, to be sure, it is only the merest catpaw of a wind hardly stirring the sluggish surface of the Soviet political waters. In the long run, however, progress can come only with some contender for power using anti-Stalinism against his opponents, as Khrushchev did against the "anti-party group" in 1957.

It may be argued, of course, that (unless as a result of a complete breakdown of authority) genuine reforms in Russia can be carried out only by an autocrat like Peter the Great or Alexander II, able to face down the opposition of his own ruling class. However that may be, the country is now stuck in a situation in which revolutionary change is called for by all the social, economic and intellectual forces, and opposed and abated only by a political machine specially constructed for the purpose. It is a highly artificial situation, resembling that of Mr. Waldemar in Poe's story. On the whole, Mr. Tatu expects an eventual liberalization of the Soviet system and the emergence of a true parliamentary form of government. In the foreseeable future, he thinks the country will experience various swings, including a possible reversion to one-man distatorship and even police *coups* and military *coups*: "things are probably doomed to get worse before they get better." The one thing he believes certain is that the rule of the current morocrats is "drawing to an end." This book is more of a monument than they deserve, but it is indispensable to anyone wishing to understand contemporary Soviet history.

Reviews in Brief

West vs. East

LEONARD SCHAPIRO: *Rationalism and Nationalism in Russian Nineteenth-Century Political Thought*. New Haven, Yale University Press, 1967.

THIS BRIEF, penetrating, and lucidly composed study is a revised and extended version of a series of lectures given by Professor Schapiro at Yale University in 1965. It is concerned with the two dominant strains—familiarily designated Westernism and Slavophilism—that can be traced throughout the history of Russian political thought since the early 19th century; here they are treated with greater accuracy and clarity under the headings Rationalism and Nationalism. The title implies more than a mere presentation of the parallel paths of these two schools of thought or of their confrontation. The case which Professor Schapiro argues, with a mastery of both political science and jurisprudence, is that the traditional demarcation of Russian thought is imperfect: the antagonists are not in fact saying what we would have them say in order that we may fit them more conveniently into our simple categories.

Thus, while the hallmark of rationalism was the belief that Russia's increasingly turbulent path was in no way different from that already or yet to be trodden by any other nation, and that the constitutional democracies of Western Europe stood as models for her development, we nonetheless find that there were rationalist thinkers who did not believe either that a democratic fu-

ture could be assured only by revolution, or that Russian indigenous institutions were necessarily a hindrance to progress.

This kind of thinking left room for peasant traditions, the *mir*, the commune, and even preserved a role for the autocracy. Herzen looked to the commune to help Russia into the socialist Utopia, while for Lenin the machinery of the centralistic autocracy must be seized and made to achieve the same end.

Professor Schapiro sheds light on an element which the old dichotomy has missed, namely the "nationalist." The nationalists believed that reforms could not be successfully planned in the abstract as some kind of universal blueprint for all societies, which would be typical of the rationalists. According to the nationalists, it was essential to take into account the customs, traditions, and attitudes of the nation, to build on that foundation and thus achieve progressive change which would be in harmony with the character of the people. Polycentrism is the analogy of this view for the Communist world today.

This book does much to correct the belief that Russian political thinking was above all dogmatic by showing that heterodox views were always to be found within the two main camps of revolutionaries and evolutionaries. Just as the constitutionalist Decembrists could harbor a Jacobin Pestel, and the determinist Marxists a Lenin fearful of missing an opportunity to make the revolution, so among the conservative and evolutionary-minded we find Boris Chicherin, who saw the cause of free-

dom and progress not as a struggle between the forces of darkness and light, but as a clash between what was rationally desirable and nationally possible. Professor Schapiro shows that in time a bogus version of this synthesis became the refuge of entrenched reactionary opinion, which espoused reform and even modified constitutionalism merely to guard against the more frightening changes promised by the forces of revolution.

Of special interest—against this background of protest and reaction—is the imperturbable role of the monarch, sustained by the ancient doctrine of autocracy and the outlook of the Orthodox Church, which preached love, virtue and trust, and which suspected intellectual inquiry as a corrupting influence of the heretical West. The role of the monarch served largely to widen the rift in opinion during the era of greatest social and economic change at the end of the 19th century and to crystallize that rift when compromise and adaptation were most needed. As the author comments in a footnote, "Had Nicholas and the party leaders shown more imagination, flexibility, foresight, and political skill than, in the event, they did, the revolution [of 1905] could obviously have been avoided." What we learn from this deeply informative book is that these were the very characteristics least likely to thrive in a society accustomed to divinely appointed rulers whose minds were seemingly changeable only by the violent means of mass revolt.

Harold Shukman