

# Books

## Khrushchev Remembers-- But Also Forgets

By Foy D. Kohler

NIKITA S. KHRUSHCHEV: *Khrushchev Remembers. The Last Testament*. Tr. and ed. by Strobe Talbott. Introductions by Edward Crankshaw and Jerrold Schechter. Boston, Little, Brown & Co., 1974.

I CAME TO KNOW Nikita Khrushchev and his family well during nearly six of the ten years of his rule—from July 1959, when I accompanied then Vice-President Richard Nixon to the Soviet Union and participated in many hours of talk between them; through Khrushchev's visit to the United States in September of that year, when my wife and I, along with the Henry Cabot Lodge and others, escorted him, his wife, and party on a two-week trip around the United States; and until he was ousted by a conspiracy of his associates on October 15, 1964, after I had been US Ambassador in Moscow for more than two years. I have either heard or read practically every word he ever said in public and talked with him personally, both officially and informally, on countless occasions.

In my own book, *Understanding the Russians*,<sup>1</sup> I wrote:

*To me he came to be the embodiment of the almost untranslatable Russian adjective khitryi. It is usually applied, not without a certain respect and appreciation, to the Russian peasant. According to the dictionary it means sly, cunning, artful, intricate or wily. But it really means more than this; it also means unscrupulous, smart, clever, quick-witted. Roll all these adjectives into one and you have the khitryi Khrushchev—a bootlicker or a bully as circumstances required, a demagogue and opportunist always.*

*He also had, just to complicate his character, a colossal inferiority complex—because of his origins, because he was not an Old Bolshevik, and just because he was a Russian—and, typically, this inferiority complex was more often than not manifested in assertions of superiority. He had an inexhaustible store of Russian proverbs and folk tales and an unrivaled vocabulary of the unprintable, earthy expressions in which the Russian language is so rich.*

*Khrushchev had certainly read less of Marx and Lenin—though probably not of Stalin—than I, and yet he was a kind of “true believer” as Eric Hoffer uses the*

*term. I used to think that he must say to himself every night before he went to bed that the system which had enabled him—a poor shepherd boy—to mount to the throne of the Czars had to be right.*

In international affairs, Khrushchev was a dangerous man with appalling areas of prejudice and ignorance and a tendency to act recklessly and impulsively. Internally, he had done more than his share of Stalin's dirty work of cruel, ruthless oppression and bloody purges. And yet he somehow remained a common man with a common touch, and when he came to power, he was the first ruler in Russian history actively to seek popularity. One could detect in conversation with him that he was not unaware—indeed, even seemed to take satisfaction in the fact—that some of his acts would inevitably influence the evolution of Russian society toward greater humanism.

I FIND NO essential differences between this picture of the colorful and ebullient little commissar I knew and the self-portrait that emerges from his own words in the two volumes of *Khrushchev*

<sup>1</sup> New York, Harper & Row, 1970.

*Remembers*, the first published in 1970<sup>2</sup> and the second, *The Last Testament*, just this summer. For, however unreliable they are as history, these fascinating and readable memoirs are extraordinarily revealing as to the character, attitudes, and general outlook of Khrushchev and his Kremlin associates.

When the first volume appeared, there was much controversy about its authenticity. Before the second volume was published, Time, Inc., had laid the doubts to rest by having its 180 hours of tape recordings verified as the real Khrushchev by voice-print analysis. I never shared the doubts, because even the first excerpts published in *Life* magazine were recognizably Khrushchev, both in style and tone and in self-serving content. After October 15, 1964, as he himself said in the opening paragraph of the first volume, he "lived like a hermit on the outskirts of Moscow," surrounded by "those who guard me from others—and who guard others from me." In the Soviet Union, he immediately became, to use Orwell's famous term, an "unperson."

He knew this, of course. He knew that he was never even mentioned in the Soviet press or on the radio or television, and he knew that the history books were all being revised to eradicate his memory. Anyone who was acquainted with the man comprehends that he was under tremendous mental compulsion to justify himself, to find a way somehow to recapture the place in Russian history to which he considered himself entitled.

Thus, Khrushchev started to make his own version of the rec-

ord on dictated tapes—a process which, as he frequently remarks, also relieved the boredom of his forced retirement. He would certainly have been encouraged in this effort by his family and especially by his son-in-law, Aleksei Adzhubei, former editor of *Izvestiia*, who was also smarting from having been removed from that important post and given a second-level editorial job after his father-in-law's ouster. Naturally, this activity could not be hidden from the secret police, who provided the staff for Khrushchev's household and who would hardly have failed to make copies of the tapes. Awareness of this fact and related concern for the future safety and well-being of his family probably account for some of the more glaring omissions in the memoirs. There is little about the internal political struggle following Stalin's death—less, for example, about the ouster and execution of Beria than was known from Khrushchev himself while he was in power, and no real details on his victory over his rivals of the "anti-party group" in 1957. Neither is there an account of the slick conspiracy of his colleagues leading to Khrushchev's own ou-

ter in 1964. None of his successors is directly attacked, and criticisms of their policies are ambiguous and indirect. Whenever Khrushchev seems about to let himself go in discussing living Soviet personalities, there are mysterious gaps in the tapes which make the reader wonder if those which reached the West were not in fact screened in advance by police or even political authorities. While military policies are discussed in broad terms, no secrets are revealed. There are no figures on defense costs, no accounts of Politburo debates, no identifications of key personnel in the Soviet military-industrial complex.

The memoirs are also replete with historical and chronological errors (most of which are ably set straight in footnotes by editor-translator Strobe Talbott). Some of these, of course, simply reflect the vagaries of the mind of an old man trying to set down his recollections without access to official archives or even to his personal records. Others are clearly deliberate, to serve Khrushchev's self-justifying purposes. As Edward Crankshaw observes in his introduction:

### Reviewers in This Issue

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NORTON S. GINSBERG—Dean of the Academic Program and Senior Fellow,

Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions (Santa Barbara, Calif.); author of *Atlas of Economic Development*, 1961, and numerous works on the human geography of Asia.

KENNETH LIEBERTHAL—Assistant Swarthmore College (Swarthmore, Pa.); author of *Research Guide to Central Party and Government Meetings in China, 1949-1974*, forthcoming in spring 1975.

<sup>2</sup> Boston, Little, Brown & Co., 1970.

*In the days of his supremacy, his speech was filled with evasions, distortions, deliberate omissions, contradictions, downright lies. How could he be expected to change in old age?*

The first volume of *Khrushchev Remembers* dealt largely with Khrushchev's early years and his life with Stalin, adding many pithy anecdotes but not really going far beyond his famous "secret speech" of 1956 in substance. The relatively shorter section on "The World Outside" in that volume featured his defense of his reconciliation with Tito, of his suppression of the Hungarian uprising of 1956, and of his surreptitious placement in and then withdrawal of missiles from Cuba.

The second volume, subtitled *The Last Testament*, is also a mixed bag—though the editors have done an excellent job of giving logical structure to what must have been an incoherent, confused mass of raw material.

Of the book's 500 pages, 150 are devoted to the domestic scene during Khrushchev's reign. His pungent commentary darts from subject to subject, touching—*inter alia*—on his relations with scientists (he distrusted Piotr Kapitsa for refusing military work but regretted having refused to let him travel abroad, partly because "Stalin was still belching inside me"); the regime view of writers and artists ("We were scared, really scared. We were afraid the thaw might unleash a flood"); housing ("It was painful for me to remember that as a worker under capitalism I'd had much better living conditions"); agriculture ("The Virgin Lands campaign showed us how mighty our Party could be if it only had the trust of the people").

The next 150 pages, devoted to relations with other Communist states, are characterized by blandly arrogant acceptance of Moscow's natural right to control the East European states and a viciously critical appraisal of Mao, reflecting the Russians' ingrained distrust of and antipathy toward their "yellow-beak" neighbors.

THE FINAL 250 pages deal with relations with the outer world, occasionally duplicating but mainly supplementing and elaborating on the material in the first volume. An almost paranoiac suspicion of the United States runs throughout. Thus, when Stalin let Beria goad him into making territorial demands on Turkey, he succeeded only in "frightening the Turks right into the open arms of the Americans." The "so-called 'scientific expedition' . . . in search of Noah's Ark" which the US organized "at about that time . . . didn't fool anyone. . . . It was a border action directed against Soviet Armenia and our oil fields in Azerbaidzhan." Next door, "the Shah repeatedly denied there were any American bases in Iran, but we didn't believe him." Still farther east, "it was clear the Americans were penetrating Afghanistan with the obvious intent of setting up a military base there." Sukarno's troubles in West Irian arose "probably at the instigation of Dutch and American agents." Khrushchev was even worried that an American submarine might sink his ship en route to the UN meeting in New York in 1960. And so on—sort of the obverse of the American Communist-under-every-bed syndrome.

In Khrushchev's version, the cold war started with Churchill's "Iron Curtain" speech at Fulton, Missouri, on March 6, 1946—not

with Stalin's famous "back to orthodoxy" speech the previous month (February 9, 1946), nor with the USSR's attempt to hang on in Iran, or its demands on Turkey, or its occupation of Eastern Europe, or its takeover of Czechoslovakia. The United States had grown rich and fat in World War II and wanted to keep the Soviet Union impoverished. UNRRA provided only food, not the machinery the USSR needed to rebuild its industries. In all this, the "arsonist and militarist" Churchill was in league with Truman, "an aggressive man and a fool," aided by "that political half-wit Mr. Acheson." When Adenauer came to Moscow in 1955, his "initial bargaining terms were wholly unacceptable—to create a single capitalist German state allied with the West would have meant for us to retreat to the borders of Poland. . . . Once you start retreating, it's difficult to stop." However, the man usually attacked as the greatest of the Western cold warriors comes out very well. "Dulles was a worthy and interesting adversary," Khrushchev says, "who forced us either to lay down our arms or marshal some good reasons to continue the struggle. It always kept us on our toes to match wits with him [and] he had the common sense never to overstep that 'brink' he was always talking about." Even Nixon, though always considered "hostile to the Soviet Union, . . . showed genuine human courtesy when he tried to see me after my retirement."

Khrushchev professes puzzlement at receiving an invitation "out of the blue" to visit the United States in 1959. This claim comes as the only real surprise in the book to those of us who counseled President Eisenhower to issue the invitation, for our pur-

pose of defusing Khrushchev's ultimatum on Berlin seemed so transparent that we were almost ashamed of the maneuver. The Big Four foreign ministers had been meeting for several months in Geneva, getting nowhere and about to break up in a complete impasse. Clearly, something new had to be done to get Khrushchev off the hook of his public commitment to move against the Western position in Berlin. In fact, the exercise produced a short breathing spell, when Khrushchev agreed at Camp David (the US presidential retreat in Maryland) to suspend his deadline. Strangely enough, Khrushchev does not even mention Berlin once in the long chapter covering his visit to the United States and his talks with President Eisenhower.

Political shortcomings aside, Khrushchev's account of his feelings about and reactions to the trip to America are engrossing and revealing reading. His admission that he was "curious to have a look"; his anxiety to be received "with maximum honors"; his initial suspicion that Camp David might be some sort of quarantine "leper colony"; his concerns about his own adequacy to face this "important test"; his discovery that capitalists looked like ordinary people without "the pigs' snouts our artists always gave them"; his obvious awe in the presence of President Eisenhower—these and a hundred other impressions are recounted with engaging earthiness.

Khrushchev adds little to the public record of the U-2 incident, except his admission that "these flights had been going on for years," thus in effect confirming that the elaborate cat-and-mouse game he mounted after the American craft was shot down on May

1, 1960, was a deliberate ploy designed for his own purposes. His main purpose comes out in his account of the abortive Paris summit meeting only two weeks later. Having recklessly renewed his threats to act unilaterally on Berlin, he was again in a dangerous situation "without much hope that the [Paris] negotiations would produce a meaningful agreement." By his own account, he decided only on the flight to Paris that the answer to his problem was to break up the summit.

*I saw that the only way out was to present the United States with an ultimatum: the Americans would have to apologize officially for sending their spy plane into the USSR, and the President of the United States would have to retract what he said about America's "right" to conduct reconnaissance over our territory. . . . We knew they [the Americans] couldn't swallow the bitter pill we were trying to force down their throats . . . this meant that the four-power negotiations were over before they began.*

Indeed, promptly after the Paris spectacle, he again publicly postponed any action on Berlin—this time until after the upcoming US elections.

Although he has some kind words for President Kennedy—here, as recurrently, his somewhat resentful respect for capitalist "millionaires" comes out—Khrushchev makes no bones about the hard line he took with the young President at Vienna: "The difference in our class positions had prevented us from coming to an agreement. . . . I felt bad about his disappointment."

Khrushchev is equally frank about the immediate sequel to the

Vienna meeting: "We decided the time had come to lance the blister of West Berlin." He becomes vague, however, about the consequences of the operation. As American military preparations and personnel moves posed "a counterthreat of their own," Khrushchev came up with the idea of the Berlin Wall; he calls it "border control" and takes full credit personally. He talks of the ensuing military standoff in Berlin, as a result of which, he says, "the West had been forced to recognize the establishment of border control and the separation of capitalist West Berlin from socialist East Berlin." "We didn't quite achieve the same sort of moral victory that a peace treaty would have represented," Khrushchev admits, "but we probably received more material gains without a peace treaty [which would have] meant concessions on our part." The remaining doubt, Khrushchev says, was "about the ability of the Germans to control their own borders . . . to shoot a fellow German." The Kremlin was soon relieved to find that the "border troops of the GDR were well grounded in the teachings of Marxism-Leninism. They understood their class obligations as well as their military duty."

Khrushchev indicates that the Cuban missile crisis was a subject much on his mind by dealing with it *in extenso* in both volumes of the memoirs; and indeed, his handling of the matter was probably one of the major reasons for his ouster. Throughout, he vehemently combats the Western thesis (and my own) that he sought surreptitiously to place MRBMs and IRBMs in Cuba to redress the Soviet ICBM gap disclosed during the Berlin confrontation, insisting that these weapons were solely intended "to maintain the inde-

pendence" of Cuba. "I'm not saying we had any documentary proof that the Americans were preparing a second invasion," he says in *The Last Testament*, but then he hastens to add: "We didn't need documentary proof. We knew the class affiliation, the class blindness of the United States, and that was enough to make us expect the worst." Khrushchev does reveal, however, that he met strong resistance from Castro when he broached the idea. "When Castro and I talked about the problem," he says, "we argued and argued. Our arguments were very heated. But, in the end, Fidel agreed with me." He goes on to say that Castro later reaffirmed that agreement and justified the Soviet action. Naturally, he concludes that forcing the Americans to pledge not to invade Cuba was one of the great "victories we won on the diplomatic front."

I SHOULD LIKE to see these memoirs read by all thinking Americans, perhaps particularly by those who are specialists in Soviet affairs but have not had the actual experience of living in the Soviet Union and negotiating with Russian officials.

For cumulatively Khrushchev's revelations of his own beliefs and feelings, his prejudices, hates, fears, and hopes provide a needed antidote to the persistent American tendency to ascribe to Soviet leaders attitudes, values, and interests closely parallel to our own and to project into Soviet affairs a mirror-image of ourselves and our own concepts. Khrushchev's ruminations certainly make it clear that the considerations determining Soviet policies and actions are not the product of conditions and practices similar to our own but are the product of an environment, a view of the world, and a decision-

making process entirely different from ours

In any event, I think the reader of *Khrushchev Remembers* must in turn remember that these self-serving, self-justifying recollections of a garrulous old man who felt very sorry for himself are not objective history. Nearly a century and a half ago, the great French observer and writer, the Marquis de Custine, quoted an eminent Russian as saying:

*God makes only the future, while the Czar remakes the past! . . . Russian despotism not only counts ideas and sentiments for nothing; it wages war on fact and triumphs in the battle. . . .*

I would say, then, that what we have in *Khrushchev Remembers* is another fascinating chapter in the long annals of Russian history —Russian history, Russian style.

## Counting China's People

By Norton S. Ginsburg

LEO A. ORLEANS: *Every Fifth Child: The Population of China*. Stanford, Calif., Stanford University Press, 1972.

H. YUAN TIEN: *China's Population Struggle: Demographic Decisions of the People's Republic, 1949-69*. Columbus, The Ohio State University Press, 1973.

THESE TWO BOOKS should be welcomed by all students of China as well as those interested in the course of China's develop-

ment, even though they seem to raise more questions than they answer. Before we attempt to deal with some of these questions, however, perhaps it would be well to describe the books briefly, review their contents, make some comparisons between them, and evaluate them for the nonspecialist reader.

The Orleans book contains an immense amount of information. After finishing it, the reader can be quite confident that he knows

as much about the population of China as anyone but a specialist in the subject would want to know. Of its six chapters, the first deals with the historical record of population fluctuation and growth, describing in some detail the characteristics of the 1953 census-registration and assessing its utility and value. The second reviews certain key characteristics of China's population and provides information about its apparent evolution since 1953 and its likely