

Khrushchev Before and After

By Peter Kenez

On October 15, 1964, while Moscow was preparing a huge reception for the three cosmonauts who had spent a day in space, Nikita Sergeievich Khrushchev was suddenly removed from power. As Henry Tanner of the *New York Times* wrote:

. . . the men in the most exposed positions were those in charge of hanging pictures of the leaders in all the right places in preparation for the return of the cosmonauts.

The crucial hours found these men almost literally half way up their ladders with Mr. Khrushchev's pictures on their shoulders and not knowing whether to go up or down.¹

The change in the leadership of the Soviet state and Communist Party found many Soviet historians in a similarly uncomfortable situation, for in the Soviet Union historians of the modern period often fulfill the same functions as the poster painters and picture hangers.

That fateful day in October 1964 changed not only Khrushchev's future, but his past as well. The historians were confronted with the difficult task of hastily sketching a new image of the man who had

dominated the past ten years of Soviet history. They were experienced men who had handled ticklish biographical problems before. Yet this time they were faced not only with the factual contradictions typical of Soviet historiography but with a dearth of source material.

To be sure, during Khrushchev's reign his name would crop up in the most unlikely places and settings: there was hardly any history book, for instance, that did not manage to quote at least one public utterance by the then First Secretary. Yet despite this steadily mounting "cult of personality," there was a curious lack of full-scale biographies of Khrushchev—as there had been in the case of Stalin. While half-forgotten Communist leaders were being "rehabilitated," while, say, the man who succeeded Trotsky as Commissar for War, Mikhail V. Frunze (1885-1925), rated more than a dozen biographies, not a single *complete* study was devoted to the party and government leader, not even an article in any of the historical journals.² It is quite possible, of course, that Khrushchev never wanted an "official biography" published, engaged as he was for such a long time in destroying his predecessor's personality cult. Whatever the reason, printed sources re-

¹ *New York Times*, Oct. 25, 1964, section 4, p. 4.

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² A partial exception is the study entitled: *Rasskaz o pochetnom shakhtere* (A Story about an Honorary Miner), Stalino, 1961, produced by a writers' collective, and dealing with Khrushchev's connections with the Donets basin.

vealed very little about his private life, and often the most informative material came curiously enough from foreign sources, such as interviews with foreign journalists and speeches made abroad.

The image we can put together, based on encyclopedia articles, histories of the party and the Soviet Union, and short references in other related studies published in the Soviet Union, has little in common with the shrewd, earthy, self-confident politician we had come to know. As portrayed by the Soviet historians, Khrushchev—who made headlines all over the world—becomes indistinguishable from other *apparatchiki*. Again one is reminded of the posters, which, incidentally, never showed the warts on the First Secretary's face: the picture is big, but it is not a good likeness. Some of the details are missing and the rest are fuzzy. What we have seen thus far of post-Khrushchevian historiography offers little hope that the picture will be any clearer. Indeed, it seems more likely that Khrushchev will fall further into colorless oblivion until an official attitude towards him becomes more fully developed in the future.

The Young Khrushchev

A generalization frequently made about Soviet historiography is that it calls for a projection of the present, often an idealized version of the present, into the past. Thus today's heroes, when written

A Poignant Prophecy

We Communists highly value and support the authority of correct and mature leadership. We must safeguard the authority of the leaders who are recognized by the party and the people. But each leader must also understand the other side of the matter—never to plume himself on his position, to remember that in holding this or that post he is merely fulfilling the will of the party and the will of the people, who may have invested the greatest power in him but never lose control over him. (*Applause.*) The leader who forgets this pays heavily for his mistake.

—From Khrushchev's concluding remarks at the 22nd CPSU Congress, *Pravda*, Oct. 29, 1961.

about today, have an exemplary past that is often a distortion if not always a contradiction, of the facts. The picture of the young Nikita Sergeievich that emerges from the pre-1964 editions of Soviet histories is so unreliable and stereotyped, that there is little we can accept with any degree of certainty about his first 25 years except the date and place of his birth.³

From the one source that is devoted entirely to Khrushchev's early years, the distortions are quite apparent. We learn, for example, that he had participated in the labor movement since he was 15 years old, that, even as a boy, he read Marx aloud to his young friends, that at the age of 18 he became one of the leaders of the strike movement in his factory, that three years later he agitated against the First World War, and that as one of the main strike organizers at the Rutchenkovo mine he was once saved from arrest by the action of the assembled miners who repulsed the police in order to save him.⁴

It is highly unlikely that any of these details is true. Contemporary documents say nothing of Khrushchev as a young labor leader, and the ex-Soviet premier himself once stated that he had never worked in trade unions.⁵ Although he might have been involved in strike activity of some sort, his lack of prominence at that time makes it highly improbable that any mob would demonstrate—and effectively at that—in his behalf.

We are not on much firmer ground when investigating Khrushchev's activities during the Civil War. The 1962 English edition of the *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union* states that N. S. Khrushchev was elected chairman of the Rutchenkovo Soviet in May 1917.⁶ However, the 1959 Russian edition of the same work and encyclopedias of the same period do not make any mention of this event, referring to Khrushchev only as a member of the Bolshevik Party who “played an active role in the Civil War on the Southern Front in 1918.” When the historians tried to be more precise about this period, they frequently contradicted each other. For example, in 1961, three different versions of Khrushchev's activities during the war were published. V. T. Sukhorukov, in his study of the 11th Army in the Civil War, maintains that in October

³ April 17, 1894, in Kalinovka.

⁴ *Rasskaz o pochetnom shakhtere*, *passim*.

⁵ Lazar Pistrak, *The Grand Tactician*, New York, F. A. Praeger, 1961, p. 9.

⁶ *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union*, no date, p. 9.

1920 Khrushchev was a military commissar in the 9th Division of the 11th Army.⁷ *A Story About an Honorary Miner* claims that he left the front in May 1920 and that by the end of that year he was an assistant director of the Rutchenkovo mine.⁸ On February 6, 1961, *Pravda* quoted V.P. Mzhavanadze as saying, on the occasion of Khrushchev's visit to Georgia:

The Georgian people know that Nikita Sergeievich came to Georgia for the first time in the memorable year of 1921, together with the legendary Eleventh Army which . . . rendered aid to the toilers who rose against the Menshevik government.⁹

The contradictions are, of course, minor. But they do demonstrate the total lack of seriousness with which Soviet historians regard the writing of contemporary history, their willingness to compile meaningless details provided they do not impair the bigger, more generalized picture. What is astonishing is that none of them seems to care about the conflicting evidence and its weakening effect on their credibility. When scholars must speculate about the effects of studying Marx at the age of 15 and are expected to write about the Civil War without mentioning Trotsky, it is possible that credibility no longer interests them.

Nevertheless, we find a more accurate picture of Khrushchev as a young party official after 1920. To be sure, there are still discrepancies, but the description of him as a party secretary who did not just sit in his office all day but who went out to meet the miners sounds authentic.¹⁰ He was most probably a good organizer and a young man with an exuberant nature. Districts he worked in usually overfulfilled their norms, and because of his zealousness he became secretary of an important district of the Donets, moving up to "important party work in Stalino," the capital of the Donets, and later to party offices in Kharkov and Kiev.¹¹ But here again the idealized version of the leader at his peak has crept into the history of his early years. We are asked to believe, for example, that in 1922 Khrush-

chev advocated the utilization of reinforced concrete instead of wooden pilings in the mines,¹² an allegation as absurd as the praise lavished on him as the party secretary in the 1920's who best observed the "principle of collective leadership" in his district.¹³

On the Ladder of Success

When Khrushchev went to Moscow in 1929 to study at the Industrial Academy, he was still far from being an important figure. In the following ten years, he rose with amazing rapidity to the very top of the hierarchy. By 1939 he was a member of the Politburo and First Secretary of the Ukrainian Communist Party, and hence one of the ten most powerful men in the Soviet Union. However, Soviet historiography has not dealt with this phenomenal rise. The historians who exaggerated his role in the Civil War and in the early 1920's skip lightly over this period.

For example, *A Short History of the USSR*,¹⁴ published in June 1964, mentions Khrushchev as an assistant director of the Rutchenkovo mine in 1921-22, but refers to him again only in 1941 as the organizer of the defense of Kiev. One finds the same curious imbalance in the various editions of the *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union*. Encyclopedia articles on Khrushchev merely list without comment the various posts he held during this decade, while the sixth volume of the *History of Moscow*,¹⁵ devoted to the Soviet period, quotes from the speeches of the First Secretary of the Moscow organization but gives little attention to the man. Khrushchev did not even receive credit for such "safe" achievements as the building of the subway and the industrialization of the Moscow district.

There can be only one explanation for the deflation of Khrushchev's role in the 1930's, in contrast to the exaggerated descriptions of his earlier career—that the Soviet leader chose to dissociate himself as much as possible from the crimes of the Stalin era which he later attacked, accusing Malenkov, Molotov and Kaganovich of personal responsibility for the purges. The only way to place himself in

⁷ V. T. Sukhorukov, *XI Armia v boiakh na severnom Kavkaze i Nizhnei Volge (1918-1920)*, Moscow, 1961, p. 239.

⁸ *Rasskaz o pochetnom shakhtere*, pp. 52-59.

⁹ As quoted in Lazar Pistrak, *The Grand Tactician*, p. 14. The invasion of Georgia took place in February 1921. It is conceivable that between October 1920 and February 1921 Khrushchev left the 9th Army and joined the 11th, but the fact that Sukhorukov says nothing about this makes it highly unlikely.

¹⁰ *Rasskaz o pochetnom shakhtere*, p. 91.

¹¹ *Ibid.* p. 60.

¹² Khrushchev first made this suggestion in the 1950's. See Edward Crankshaw, *Khrushchev, A Career*, New York, Viking Press, 1966, pp. 17-18.

¹³ *Rasskaz o pochetnom shakhtere*, p. 92.

¹⁴ *Kratkaia istoriia SSSR*, Part Two, Moscow Leningrad, 1964, p. 158.

¹⁵ *Istoriia Moskvyy*, Vol. 6, Moscow 1957-61.

a different category was to promote the implication that at the height of the "crimes of the personality cult" he was not a figure of national importance.

There is no ambivalence about the official Soviet attitude toward Khrushchev's role in the second World War. The Soviet historians of the period had an advantage over the historians of the Civil War, for Khrushchev was an important figure in 1941-45, although here again his importance often has been overemphasized.

There is little reason to doubt that Khrushchev was in fact a skillful political commissar (officially described as a "member of the Military Council"), that he established relations with ordinary soldiers and commanding officers and that he participated in crucial strategic decisions. However, historians have exaggerated his role as the strategist of important victories and have conspicuously dissociated him from any responsibility for failure. Who had exactly what role in devising the strategy at Stalingrad, for example, will probably remain an open question for some time. This author is inclined to believe A. I. Yeremenko, the front commander, who wrote in 1961 that it was the work of the Military Council of the front, of which Lieutenant-General Khrushchev was a member.¹⁶ Other sources, on the other hand, again when dealing with specifics, tend to contradict each other. In an early account of the battle published in 1953,¹⁷ Khrushchev's name is barely mentioned, all credit for the victory going to Stalin and Malenkov. The claims of the 1962 English edition of the *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union* hardly inspire greater confidence with the claim that in April 1941, Khrushchev, as First Secretary of the Communist Party of the Ukraine, warned Stalin that the defenses of the country had to be improved,¹⁸ while earlier editions of this same work make no mention of this warning. Elsewhere, the authors of a six-volume study of the war, published over the period 1960-64, wrote that Khrushchev pleaded with Stalin to withdraw from Kiev in 1941 and Kharkov in 1942 to avoid the bloody defeats that brought such great losses to the Red Army.¹⁹ These versions can only be interpreted as part of the campaign to discredit Stalin for the country's military unpreparedness and to absolve

Khrushchev of the responsibility for the military defeats which occurred in his area.

The Summit

Since the postwar policies of the Soviet Union have immediate implications for the present, Soviet histories of this period have approached any evaluation of these policies with extreme caution, both in the pre-1964 and the post-1964 versions. In the case of the former, Khrushchev emerges only gradually as an important figure after the victory over Germany until he becomes undisputed master of the USSR.

While the histories of the early postwar years do not slight Khrushchev, the party clearly has the limelight, being collectively responsible for the "radically improved agricultural management," for the "reorganization of the management of industry," even for the "initiative in the improvement of relations with the US, Britain, France, Italy and other capitalist countries."²⁰ Eventually the phrase, "as Comrade N. S. Khrushchev has pointed out . . ." begins to proliferate, especially regarding the developments after 1957 when Khrushchev accepted credit for the "achievements and victories" of Soviet science, agriculture and industry. It will be recalled that even the cosmonauts in their inevitable telephone communications from space thanked him personally for making their feats possible.²¹

As might be expected, Khrushchev's image grew even larger after the elimination of the "anti-party" group. With the gradual disappearance of Malenkov, Molotov, Kaganovich, Zhukov and Bulganin from the history books, Khrushchev's role prior to 1957 steadily increased. The treatment of the 19th Party Congress in the 1959 edition of the *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union*, for example, makes no mention of Malenkov, who gave the main report, or of the other speakers such as Molotov, Beria and Kaganovich. In the 1957 edition of another important textbook, *History of the USSR*²² (which came out a few months after the "unmasking of the anti-party group"), Malenkov, Molotov and Kaganovich receive no mention at all. From this volume of over 800 pages, a student would

¹⁶ A. I. Yeremenko, *Stalingrad*, Moscow, 1961.

¹⁷ B. S. Telpukhovski, *Velikaia pobeda sovietskoi armii pod Stalingradom*, Moscow, 1953.

¹⁸ *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union*, p. 538.

¹⁹ *Istoriia velikoi Otechestvennoi Voiny Sovetskogo Soiuza*, (Great Patriotic War of the Soviet Union) 6 vols., Moscow 1960-64.

²⁰ *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union*, Moscow 1960, p. 661. This is a translation of the 1959 Russian edition.

²¹ *Pravda* (Moscow), Oct. 13, 1964.

²² *Istoriia SSSR*, Moscow, 1964.

look in vain for the name of the man who became the Prime Minister of the Soviet Union after Stalin's death.

Malenkov's reputation remains bad, his position comparable only to that of Trotsky. Although Stalin does receive credit for his achievements, Malenkov is only responsible for his and Stalin's mistakes. Kaganovich has fared less badly, but he is never mentioned in any neutral context. If his name appears at all, it is in connection with some error, poor planning or mismanagement. Molotov is in a different category. Although he is frequently blamed for "excesses" in collectivization and several "violations of socialist legality," his active Bolshevik past has not been minimized. Bulganin's punishment was oblivion. The premier of the country from 1955 to 1958 has virtually disappeared from the history books.

It is difficult to envisage the line of development that Soviet historiography might have taken had Khrushchev stayed in power. A "personality cult" has a dynamism of its own. One writer tries to outdo the next in seizing the essence of his subject, and once a "fact" is discovered and added to a biographical sketch, no one will challenge it while the subject is still "acceptable." On the other hand, during the period of Khrushchev's unchallenged leadership, the writers continued to denounce the personality cult in general and Stalin's in particular, just as they continued to pay lip service to the principle of collective leadership long after it had become a myth.

In assessing the nature of the Khrushchev cult, we must bear in mind its similarities to the cult of Stalin, as well as the differences between them. The last edition of *A Short History of the USSR* is a good case in point. Having come off the presses in June 1964, it suffered the indignity of almost instantaneous obsolescence—remarkable even by Soviet standards. On the one hand it differs from the volume published in 1959 in that Khrushchev appears on almost every page dealing with the events of the past ten years; the aims of Soviet society are defined almost entirely by his utterances, and the book is replete with phrases such as "The Communist Party, at the initiative of N. S. Khrushchev, decided . . ."—all of which is singularly reminiscent of the adulation once heaped upon Stalin.

On the other hand, even though the book may be taken as the ultimate expression of Khrushchev's personality cult, it contains none of the typical Stalinist extravagances such as "teacher of his people," "foremost historian," or "brilliant linguist." Similarly, in an article in *Voprosy istorii* devoted

to Khrushchev's writings, he is described as a propagandist, a tribune of Leninist ideology—but significantly, not as a philosopher.²³

The Post-1964 Image

It is difficult to find any precise image of Khrushchev in the historical studies published after October 1964. In the sources perused by the author no clear approach to the man has as yet developed, the rule of thumb being, one presumes, to say as little as pos-

²³ *Voprosy istorii*, No. 4, Moscow, 1964.

How History Is To Be Taught

. . . The teaching of history in the [Soviet secondary] schools is still not fully utilized for the purposes of indoctrination. It often boils down to the teacher's bland repetition of facts contained in the texts, without sufficient use of visual aids or vivid influences on the students' emotions. . . .

History courses in secondary schools must provide students with a scientific understanding of the laws of society's development in a form intelligible to them and must develop in them a conviction about the inevitable victory of communism, while revealing the role of the popular masses as the true makers of history and the historical significance of the individual.

In a history course, special attention should be given to explaining the role of the Communist Party as the directing and guiding force in Soviet society and to a study of the modern stage of Communist construction in the USSR . . .

History instruction in school is intended to bring up the young people in the spirit of Communist ideals, socialist patriotism, proletarian internationalism and a deep respect for labor, and to facilitate the training of students for an active public life.

—From "On the Teaching of History in Schools," by the Russian Republic Academy of Pedagogy, *Pravda*, September 16, 1959.

sible on a controversial subject for which no official line has been devised. Yet it is striking how much better Khrushchev has survived his fall than did his own victims. Stalin executed his opponents, while Khrushchev removed them from power and denounced them. Thus far the punishment accorded to Khrushchev has been *indirect* criticism and vilification, plus gradual “non-personalization”—which might be considered, perhaps, an improvement over past methods in dealing with disgraced political leaders.

The rule of saying as little as possible seems to obtain in the studies which appeared immediately following Khrushchev’s demise. The first of these, the 1964 edition of the *History of the USSR*, was sent to the typographer in June and to the printer on December 3, 1964. Assuming that the typesetters needed at least two weeks to reset the last hundred pages, the writers had about a month to correct the “errors.” There is nothing in the book which could be construed as even an oblique criticism of the ex-First Secretary. At the same time, the authors appear to have given way to the automatic reaction of ignoring him.

The book is 647 pages long, yet it mentions Khrushchev only three times: as one of the party leaders who went to the front in 1941, as a member of the Stalingrad front Military Council in 1942, and as First Secretary-elect of the party in 1953. All other references to the years of his “accomplishments” were obviously deleted. The seven-page discussion of the 20th Party Congress is particularly striking, in that Khrushchev, who played so crucial a role in this momentous event, is never mentioned at all!

The ex-First Secretary received much better treatment in a one-volume history of the Second World War which appeared in March 1965,²⁴ based on a larger six-volume work which came out between 1960 and 1964. In it, Khrushchev is mentioned eleven times and is even favored with a photograph. Whenever the outstanding leaders of the party are enumerated, he is invariably included, receiving credit for strategic decisions, for his role in organizing the partisan movement in the Ukraine, and for contributions to postwar reconstruction. Even the episode concerning his opposition to the Khar-

kov offensive in May 1942 is retained with only a minor variation.²⁵

The relatively objective attitude with regard to Khrushchev’s wartime activities—whatever the reason—is an exception to the rule. Far more characteristic is the treatment of Khrushchev’s postwar career, for here current political issues and contemporary political figures are at stake. The safest course, then, is to refer to Khrushchev as infrequently as possible. The ironic result is that the period of Khrushchev’s rise to the zenith of his career has become the period of his greatest obscurity. In contrast to commentary in purely political and journalistic writings, even his “mistakes” have been overlooked by Soviet historians. *The Handbook for Party Activists*, published in June 1965, had to take a position on his removal, and it did so briefly—with slightly veiled criticism of his “subjectivist policies which led to “mistakes in planning.”²⁶

A comparison of the three volumes of the *History of International Relations since the Second World War* published between 1962 and 1965²⁷ provides perhaps the clearest illustration of how quickly the Soviet leader has dropped out of historical sight. The first volume, which appeared in 1962, deals with the events of 1945-49 and mentions N. S. Khrushchev 24 times. Considering that in the immediate postwar years he had very little to do with foreign policy, one might say that the authors of the book did not neglect him. In the second volume, published a year later and covering the years 1950-55, there are 53 references to him, since he had by then assumed a more important role in foreign affairs. It is the last volume of this study which might surprise those who are unfamiliar with Soviet historiography. Published in September 1965, it describes the momentous events between 1956 and 1964, from Suez to Vietnam, but mentions the name of the powerful ruler of the Soviet Union only three times. (Henry Kissinger’s name comes up twice as often.)

²⁵ The story has three variants, the earliest from Khrushchev himself. In his secret speech to the 20th Party Congress, he said that as a member of the Military Council, he had asked General Vasilevski to persuade Stalin to stop the hopeless Kharkov offensive. When Vasilevski declined, Khrushchev called Moscow himself, but Stalin refused to speak to him. In the six-volume history of the war we get a slightly different version: there is no mention of Vasilevski. He reappears, however, in the one-volume version as the man who asks Khrushchev to telephone Stalin. Vasilevski, incidentally, was a consultant to the editors of the 1965 version.

²⁶ *Spravochnik KPSS*, Moscow, 1965, p. 318.

²⁷ *Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia posle vtoroi mirovoi voiny*, 3 vols., Moscow, 1962-65.

²⁴ *Velikaia Otechestvennaia Voina Sovetskovo Soiuza*, Moscow, 1965.

The authors of this study refer to Khrushchev twice in connection with his visit to the United States, and they do mention his removal in October 1964. On the innumerable other occasions where his name should have been mentioned, however, the authors use the collective euphemism "Soviet government" or "Communist Party of the Soviet Union," or, at best, "the head of the Soviet government," even when referring to his talks with other heads of state who *are* named.

It is worth noting that the studies mentioned in this article to illustrate Khrushchev's treatment since 1964 (*History of USSR, Great Patriotic War of the Soviet Union, Handbook of CPSU, History of International Relations Since the Second World War*) were all products of historians' collectives. It is here that one is likely to find new trends developing in the handling of politically sensitive matters. The historian in a collective enjoys a degree of safety partly because of the spread of responsibility and partly because the name of a well-known political figure is usually included among the editors.

The individual historian will probably soon be taking his cue from the collectives. However, too little time has passed since Khrushchev's ouster for a definitive approach to have developed. Consequently, in the works of individual authors Khrushchev's name appears even less often than in collective histories. The authors of the *Great Patriotic War of the Soviet Union* (1965) explicitly credit Khrushchev with leading the partisan movement in the Ukraine as well as with achievements in postwar reconstruction. A. S. Kudlai, however, does not mention him at all in his 1965 article about the Ukraine in the years following the war.²⁸ P. T. Tronko and P. M. Ovcharenko also ignore the then First Secretary of the Ukrainian Party in their discussion of the Kiev partisan movement in a recent volume entitled *Heroes of the Underground*.²⁹

²⁸ A. S. Kudlai, "Bratskaia pomoshch narodov SSSR v vostanovlenii narodnovo khozaistva Ukrainy posle Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voiny" (Brotherly help of the peoples of the USSR in the restoration of the Ukrainian economy after the Great Patriotic War), *Voprosy istorii*, No. 7, 1965, pp. 21-30.

²⁹ P. T. Tronko, P. M. Ovcharenko, "Soldaty kievskovo podpolia," *Geroi podpolia*, Moscow, 1965, pp. 366-408.

What may Khrushchev—demoted, disgraced, and living out his last years in almost total obscurity—expect from future Soviet historians? Will his final moments of both attainment and error, of glory and humiliation, ever be subjected to impartial scrutiny and judicious evaluation? Only time will tell. In the meantime, whatever the differences undergone by Soviet historiography since the days of Stalin, the maxim coined by the early Soviet historian Mikhail N. Pokrovski still holds sway: History in the USSR remains largely an exercise in "politics projected into the past."

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POSTSCRIPT

As this article was about to go to press, a new book, *Ocherki istorii KPSS* (Essays on the History of the CPSU), was published in Moscow, in which Khrushchev's recent activities are subjected to a somewhat more objective and perhaps even more sympathetic treatment than heretofore. Designed as a textbook for party indoctrination schools, the new volume might best be compared to an earlier history, *Istoriia SSSR, 1917-1964* (History of the USSR), by I. B. Berkhin, which came out in February 1966. In the earlier volume, for instance, Khrushchev's speeches at the 20th, 21st, and 22nd CPSU Congresses are referred to without any mention of their author. In the new volume, the author is no longer anonymous. Similarly, while the earlier textbook gives no credit to Khrushchev for the policies instituted by the new regime after Stalin's death, the new one acknowledges that "In September 1953, N. S. Khrushchev . . . actively fought to introduce into effect the [new] line. . ." Finally, Khrushchev's exit in October 1964 is described in the earlier book in a distinctly unfriendly fashion, while the new book refrains from any pejorative comments: "The Plenum granted N. S. Khrushchev's request to be released from his posts. . ."

Straw in the wind? It remains to be seen.

—The Editors

A Marxist Heroine

J. P. NETTL: *Rosa Luxemburg*

London-New York-Toronto, Oxford University Press, 1966. 2 vols.

Reviewed by Abraham Ascher

THESE TWO VOLUMES are clearly a labor of love. Aside from reading widely in published sources, Mr. Nettle—lecturer in politics at the University of Leeds—sought out people who had information about Rosa Luxemburg, and he ransacked the archives in Warsaw, East Germany, Bonn, Amsterdam and Israel in the preparation of his study. It is hard to imagine that he missed anything of consequence relating to his heroine, who in her time, he believes, attracted more people to revolutionary Marxism than any other socialist leader. This is no doubt an exaggeration growing out of Nettle's strong emotional attachment to his subject—an understandable sentiment, yet one that seems to be the cause of the study's major weaknesses. For one thing, the work is too long and occasionally repetitious. Nettle had difficulty omitting the unessential; nor could he resist the temptation of correcting even inconsequential mistakes made by previous writers on Rosa Luxemburg. For example, he supplies a long footnote on a misdating of her arrest in 1916, although the error is of no particular importance. A thoughtful and imaginative writer with a strong analytical bent, Nettle raises many interesting problems, but unfortunately not all of them are quite relevant to his main subject, as he himself virtually acknowledges on one occasion.

Nevertheless, Mr. Nettle's work is extremely impressive and by far the most thorough and penetrating biography of Luxemburg. His task was

far from easy. Rosa Luxemburg not only was a leader of German social democracy for over two decades and one of the founders of the German Communist Party, but she also participated in establishing Polish social democracy and wrote extensively on the Russian movement. Moreover, she was a subtle theoretician and frequently engaged in polemics with the major figures of European socialism. From 1898, when she moved to Germany, until she was murdered in 1919, Luxemburg maintained a lively interest in all these activities. Nettle has faithfully recorded her contributions, always taking care to place them within the broadest possible historical setting.

Through extensive use of Luxemburg's correspondence, the author has also been able to provide a detailed description of her private life and personality. She emerges as a cultivated person with far-ranging tastes in art, literature and the sciences. She was also passionate, strong-willed and, above all, courageous and independent. In 1907, when she felt betrayed by Leo Jogiches, to whom she had been romantically attached for many years, she broke off their personal relations—without, however, ending her political collaboration with him. In 1898, when she was only 27 years old, she did not hesitate to engage in polemics against Eduard Bernstein, already a highly respected figure in German social democracy, and in 1904 she wrote one of the earliest and most incisive critiques of Lenin's organizational views.