

Reasons Behind Khrushchev Fall Create a World of Speculation

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Khrushchev's fall, neither expected nor explained here, is bound to seed a garden of theories as to why it happened.

Everyone assumes, to start, that it was less his age and health than the calculation of his colleagues that cost him his posts as head of party and government and a good deal of his political and personal honor as well.

The theories are in two rows. One starts with his policies, the other with his person. In the first are his policies towards the Communist movement, especially China, towards the West and towards Russia's domestic cares. In the second are his power position, his personality and his ideological outlook on the world.

Take Easy Root

Theories on Kremlin motive and maneuver take easy root in Russia, or rather outside Russia. The old Russian passion for secrecy invites speculation. There is, too, another Russian tradition of one leader trading on the myths and miscues of his predecessor. Then, the current change is not only veiled but messy, involving many factors and persons; chaos cries for the simplification of a theory.

Here Are The Theories:

1. China and the bloc. China must head the list, and not just because of Moscow's hints. Khrushchev did not take office to preside over the dissolution of the Soviet empire but, in large measure, he did. Critics can

charge that he dribbled East Europe away, encouraged challenges by Western Communists, failed to keep or capture Communists in Asia and in the poor lands and, of course, that he "lost" China.

Whether "Russia Firsters" or "internationalists" lead the questioning, we are not sure. The last straw might have been Khrushchev's summons of world Communists to a conference next December to deal with Peking. Soviet Communists faced embarrassment galore at this session.

2. East-West relations. From 1958 to 1962 Khrushchev conducted a high-risk foreign policy, in Berlin and Cuba, which presumably raised fears and brought small gains. Then, practically overnight, he switched to accommodation. If the suddenness of the turn did not stir those brought up in the Stalinist harness of hostility to the West, the policy surely did.

Some Instances

For instance, Khrushchev signed a test-ban treaty which, Washington claimed, froze the American nuclear advantage; aided the foe of his socialist brothers in Peking; turned cartwheels to win commerce for a self-contained economy; and—another last straw—jeopardized the Soviet grip on East Germany by scheduling a trip to Bonn. Next year to Bonn.

3. Russia's domestic cares. Each shortfall in Khrushchev's ambitious plans opened him up to second-guessers; each new departure by this adventurous in-

novator left eddies of resentment. On the gut issue of Soviet home policy—whether to spend the money on butter, guns or whathaveyou—it is known that Khrushchev antagonized some military men, some planners, some ideologists, etc.

4. Khrushchev's power position. In a sense, every politician is eternally engaged in a power struggle with ambitious underlings; that is politics. A Soviet leader needs to control certain key levers. Khrushchev was a master—while he was on top. But in the crucial play, he lost. We know very few of the details.

5. Khrushchev's personality. Already charges of "nepotism" and "personality cult" are ringing. Khrushchev was erratic, bumptious, sometimes coarse, once an imbibor, a shoe-banger, too, given to impulses, a man who would criticize his highest subordinate in public.

6. Khrushchev's ideological outlook. Soviets act, or justify acting, on the basis of a certain over-all view of the world. Khrushchev, for instance, recently made the pioneer pronouncement that the Soviet Union, its defenses secure and its heavy industry installed, can now focus on consumer goods. This touches concepts about the balance of world forces, the nature of capitalism, and so on, ideological issues which Soviet officials often press in public and, one can be sure, argue in private.

Of such stuff as these six theories, speculation on Khrushchev's fall must be made.