

Khrushchev Fought Red Army

By Drew Pearson

Now that the dust kicked up by the exit of Nikita Khrushchev has settled, I should like to write something about the shadowy cross-currents of Kremlin politics, based in part on my conversations with Khrushchev himself, in part on intelligence reports received in Washington.



Pearson

It is an axiom of American politics that calling a political opponent soft on communism is the most effective way to defeat him in the USA. That's why Barry Goldwater's advisers have urged such an attack on President Johnson.

But what most Americans don't realize is that to call a man soft on capitalism in the Communist world is even more damning. It can lead to his being kicked out of office.

This in large part was what happened to Khrushchev. An important and corollary factor in his political demise is the opposition of the Red army.

Khrushchev has had a long, running feud with the Red army over curtailing conventional weapons, just as President Johnson has had the opposition of the Air Force over curtailing bombers, the navy in cutting back out-shipyards, and the

Army in cutting back certain Army posts.

And just as Sen. Strom Thurmond (R-S.C.), plus Barry Goldwater, plus various Congressmen, have jumped on Mr. Johnson for his cuts, so the Red army has got support for its anti-Khrushchev position from conservative forces inside the Kremlin. The chief difference is that in the U.S.A. the people vote a President out of office. In Russia, the boys in the Kremlin boardroom do it.

Long Army Struggle

The running battle between Khrushchev and the military has been going on for some time. It began in 1960 when Khrushchev proposed a cut of 200,000 officers and 1,000,000 men from the army. This brought such vigorous opposition that eventually Khrushchev retreated. His employment services and housing officials were swamped trying to find jobs and living quarters for retiring army men, and he cut back the cut-back.

He gave a hint to me when I interviewed him during the 1961 Berlin crisis that he was having trouble with the Red army. The generals were pressuring him, he said, to renew nuclear testing. A week or so later, he bowed to them and did.

Next year, the summer of 1962, President Tito of Yugoslavia gave a frank and

significant reply to my question: "Is Khrushchev influenced by the Red army?"

"Of course," he said.

The interview took place about two months before the Cuban missile crisis. American diplomats have always believed it was the Red army that induced Khrushchev to put missiles in Cuba. Whether true or not, there was no question but that friction between the Red marshals and Mr. K. increased after he promised to withdraw from Cuba.

U. S. Ambassador Foy Kohler reported from Moscow that Marshal Rodion Malinovsky, the Minister of Defense, was furious. Subsequently, Khrushchev fired two top army officers, Chief of Staff Marshal Matvei Zakharov and Intelligence Chief General I. A. Zerov, though he waited until Marshal Malinovsky was absent in Indonesia to do so.

Concession to Army

Khrushchev made one important concession to Red marshals at about that time. He notified the United States that, if we put nuclear weapons in the hands of the West Germans, it would be cause for the Red army to invade Germany. Just as the United States would not tolerate missiles in adjacent Cuba, so, Khrushchev said, he would not tolerate nuclear weapons in the hands of the adjacent West Germans.

Nine months later, Aug., 1963, when I interviewed Khrushchev again at his summer place on the Black Sea, he again gave a hint of trouble with the Red army. He told of internal Kremlin discussions over reducing arms, and how he was determined to proceed with arms reduction.

"Regardless of whether the United States stops increasing its arms budget or not, we are going to stop increasing ours because we have enough of these things," Khrushchev said.

He went on to explain that both sides had enough missiles to destroy each other several times over, and while he was not going to cut firepower—referring to missiles—he was going to cut the military fat.

Five months later, on Dec. 4, he did. He slashed the Russian military budget 4.7 per cent.

Some military men in Washington griped and ran up to Congress. But in Moscow they did more than gripe. Editorials critical of Khrushchev began to appear in the Red Star, official organ of the Red army, and in other military journals.

Other factors contributed to Khrushchev's political demise, as will be outlined in subsequent columns. But eventually, the Red marshals got their man.