

Svetlana's Memoirs

Svetlana Alliluyeva's memoirs furnish the world a chilling glimpse of life in a country which permitted absolute power to devolve into the hands of one man. It would be difficult to contrive or compile a more sobering instruction against political institutions that allow one man to exercise powers of life and death over millions.

And not the least of the virtues of this great human document is its disclosures how such power corrodes the life of men who wield power.

The human mind and will are fallible and frail instruments, susceptible to a thousand intrusions of irrationality and flaw. It must be a first object of all political communities to safeguard against the possibility of a breakdown at the pinnacle of leadership. Those who live under a system where sole power may be seized or exercised by one man, live precariously. The rationality of any great man cannot be assured or guaranteed more

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than minute by minute. And where all is entrusted to the great man, no citizen enjoys any longer assurance of security or safety.

Prudence requires society to provide continuous checks upon the possible aberration of heads of state so that no man, however exalted in power, can act alone with arbitrary will. And it dictates, as well, unremitting watch so that some authority in the state may intervene to change the leadership when aberrant behavior appears.

The Communist system has demonstrated a dangerous vulnerability to such hazards. Whether it now has perfected adequate safeguards against the cult of personality remains to be seen. The collective leadership principle is an improvement on the dictatorship of one man. But it is not sufficiently secure against arbitrary power to give confident assurance that another tyrant may not seize power and direct the awful authority of the state against individuals on mere accusation. The collaboration of a Stalin and a Beria seems less likely now but no man could say that the system clearly precludes it.

As a human story, the Svetlana Alliluyeva memoirs have the quality of a tale out of King Lear. As a political document it carries instruction to every human society against the lodgement of arbitrary power in a single person.