

HE GAVE THE WORLD THE WILDEST RIDE IN THE PARK

by JOHN K. JESSUP

For nearly 10 years Nikita Khrushchev was the undisputed driver of two oddly yoked juggernauts, the Soviet Union and the world Communist movement. He leaves them unyoked and squeaking in all wheels; but, for those 10 years, he gave world politics the longest and scariest ride in the park.

When Stalin died and Khrushchev began his maneuvers toward absolute power, the Soviet Union was a nation of multitudinous talents regimented by public terror and long-deferred hopes. Today it is a nation of proud people, still regimented and lied to, but unterrorized and sustained by rising living standards and a proprietary feeling about outer space.

When Stalin died, the world Communist movement was a network connecting Communist governments with agitators and spies the world around. Today world Communism is a handful of stale slogans by which remaining spies and agitators mean one of three different things: Moscow, Peking or their own ends.

On his last day in office, Khrushchev had a public triumph: he spoke by radio to the three Cosmonauts in Voskhod (the Sunrise spacecraft) and promised them a big welcome when they got down. When they got down, the French Communist party announced it was severing its 40-year link with Moscow, and Khrushchev was nowhere to be seen. Nor will he be seen at the conference of 26 Communist parties called for December in Moscow. That conference, which would have fractured world Communism still further, now probably will not take place.

Inside Russia, Khrushchev in power made Communism seem tolerable; outside he tried to make it seem inevitable. One of the last great traveling salesmen, he courted crowds from New Delhi to San Francisco and granted the most unpredictable interviews to anyone he thought worth impressing. Impress them he did, with his quick com-

mand of every style from affability to insult, from megaton threats to barnyard aphorisms.

He was hard as nails and supple as a strap. He had a talent both for patient hard work and for long-shot gambling. When his early experiments in the "relaxation of tensions" led to the revolt in Hungary, he reverted to Stalinist brutality. When the "antiparty revolt" of 1957 almost cost him his job, he saved it with the help of the new, younger Communists with whom he had restaffed Stalin's neglected party apparatus.

He was always ready for high-decibel summity, seldom for real negotiation. To the West he delivered repeated ultimatums on Berlin, then earned a cheap propaganda gratitude by postponing them. He told the Greeks he would not scruple to put a mushroom cloud on the Acropolis. He threatened to make Germany "a funeral pyre." He showed his scorn of "world opinion" by breaking the test moratorium with a 50-megaton explosion and by that hideous bequest, the Berlin Wall.

When the strategic balance of terror began to shift in favor of the U.S., he tried the most perilous end run in modern history: secretly planting missiles with nuclear warheads in Cuba. This maneuver confirmed for most Americans, including John F. Kennedy, that Communists respect no statement except force. Khrushchev got that statement from Kennedy in the crisis of October 1962. After that, Khrushchev's tactics changed.

Mutual diplomatic probes between Washington and Moscow soon led to the test-ban treaty, and with it hope slowly spread for a cold war détente. Some in the West read this hope into Khrushchev's speeches on "peaceful coexistence" and in his hunger for East-West trade; but more prudent hopes traced to his setbacks as the leader of international Communism.

For several years he had been pushing his influence into the capitals of "emerging" nations in Africa and Asia, combining the appeals of Russian space prestige with offers of trade credits. The

Chinese, who were eager to absorb all the ruble credits Russia could afford, found ample reasons in Communist dogma to challenge such global "adventurism"; and after Cuba they could call Khrushchev a "capitulationist" as well. There were many other reasons, including race and boundaries, why the Russo-Chinese alliance fell apart. It did so at a time when Khrushchev was also having troubles at home.

His adventure in giving the Russian people more consumer goods, and a little more freedom, put his apparatus of party controls to a test it was not designed to meet. People who eat better cower less; people whose improving technology and education exact higher standards of work must also have enough personal leeway to meet those standards. Khrushchev, earned some personal popularity in Russia, but by the same token created the beginnings of a Russian public opinion. That is now a factor in the Russian political scene which Communist ideology cannot handle without turning the clock back.

So also, or more so, in the satellites. The 1954-55 "relaxation of tensions" was only temporarily reversed by the repression of Hungary. The nationalist impulses of these captive countries demand more freedom from Moscow, more contacts with the West, more license to imitate "other roads to socialism" like Tito's. More Red army or still more freedom are the equally dangerous alternatives that face Khrushchev's successors in trying to keep this empire together today.

Khrushchev wanted to be a great leader of Russia and a great world Communist. He had every personal talent, every nuclear weapon and every kind of worldwide opportunity to help him succeed; and he seemed well on his way. He was stopped by the basic incompatibility of his two aims.

A nation can be a juggernaut, and so can an ideology; but they cannot be kept in tandem on a destructive course very long. Khrushchev's successors will outshine him if they learn this lesson of his overweening aims.



EYEFUL OF DUST. With his smiling wife Nina at his side, Khrushchev pauses during an appearance in Denmark to wipe a speck from his eye.



A LAST HURRAH. As Nikita goes offstage, he leaves a memory — from his last U.S. visit in 1960 — of a robust politician, a showman supremely sure of himself.