


Saturday Review



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The Khrushchev "Memoirs"

The controversy begun in this country with the publication of *Khrushchev Remembers* has spread to Europe. In London and elsewhere, Kremlinologists and literary critics are debating the authenticity of the memoirs of the colorful figure who presided over the Soviet Union during a period of profound transition following the Stalinist era. As in the United States, the controversy in Europe appears to have missed the main issue. The main issue is not whether the material is *authentic* but whether it is *authorized*. The distinction is critical. Whether or not the book sounds like Khrushchev—the point now being debated—there can be no question about the fact that no evidence has been presented to show that Nikita Khrushchev has consented to publication of this material over his name.

Everything is marginal alongside the undisputed fact that no one—not *Life* magazine nor Little, Brown, the book's publishers, nor any of the publishers abroad—has claimed to be in possession of a single authorizing document.

How is it possible, it may be asked, for a book by a prominent person to be unauthorized? In the case of Nikita Khrushchev or any public figure, this question is easily answered. Anyone who is in a history-making position, who signs his name to hundreds of documents or statements, makes public appearances, gives lengthy interviews, and is the subject and source of numberless anecdotes—any such person generates enough raw material for several volumes. A not inconsiderable number of "autobiographies" of famous persons are put together in just such a fashion. An editor or writer

is assigned to go through all such materials and weave them together into a coherent literary whole. The fact of major editing and outside writing does not make the finished literary work any less authentic—so long as the author himself is engaged in the total process and authorizes the final product. Without such authorization, the use of the author's name may be unethical, illegal, and, under some circumstances, fraudulent. No reasons are now apparent for making an exception in the case of *Khrushchev Remembers*.

When they say that the Khrushchev "memoirs" are authentic, what do they mean? Do they mean that the book is characteristic of Khrushchev? This is not a reasonable statement. A book may be "authentic" in the sense that the basic material originated in various forms with the man whose name is on the book. But this does not necessarily make it a legitimate book or a legitimate enterprise; certainly it is not enough to justify the use of a man's name as author.

Only Nikita Khrushchev—and not the various Soviet specialists who have rendered an opinion—can establish the authenticity of this book. Not only has he declared that he never authorized use of materials over his name, but he has specifically disavowed any connection with the volume. The publishers have attempted to reassure concerned parties by saying that the denial is not really unequivocal or definitive and that, read carefully, it leaves a significant opening. We have read this statement carefully and see nothing ambiguous about it. Here is the Khrushchev statement:

This is a fabrication and I am indignant at this. I have never passed on memoirs or materials of this nature either to *Time* or to other foreign publishing houses. I did not turn over such materials to the Soviet publishing houses either. Therefore, I declare that this is a fabrication.

Now, it may be contended that Mr. Khrushchev or his agent did in fact furnish some materials at one time but, because of changed later circumstances, found it necessary or expedient to put forward a repudiation. Such a contention may or may not be factual, but in the context of the Soviet political situation, it is at least worthy of serious consideration. What is not persuasive, however, is the argument that the Khrushchev statement is ambiguous.

It may be asked if it really makes any difference whether Nikita Khrushchev actually wrote the book or not. It makes a great deal of difference. People are entitled to know what they are

House Call: Evening

by Charles Philbrick

Shaved and brave, I assured the tired physician
 That I could stand any siege of suffering as long
 As he truly considered it was doing some good.
 I'd appreciate being told straight, I said,
 If he thought the suffering was useless—as though
 I had made any plans in that case. The doctor gave
 As good as he got: too early to tell, he said,
 And asked me where he could wash his hands.

Letters to the Editor

buying. If all that is required to justify the use of a famous name as author of a book is to assemble material that sounds authentic, then the entire system of copyright as we know it is doomed and there is no way of protecting the public against literary swindles and forgeries. What is there to stop a publisher from putting together a book drawing upon, for example, everything written or spoken or attributed to John F. Kennedy? Could the publisher simply add enough new material, genuine or otherwise, to give the book an apparent fresh importance, and then claim that the volume is a hitherto unpublished and authentic autobiographical memoir? For such a book to be authentic it would have to be authorized by the author—or, in the event the author is no longer alive, by someone intimately associated with him.

We do not know for a fact that *Khrushchev Remembers* was assembled without authorization; we know only that the case for authorized publication has not yet been made. Even if we are to assume, as we said earlier, that at a certain point in time Khrushchev did agree to have his memoirs constructed out of his papers, the final word about publication must be his. In the catalogue of author's rights, nothing is more basic or inviolate than the right of final approval or withdrawal. To set aside this right because the author is a Soviet citizen without recourse is to invoke the same specious policies used by Soviet publishers to justify the publication of American books without consent of the authors.

We do not question the fact that the American publishers obtained a manuscript in good faith, on the basis of representations made to them by intermediate parties. What is difficult to understand is why the American publishers did not protect themselves and their readers by insisting on a signed statement by Mr. Khrushchev authorizing publication. This is the fundamental purpose of contracts between authors and publishers. If such a contract is regarded as essential under ordinary circumstances, it would appear to be mandatory under circumstances in which authorship might be contested.

If an authorizing document does in fact exist, the publishers would do well to produce it. Failing to do so, they inevitably invite the criticism that they are purveying questionable merchandise. Putting it more plainly: The absence of an authorizing document leaves the publishers no ethical alternative except to withdraw the book from further public sale as well as to refund the cost of the book to anyone who requests it.

—N.C.

Conscientious Objection

THE EDITORIAL by Bill Moyers "Vietnam: What Is Left of Conscience?" [SR, Feb. 13] comes as a slap in the face to all those who have opposed U.S. intervention in Vietnam from the beginning. It's a little late for Mr. Moyers, who, as President Johnson's press secretary, was individually responsible for daily mouthing platitudes after platitudes, empty promise after empty promise, lie after lie, to want to cleanse his conscience, to want to wash his hands. Where was his conscience during the time he served under Johnson? Nowhere in his article—except only by subtle implication—does Moyers regret having served under Johnson's administration. Can we assume then that he favored every escalation of the war made by his chief, or can we assume that he opposed Johnson's Asian policy but was too weak to break with the administration? We don't know.

Perhaps, though, Moyers is right. Perhaps this nation has lost its collective conscience. But I do know this: that from the very beginning, the Vietnam War has been an outrage to many, that, throughout the years, there have been those who have opposed this war both violently and non-violently, those who have demonstrated and marched, those who have petitioned their government, those who have refused to pay taxes, those who have burned draft cards, fled to Canada, or gone to jail. They are not guilty, Mr. Moyers. They did not give their tacit consent to a policy that has brutalized a people, that has divided its own at home.

Telford Taylor, in his book *Nuremberg and Vietnam*, contends that if we, the United States, were to apply the principles

and standards that we helped to establish at Nuremberg for dealing with war criminals, then we would have to try all those top civilian and military officials responsible for war crimes in Vietnam.

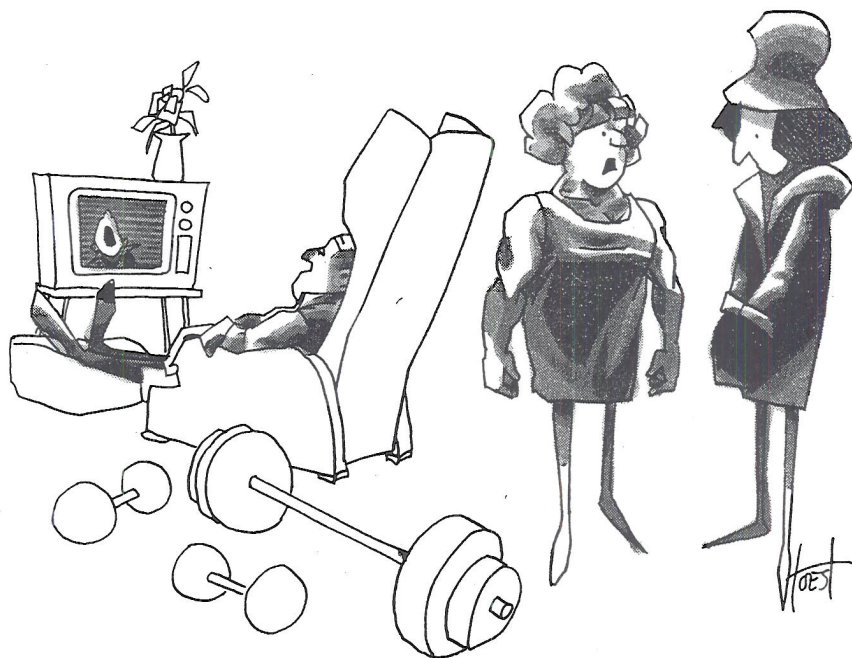
Perhaps, Mr. Moyers, anything less would be unconscionable?

STANLEY TAIKEFF,
Brooklyn, N.Y.

Heavy-duty Changes

ALTHOUGH it would be foolish to argue with N.C.'s contention that change can occur swiftly, as stated in his editorial "The Changing Mood of Youth" [SR, Feb. 20], he makes a fundamental error in supposing that the mood on American campuses has become less hostile toward the government and other established institutions than it was last spring.

The reaction of students to the latest American outrage in Indochina might be less overtly hostile than it was to the invasion of Cambodia, but hostile it is, nonetheless. What has changed is that many students are more apathetic, and this, I believe, is far more potentially explosive than anything that preceded it. I am reminded of a comment of Dr. Rollo May, who said that widespread apathy grows out of the despair people have when they no longer believe in their power to influence the institutions that act in their name. He goes on to suggest that such apathy is that stage of frustration which immediately precedes violence. . . . That those who have had the courage to act and speak out in the past now seem to be quiet does not mean a return to conventional politics. As long as the Nixon administration continues to butcher Asian



"John never uses them. I just keep moving them from one room to another."