

A Khrushchev Puzzle

Life's publication today of the first part of what are claimed to be Khrushchev's memoirs is certain to provoke intensive international discussion. The Soviet Government has already indicated concern about the matter by having Tass issue a denial—allegedly by Nikita Khrushchev—of the material's authenticity, but the denial is so curiously worded that it does not dispose of the issue.

The portrait of Stalin which emerges from this first installment is a familiar one to those who have read Khrushchev's originally secret speech of February 1956 as well as Milovan Djilas's "Conversations With Stalin" and Svetlana Alliluyeva's "Twenty Letters to a Friend." Fascinating and repulsive as the ordinary reader will find this description of Stalin, the account—even if authentic—adds only details to the professional historian's knowledge of the tyrant who built the Soviet colossus at such huge human cost. Politically, the chief impact

of this publication will be to remind the world that many of Stalin's victims—Trotsky, Bukharin, Rykov, Zinoviev and numerous others—are still reviled in official Soviet history.

A final verdict on the importance of this manuscript cannot be based on this brief, first extract. But even now the question of authenticity emerges as central. The curious errors of fact are perhaps explicable as the result of an old man's failing memory, but there are less-innocent alternative explanations. Back in the 1950's a volume allegedly containing the diary of the late Soviet Commissar of Foreign Affairs Maxim Litvinov was published here with an introduction by the eminent British historian, E. H. Carr. Nevertheless there is widespread belief that those memoirs were concocted abroad, and this newspaper's reviewers implied that they had actually been written by a defected Soviet diplomat, Grigori Bessedovsky. Analogous suspicions are likely to becloud these alleged Khrushchev memoirs unless Life states more convincingly than it has to date how and from whom it received the manuscript and why it is so confident that its author was Nikita S. Khrushchev.