

# Khrushchev 'Memoirs': Some Distorted but Important Pictures

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**"Khrushchev Remembers"**  
poses three major questions: Is it Nikita S. Khrushchev himself speaking, does he speak the truth and does he enlighten us about his country, Stalin and himself?

The key lies in the first question. Careful examination of the four excerpts published in Life magazine demonstrates almost certainly that this appraisal material, in one form or another, originally emanated from Mr. Khrushchev.

Although those outside the publishing enterprise are unable to determine the form or means by which the material was conveyed from Moscow to the West, internal evidence suggests that it was originally dictated by Mr. Khrushchev at different times and under different circumstances, then extensively cut, patched and possibly revised by various hands, some in Moscow, some in the West.

**What of the Truth?**  
Does Mr. Khrushchev speak the truth?  
This is a tricky question. At best the excerpts discuss major

subjects only in half-truths and frequently in outright distortions. So many enormously important topics are not dealt with that the suspicion grows that major excisions were made in the remembrances long before they reached Life magazine.

For example, Mr. Khrushchev apparently has not dealt with such major events in his own period of power as his first encounter with Richard M. Nixon, then Vice President, in Moscow in 1959; the Soviet Premier's first trip to the United States in the fall of 1959; his return trip to the United Nations session in 1960; his spectacular defeat of the anti-party group and its ouster from the leadership in 1957; the 22d Party congress of 1961, when Stalin's body was removed from its Red Square mausoleum; his own ouster from the Government in 1964; nor in anything but the most periphrastical manner with any events after the Cuban missile crisis of 1962.

The remembrances contain almost no references to the men who now run the Soviet Government: Leonid I. Brezhnev, Aleksei N. Kosygin and Nikolai V. Podgorny. This can hardly be accidental.

Mr. Khrushchev's recollections are flawed by what seems to be a mixture of the bad memory of a 76-year-old man (he often confuses or juxtaposes events out of historical context) and a desire to distort the record, either to enhance his own image or to pay off old and often obscure scores.

A notable example is provided by his truncated account of events preceding his famous "secret speech" of Feb. 24-25, 1956, in which he exposed Stalin's crimes. His account indicates that the speech was rather spur-of-the-moment and at his own suggestion, over the opposition of many colleagues.

But the historical record demonstrates that public de-Stalinization actually was under way before the convening of the 20th party congress, at which he spoke. It had begun nearly six weeks before at a conference of party historians in Moscow and was outlined on Feb. 16, more than a week before Mr. Khrushchev spoke, by Anastas I. Mikoyan.

Mr. Khrushchev gives an equally confused account of the origin and development of the so-called Doctors' Plot announced Jan. 13, 1953, by Vietnam because the situation

which Stalin planned to finish off many of the older members of the Politburo.

A seeming distortion occurs in Mr. Khrushchev's portrayal of Mr. Mikoyan, who was closely associated with Mr. Khrushchev's rise to power. But, possibly because Mr. Mikoyan aided the coup that displaced Mr. Khrushchev, the remembrances picture him as an ally of the hated police chief, Lavrenti P. Beria.

**Biased Picture of Mao**  
The description of Mr. Khrushchev's relations with Mao Tse-tung seems deliberately tendentious, and the account of the 1958 rupture between the Soviet Union and China over the Formosa Strait crisis manages not to mention Taiwan or the fact that the row concerned Peking's demand for nuclear missile support and Mr. Khrushchev's refusal unless Communist China put all its armed forces under Soviet command.

The former Soviet leader is almost certainly tendentious in contending that just before the Geneva conference of 1954 on Indochina Premier Chou En-lai of Communist China was about to end support for North Vietnam because the situation

was "hopeless." The Chinese were then deeply involved with Ho Chi Minh and Gen. Vo Nguyen Giap in preparing the trap at Dienbienphu that ended French military power in Indochina.

One of Mr. Khrushchev's most misleading and confusing episodes deals with his own rise to prominence in Moscow at the beginning of the nineteen-thirties. He gives credit for his promotion to Nadezha Allilyeva, Stalin's wife, whereas the record clearly shows he was a protégé of Lazar M. Kaganovich, eventually by his deadly enemy in the Politburo.

**Value to Historians**  
Despite these distortions, the omissions, the probably censorious, the confusions arising from weakened memory and from earnest desire for political vindication—despite all this, the value of the document to historians is still considerable.

Basically it gives an insider's version of the atmosphere that surrounded the history carefully reconstructed by Western scholars. It provides insights not so much into events as into the atmosphere

of the Kremlin and Stalinist society.

One of America's leading students of Soviet affairs has expressed skepticism about the validity of the remembrances. "Nowhere is there any discussions of principle," he said, "no questions of ideology arise in the debates of the Politburo. They all sound like a bunch of high school students."

But this, almost certainly, is the great merit of "Khrushchev Remembers." It underscores spectacularly the venality, the banality, the petty intrigue, the crude ignorance, the ruthless rivalry of the men in the Kremlin and the society that revolved around Stalin. Ideology in the Marxist sense was left at the door along with the sidearms that military men were not allowed to bring into the Kremlin under Stalin.

It was a society of dangerous men who knew that their lives depended on the whim of one increasingly paranoid old man. After Stalin, Mr. Khrushchev makes plain, the atmosphere changed and some fresh air came in, largely because of him. Now, he is equally clear, the doors are slammed shut again.