

Another Ouster Another Time

by Werner Hahn

With the removal of Mikhail Gorbachev from the Presidency of the Soviet Union many will be looking back on other dramatic changes in Kremlin. One such change was the downfall of Nikita Khrushchev in 1964. Here is an account of how it happened.

WHO led the plot to oust Nikita Sergeevich Khrushchev in October 1964? In Soviet assessments of this event, historians and former leaders sharply disagree, with some blaming Mikhail Suslov, others Aleksandr Shelepin, and still others Leonid Brezhnev, and still others Nikolay Podgorny.

In the current wave of glasnost and filling-in of "blank spots" in Soviet history, new information is being published about many episodes in Soviet political life — including the overthrow of Khrushchev. Soviet historians and political scientists with inside knowledge — such as Roy Medvedev and Fedor Burlatsky — started a debate over Khrushchev's overthrow by writing detailed new versions of the coup that were published in the official Soviet press in 1988.

Subsequently, Khrushchev's son serge revealed fascinating new information about the coup from the perspective of Khrushchev and his family. In turn, the appearance of these versions prompted several retired Soviet leaders to make public their own versions based on their participation in the plot against Khrushchev.

But even on the core issue of the examination system, the education ministry has managed to land itself in a wholly unnecessary mess. Not so long ago, the new system was hailed as a progressive one by the ministry itself. But by doing a sudden volte-face, was the ministry trying to tell us that it was wrong in its assessment, and that the old system was better? If so, then why did it move ahead with implementation of the changes in the first place, without giving much thought to the consequences? But if the ministry still insists that the aborted system is indeed a progressive one which would help to improve the standard of education in the country, then why did it abandon it? Has the ministry simply abdicated its responsibility to carry out the reforms necessary to improve the quality of output from our schools?

These are not friendly questions, and they are not meant to be so either, but somebody has to stand up and answer them. Education is possibly the most critical area for any developing nation, which deserves the greatest thought and care, as well as expenditure. Unfortunately, what we have at present is a picture of a directionless ministry muddling through from crisis to crisis, sending all the wrong signals.

We know the decision to introduce the new system was taken back in 1988, under a vastly different political environment. It was imperative, therefore, for the ministry to enter into wide-ranging consultations with teachers, parents and, yes, pupils, to see exactly how the changes were likely to affect those most directly involved. We simply cannot accept a bureaucratic decision to be a *fait accompli* under a democratic dispensation. There is such a thing called public opinion, and the decision makers must learn to consult it.

But even in the current situation of all muddle and no direction, we sincerely hope the education ministry knows where it is going, and that a clear, imaginative and far-sighted policy will emerge to guide this most vital sector to the 21st century.

Education's Listless Journey

After several days of non-stop anarchy in the streets, during which 10 to 16-year-old schoolkids wrought havoc to put their elders at the universities and colleges to shame, the government did a stunning somersault and accepted all their demands. The education minister, Dr. Badruddoza Chowdhury, praised the new system which he had just scrapped (or should we say shelved?), but also termed the schoolboys' demands "justified".

Naturally, that left more questions unanswered than not. To begin with, the ministry said it was ordering the U-turn in order to preserve peace and discipline at schools. Did that mean the government was simply bowing to the pressure of boys in their early teens throwing bricks at innocent bus and car passengers? If so, then what kind of precedence does the ministry think it sets for the future? Not a healthy one, we should say, since it sends the worst possible signal that the government is vulnerable to pressure, no matter how unlawful the method of protest. In fact, no attempt was made to treat the street violence as a law and order issue, separate from the arguments about the rights and wrongs of the changes the ministry planned to bring to the Secondary School Certificate examinations.

However, unlike other important episodes of Soviet history, for example, the arrest of Lavrenty Beria — where one leader (Khrushchev) presented his insider's account (in several variations) and other participants were never heard from, this time we have been presented with varying ver-

sions by insiders.

The new information undermines the long-held interpretation that Suslov played the leading role — or at least one of the leading roles in the plot. Most new versions assert that Suslov had little to do with it, that Brezhnev led the plot, along with Central Committee Secretaries Podgorny and Shelepin and KGB Chairman Vladimir Semichastnyy, and that the plot had been under way for many months and involved a large number Central Committee members. Perhaps most important, the new versions make it clear that Khrushchev was not overthrown by his enemies (such as Suslov), but by some of his own proteges (Brezhnev, Podgorny, Shelepin).

Accounts in the West

Previously, the most widely accepted view of the plot was that Suslov led it (based on his obvious opposition to Khrushchev for some time and also on his delivery of the October 1964 Central Committee plenum speech listing Khrushchev's errors) and that Brezhnev and Podgorny — who were close to Khrushchev — were persuaded to join only later. Michel Tatu's

account-written soon after the event — presented the most detailed and convincing arguments supporting this position. He contended that Suslov, the "main spokesman of the opposition," was "unquestionably the spearhead of the opposition." While Brezhnev, who "could not have played an active role in the preparations," and Podgorny, whose behavior before the overthrow "suggested that he was not a member of the plot," were informed only at the last minute.

Shelepin, Semichastnyy, and Ukrainian First Party Secretary Petro Shelest were promoted immediately after the coup, suggesting that they were being rewarded for their help. Tatu portrayed the plot as originating only a few days before the coup and as restricted to a small circle — a logical assumption in view of the danger if such a plot were exposed.

Later, dissident Soviet historian Roy Medvedev included explanations of the coup in books published in the West. In his first book on Khrushchev, Medvedev gave the lead role to Suslov, declaring that Central Committee members "were briefed mainly by Suslov" on the intended move against

Khrushchev. This account gave a lesser role to Brezhnev (Brezhnev phoned Khrushchev to persuade him to come back to Moscow) and made no mention of Podgorny or Shelepin.

In a subsequent book, Medvedev provided more detail and also altered the story somewhat, labeling Suslov and Shelepin "the prime movers," he also mentioned that Khrushchev had briefly questioned Podgorny about a possible plot, and described plotting during hunting and fishing trips hosted by Stavropol First Secretary Fedor Kulakov in September. He mentioned that there had been rumours of a discussion about removing Khrushchev in early 1964. Medvedev asserted that Khrushchev vigorously fought his removal at the October 13 meeting of the Presidium (as the Politburo was then called).

Medvedev's version — apparently based on some insiders' information — sounded convincing, but like Tatu's, it is now being refuted on many points by the recent accounts of both observers and insiders.

Accounts in the Soviet Press

In the era of glasnost, the first attempt to describe

Khrushchev's overthrow in detail in the Soviet press was presented by Roy Medvedev in 1988. He again portrayed Suslov and Shelepin as the ringleaders, whom Brezhnev later joined. Medvedev made no mention of Nikolay Podgorny.

At the center of the discussions were, as one could judge, M.A. Suslov and A.N. Shelepin. Of decisive importance was the joining of CPSU Central Committee Secretary L.I. Brezhnev and USSR Defense Minister R.Ya. Malinovsky.

According to Medvedev, it was Brezhnev who phoned Khrushchev on October 13 and persuaded him to return to Moscow to attend a Presidium meeting on agriculture. Semichastnyy met Khrushchev and Mikoyan at the airport and escorted them to the Presidium meeting, where "Suslov and Shelepin raised the question of removing Khrushchev from all his posts." Although Khrushchev at first stubbornly fought back, he eventually surrendered. At the plenum, Suslov delivered a long indictment of Khrushchev's errors. Medvedev also asserts that Stavropol First Secretary Kulakov organized hunting trips with other leaders to discuss moves against Khrushchev, and that former Presidium member Nikolay Ignatov engaged in similar discussions around the country.

Burlatsky — a speech writer for Khrushchev and a long-time Central Committee official — followed Medvedev with a remarkably detailed version of the coup in the September 14, 1988, issue of Literaturnaya Gazeta. He contended that Shelepin was the ringleader, along with Suslov and Brezhnev.

Probably not everyone knows that Khrushchev's overthrow was not planned by Brezhnev. Many people think that M.A. Suslov did it. In fact, it was the work of a group headed by A.N. Shelepin. They used to meet in the most unlikely places, usually at a stadium during a soccer match. And there they plotted. A special role was assigned to Semichastnyy, leader of the KGB, who was recommended for that post by Shelepin. His task was to replace Khrushchev's bodyguard. And indeed, when Khrushchev was summoned to the CPSU Central Committee Presidium session from Pitsunda, where he was on vacation with Mikoyan at the time, on board the plane he saw a new bodyguard, not his own. Khrushchev apparently realized at once what was afoot, and unsuccessfully tried to persuade the plot to land the plane in Kiev.

Burlatsky contends that it is still unclear when Shelepin entered into the compact with Suslov and Brezhnev. It is only clear that Shelepin joined first with the former, then with the latter. Burlatsky also wrote that the immediate pretext for the Presidium session was a speech by Khrushchev's son-in-law Aleksey Adzhubey in West Berlin, where Adzhubey said flippantly that it would cost the Soviet Union nothing to accept the unification of Germany. The GDR leaders immediately expressed their indignation to their Soviet colleagues, and this was the spark that started the conflagration.

In a four-part series in the October 1988 issues of Ogonek, Khrushchev's son Sergey presented a dramatic account of how he learned of the plot and sought to warn his father. According to him, the

plot was led by Brezhnev, Podgorny, Shelepin, and Semichastnyy, with former Presidium member Ignatov playing a big role and Stavropol First Secretary Georgiy Vorob'yev (not Stavropol First Secretary Kulakov) hosting the vacationing leaders who discussed Khrushchev's removal. Brezhnev and Podgorny, the senior CPSU secretaries, undertook most of the political preparation, canvassing and persuading Central Committee members and regional party officials. Sergey wrote that Brezhnev and Podgorny were the "key figures." In talks with Presidium members, they repeatedly stressed how difficult it was to get along with Khrushchev. According to Sergey, "Brezhnev complained of Khrushchev's intolerance and sharp criticisms of him, especially about the fact that father once called him 'lazy.' Because of his 'irresoluteness,' however, Brezhnev only spoke of holding a plenum to 'criticize' Khrushchev, rather than actually daring to suggest removing him.

Sergey depicted Shelepin and Semichastnyy as playing especially devious role, because to discredit Khrushchev, they fabricated stories about Khrushchev abusing his position by granting special favours to family members and relying on family members to conduct sensitive state matters (such as son-in-law Adzhubey's 1964 diplomatic mission to West Germany). Shelepin raised accusations that he, Sergey, had taken advantage of his father's position to acquire the title of doctor of science, while Semichastnyy used KGB reports to portray Adzhubey's diplomatic activities in West Germany in a bad light. Semichastnyy, as KGB chief, also controlled Khrushchev's guards, isolated Khrushchev from his supporters, and escorted him from the airport to the Presidium meeting held to oust him. Sergey considered the conspirators all the more duplicitous because, he said, Shelepin had consensually played up to him (Khrushchev's son), while Semichastnyy had married Adzhubey's sister and was a close friend of Khrushchev's son-in-law.

In contrast to Medvedev, Sergey Khrushchev portrayed Suslov as playing a minor role. He wrote that "according to rumours he knew nothing about the impending coup and when he found out, became very frightened." Nevertheless, continued Sergey, Suslov "quickly reoriented himself" and agreed to be the one who phoned Khrushchev to persuade him to return from vacation to attend the Presidium meeting. He also delivered the main report against Khrushchev at the plenum. However, wrote Sergey, Suslov was "assigned" to deliver the report only because Brezhnev and Podgorny had refused.

Sergey's account of the debate in the Presidium — an account related by Anastas Mikoyan to a close friend — had Shelepin listing Khrushchev's errors "in the name of the others present." Shelest and Gennadiy Voronov sharply attacking Khrushchev, with Brezhnev, Podgorny, and Aleksey Kosygin remaining silent, and Mikoyan halfheartedly suggesting that Khrushchev be allowed to keep one of his leadership posts.

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By arrangement with "Problems of Communism".

Philippines: Peace Babble

In the war between the communist insurgents and the Philippine military, to be able to talk peace both sides will have to fight more. Ramon Isberto of IPS explains reporting from Manila.

IN South-east Asia's longest running insurgency conflict, talking peace is as good a tactic as shooting in the war between the Philippine military and communist rebels.

Thus, when government and rebels talk of peaceful negotiations, observers wonder whether what they really mean is more fighting.

Recently, the government responded to persistent peace feelers from the rebel underground by saying it was willing to talk — but only with local commanders and not the national leadership.

The National Democratic Front (NDF), the rebels' umbrella group, quickly dismissed this as a crude attempt at divided and rule. But the government said it would start localised peace talks anyway.

Analysts here take the government's response to mean it is not interested in peace negotiations.

"What (officials) are really trying to say is 'no'," commented the Philippine Daily Globe newspaper. "But they don't want it to appear that the government is averse to talking peace."

The military leadership is plainly not eager to interrupt a war they say they are winning.

Armed Forces Chief of Staff Gen Lisandro Abadía has claimed that the military's strategy of systematically dismantling strongholds of the New People's Army (NPA), the military arm of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), is succeeding.

In the past three years, the number of NAP 'guerrilla zones' dropped from 71 to 57 while rebel manpower fell from 26,000 to 17,000 Abadía says.

At that rate, the insurgency will shrink to a manageable "police problem" by the time

Aquino steps down from office next year, Abadía adds.

It is the insurgents who have doggedly pressed their peace proposals. Days after Mt Pinatubo erupted in June, the NPA declared a ceasefire in the devastated areas.

Soon after, in an open letter to President Corazon Aquino, the NDF reiterated its willingness to "sit down with your government and seriously work towards negotiating a political settlement."

This was a repeat of events last year when the NDF declared a ceasefire and proposed peace talks shortly after a killer earthquake destroyed large areas in the country's north.

That initiative won the support of the Catholic Church and various peace groups, which successfully convinced Aquino to reverse her long-standing policy of spurning rebel peace feelers.

But hopes for peace quickly fizzled out: Manila rejected NDF proposals for face-to-face meetings between government and rebel representatives abroad and the involvement of intermediaries.

Defence department officials say the NDF peace initiatives are cynical attempts to score political points. The rebels' real objective, they say, is not peace but belligerency status.

In an 82-page primer that details its peace proposals, the NDF does stress that it should be recognised as a "belligerent force in a civil war."

The NDF also proposed that negotiations be held under the auspices of the United Nations Secretary General, like the talks between the Salvadorian government and the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN).

The NDF International



office in the Netherlands has also asked the Swiss government to host the talks, possibly in Geneva.

Swiss deputy foreign minister Klaus Jacobi brought up the matter with the Philippine government when he visited Manila in May. But the Swiss offer was turned down.

Analysts here wonder whether the NDF's repeated peace offers, which date back to February 1989, are simply attempts to regain the political initiative from the government or reflect a genuine shift in the movement's strategy for seizing power.

Though the CPP and NPA remain officially committed to a strategy of first building rural bases and seizing power in the cities later, the rebels have in recent years tried to establish a greater urban presence, particularly in the capital.

Underground sources say rebel leaders here and abroad have shown great interest in the FMLN's decision to shift its emphasis from seeking an outright military victory against the government to political actions like peace talks and elections.

A similar shift in strategy by the NDF would mean a situation where two contending sides would, as an NDF source put it, "talk and fight."

One NDF source observed that the FMLN succeeded in bringing the Salvadorian government to the bargaining table because its guerrilla forces were strong enough to battle the state to a stalemate.

To create a similar situation, the NPA would have to greatly increase its present armed strength and may mean more, not less, fighting.

To the Editor...

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

Gorbachev utters God

Sir, A very interesting news was published in the 4th August issue of one of the local dailies, "Gorbachev utters God, quotes Bible." The last paragraph is specially worth mentioning:

"Gorbachev frequently mentions God in his public remarks. Last week the Communist Party Central Committee adopted his new party platform that is expected to end the preaching of atheism as party doctrine."

Socialism as a belief has seen its own death within a period of less than 100 years. On the other hand, more and

more people throughout the world are evaluating Islam from a new perspective — they are beginning to view Islam not as a "religion" only but as a "system" for man to follow — the term system meaning anything and everything a human being encounters throughout his life.

Mr. Humayun Kabir, Dhaka.

Smokers' wars

Sir, Etiquette books remind us "Mind your own business." Those who do so are certainly gentlemen. When non-smokers start giving their views on smoking, they are apt to get carried away by their own en-

thusiasm. They do not care to read the small print which imply:

i) Smoking is not yet illegal, therefore the smokers are not breaking the law; and are, therefore, not criminals yet — but are being treated as pseudo criminals by a small section of the society, which is not fair. The sales of cigarette (and tobacco products) are very much legal.

ii) Officially there are campaigns in various countries to discourage people from smoking, and certain areas, mostly indoors, have been declared "No Smoking zones, with legal penalties in some countries.

The smokers are sane people who do not get "drunk" on excessive smoking, as in the case of drinking alcohol, but since the western society has accepted "drinking", the anti-campaign, if any, is on low key, and rather "transparent". The social and domestic effects of drinking are well known. We seem to be blindly impressed by western materialistic R & D. Let us be democratic, so

long the law allows it. The non-smokers are becoming too intolerant (in trying to be the good Samaritans) and boorish.

Perhaps the non-smokers do not realize that in large metropolitan cities they "smoke" the equivalent of three cigarettes every day. How do they propose to stop "smoking", before they offer free advice to the smokers?

A Smoker, Dhaka 1207

English Language

Sir, Now-a-days both English Literature and English Language are taught at Dhaka University as Honours and Post-graduate courses. But it is a matter of great regret that only English Literature is taught at Jahangirnagar University. Although a large number of students are interested to study English Language they cannot avail themselves of the opportunity for the lack of this system at Jahangirnagar University.

Therefore, I draw the attention of the appropriate authorities to the matter in the hope of necessary action as soon as possible.

Mahbubul Alam, English (Hons.), 1st year, Jahangirnagar University.

National mourning day

Sir, It is interesting to note that Awami League has demanded 15th August to be declared as National Mourning Day. We remember, in 1972 Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman himself declared 21st February as National Mourning Day.

Is it possible that a nation observes two National Mourning Days and Awami League proposes to disregard the decision of Bangabandhu, their own leader, and the Father of the Nation by changing the date fixed for national mourning? Cannot we pray for the departed soul, show re-

spect to him without the day being called as National Mourning Day?

Munira Khan, Dhaka

Obituary reports and FP

Sir, It appears from obituary reports in various newspapers that a good number of government officials left behind half a dozen children or so each. The government continues to preach two-child family, family planning, population control, birth control. All those officials were responsible to realise those objectives but they themselves practised otherwise should the government officials be sincere in controlling the 'number one' problem and maintain record of all public representatives?

Sadiq Alee, Mughalazar, Dhaka.