

KHRUSHCHEV: THE YEARS IN POWER. By Roy A. Medvedev and Zhores A. Medvedev. Translated by Andrew W. Durkin. New York: Columbia University Press, 1976. xvi, 198 pp. \$10.95.

The Medvedev brothers have made several of the most important contributions to knowledge of Soviet history and politics. This book is not as good as some of their earlier works, but it is informative and provocative. Albeit more implicitly than explicitly, it poses many problems, in particular the need and means for reforming the oppressive Soviet political system. It offers valuable confirmation of pessimistic Western diagnoses of the chronic ills of Soviet agriculture, resulting from decades of Stalin's incredible mismanagement. It will interest serious students of Soviet affairs and might be useful as supplementary reading in courses on Soviet politics.

In matter-of-fact fashion, Roy and Zhores Medvedev offer a series of sensational but believable reports. For example, on the basis of the *Politicheskii dnevnik*, now known to have been largely or wholly Roy's *samizdat* publication, they assert that two attempts were made on Khrushchev's life in 1956. The would-be assassins were apparently "people . . . involved in the repressions of the Stalin years" (p. 21). Their report that after 1957 underground bomb shelters were no longer part of the standard equipment of new housing in Moscow—"a clear sign of confidence that the country was on its way to peace and prosperity" (p. 80)—is interesting because of the current discussions of Soviet civil defense measures. They provide some apparently new details on the bizarre, tragic episode in Riazan oblast in 1959–60, involving fraud, cover-up, the wrecking of agriculture in the oblast, and the suicide of the much praised party secretary, and Khrushchev favorite, A. N. Larionov. It should be noted that this story is told in Werner Hahn's authoritative study, *The Politics of Soviet Agriculture*, though without some of the details reported by the Medvedevs.

The Medvedevs' account of the exciting, stormy Khrushchev era is enlivened, as I have noted, by "insider" touches. However, it cannot be said to present a startlingly new interpretation. In fact, it is more descriptive than analytical in thrust. The Medvedevs, like Western scholars, portray Khrushchev in the ascendant until 1958, after which his early successes began to turn sour as he dug his political grave by antagonizing, one after the other, the elite sectors whose support was necessary for the success of his policies and even his continued tenure in office. The book sheds a vivid light on the depth of the crisis confronting Soviet Russia after Stalin's death, especially in the crucial field of agriculture. In my opinion, the Medvedevs correctly credit Khrushchev with being the only one of Stalin's lieutenants who realized the catastrophic situation of Soviet agriculture and had the courage to tackle the related problems even if unsystematically. They justly praise Khrushchev for releasing millions of people from concentration camps, and they accurately describe the limitations—rooted in inherited Russian and Soviet authoritarianism and problems of ideological legitimacy—of his de-Stalinization program. Above all, they provide sobering evidence on the enormous difficulties that face reformist political leaders in a system as rigid as the Soviet one.

If I read the Medvedevs correctly, Khrushchev, although his intentions were good, failed because he attempted, as they put it, "too much too soon." He failed also because he antagonized elite elements whose interests were infringed upon by his reforms, but whose support was necessary for the success of these reforms. The authors do not explain how, in view of the enormity of the problems confronting Russia after years of Stalin's misrule, reforms smaller in scale than those attempted by Khrushchev would have had much value or could have successfully carried through given the necessary magnitude of such programs. Was it not necessary for Khrushchev, in order to generate support for his measures, to resort to methods, including demagoguery, that militated against their success? What all of this amounts to is that

the Medvedevs fail to confront the systemic dilemmas of Soviet communism fully. Furthermore, there is ambivalence in the way they deal with the problem of comparing Khrushchev and his successors. They correctly credit Khrushchev with inaugurating détente, the post-Stalin borrowing of Western technology, and the gigantic post-Stalin housing program. They portray Khrushchev's successors as ideological reactionaries. They sometimes seem to imply—but do not explicitly say—that it is impossible to combine Khrushchev's humanitarian impulse with the greater efficiency of his successors. In a word, they do not take a firm, unambiguous position on the crucial issues they raise. But perhaps it is unfair to demand from the Medvedevs answers to the most difficult questions of Soviet politics. We can rejoice that they have outlined some of the essential issues so clearly and have given us much food for thought.

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DÉTENTE AND SOCIALIST DEMOCRACY: A DISCUSSION WITH ROY MEDVEDEV. Edited by *Ken Coates*. New York: Monad Press, 1976. x, 163 pp. \$9.00, cloth. \$2.45, paper. Distributed by Pathfinder Press, 410 West Street, New York, N.Y. 10014.

Roy Medvedev is a representative of the Russian type of "socialism with a human face." Through the initiative of Ken Coates, Medvedev's 1973 essay on détente and socialist democracy was reprinted and commented on by twelve Western Marxists with similar political backgrounds. Medvedev deals with three major issues: (1) current repression of Soviet dissidents; (2) the relation between détente, democratization, and external pressures; and (3) the future changes in Russia. There is almost no disagreement about the first issue; it is accepted by all that—as aptly formulated by Tamara Deutscher—"the emancipation of the Soviet people will be the work of the Soviet people themselves" (p. 39).

The second question, concerning détente is more controversial, because several contributors (Y. Craipeau, G. Novack) have warned that détente will lead to reinforcement of restrictive measures, not to democratization. The best essay in the collection is Ernest Mandel's, who shows that, détente notwithstanding, military budgets increase and that monopoly of power is incompatible with socialist self-management. R. Pannequin adds that the party machine is the complete opposite of democracy and that its roots are to be found in Leninist centralism and its barracks-like spirit. The third issue—the proposed reform from the top—is unanimously rejected by the Western Marxists (M. Pablo, R. Milliband, F. Marek, and E. P. Thompson), who differ only in degree. However, the two East Europeans, Mihailo Marković and Jiří Pelikán—who have both had direct experience with the vicious circle of reforms from above—see more clearly than others that the future antibureaucratic revolution will be possible only if linked with "socialist enlightenment," and that controlled liberalization might really be the trigger of future change.

What is surprising is the outcome of this discussion. Medvedev's final comments on the opinions of his Western counterparts reveal the same dogmatic attitude which he likes to criticize in others, namely his semi-Stalinist type of thinking. Medvedev ignores the arguments and attributes to every opponent—left and right, Russian or Western—lack of understanding of the specific Soviet conditions. On top of that, he startles even the most sympathetic reader with a concluding statement—*after* the discussion!—that "in the present leadership of the Central Committee of the CPSU there are nowadays no proponents of authoritarian government" (p. 146). Whatever might be the shortcomings of Solzhenitsyn, Sakharov, and the Westerners, they at