

BOOKS

KHRUSHCHEV

by Roy Medvedev

translated by Brian Pearce

(Anchor Press, Doubleday; x + 292 pp.; \$17.95)

Larry Tool

In February of 1956 Nikita Sergeevich Khrushchev delivered his now famous secret speech denouncing Stalinism and the "cult of personality." One of the many unintended effects of that speech was to launch the career of Roy Medvedev, a young Marxist historian and Party member whose father had "disappeared" in the great purge of the 1930s. With the completion in 1968 of *Let History Judge: The Origins and Consequences of Stalinism*, Medvedev became an unofficial conscience of Soviet Marxism and a name to conjure with in the West.

Official fashions change fast. Under Brezhnev, Medvedev found himself a barely tolerated "dissident." Although he remained loyal to the Communist party and its ideals, his works of constructive criticism were permitted to circulate only in *samizdat*. When *Let History Judge* appeared in the West, his apartment was searched and his research materials were confiscated. The Andropov regime has now let it be known that this unreconstructed Khrushchevite will not be tolerated at all. Medvedev has been ordered to be silent, on pain of arrest. His arrest seems imminent, for—in his exiled brother's gentle phrase—"Roy has no inhibitions."

Within the politically charged world of Soviet letters, a political biography is inevitably a political gesture. It obviously occurred to Medvedev that the passing of the men who ousted Khrushchev would provide an excellent occasion for rekindling interest in his career. Dated June, 1981, Medvedev's manuscript is a message to the potential successors of Brezhnev and Company. It offers them both a warning and a plea. It warns them not to try to turn the clock back to "the Stalin cult and the myth of the infallibility of the Party and its leaders." It is also a reminder, via Khrushchev's example, that it is possible "to change Soviet society from the top, given support from below." As we now know, Mr. Andropov's enthusiasm for some comradely advice has not been excessive.

On its face this new biography of Khrushchev is a nostalgic tribute to the man who

opened Soviet society to the kind of self-criticism that made Medvedev's career possible. As an historical sequel to *Let History Judge*, it lacks the thoroughness and urgency of the earlier study. Its overriding aim is not to expose Khrushchev's mistakes but to recapture the heady atmosphere of the "distinct epoch" over which he presided. Medvedev is not uncritical. His book contains a sustained critique of Khrushchev's impetuous and erratic administrative style. But its basic mood is commemorative.

Medvedev's most informative chapters describe Khrushchev's agricultural initiatives. The famous experiments of his years in power are analyzed against his background as peasant, miner, and rural administrator. Since Khrushchev was one of the best Soviet administrators of his generation, a critique of his career suggests some of the general limitations of a Bolshevik political education. The sort of ruthless hortatory utopianism that produced Soviet industrial "miracles" frequently proved disastrous in agriculture. Those who mastered nature proved incompetent to work alongside nature. Khrushchev never could bring himself to modify the Stalinist commitment to industrialization. Where Soviet agriculture needed capital, Khrushchev put all his faith in administrative reorganization and ill-conceived experiments. The net result of Farmer Khrushchev's efforts was the unprecedented need to import grain.

But the story of Soviet agriculture is as familiar as it is bleak. Medvedev and his brother covered much the same ground in an earlier book, *Khrushchev, The Years in Power* (1974). The Western reader is more likely to open the present volume in search of new light on Khrushchev's foreign policy. He probably will be disappointed. A broad outline of events is presented, but it is drawn largely from the public press. Medvedev's extraofficial sources seem unable to shed much light on the workings of the Politburo. We are given the Soviet point of view on the Sino-Soviet quarrel, the Cuban missile crisis, and other matters; but the reasoning behind policy remains hid-

den. We get itineraries of Khrushchev's many trips outside the Soviet Union, but no real evaluation of their significance. Nor does Medvedev try to understand or weigh the effects of Soviet actions on others. In the case of dissent in Poland and Hungary, for example, he tells us that Khrushchev "appreciated the dangers and took appropriate action"—a euphemism worthy of *Pravda* at its worst.

Medvedev's outlook often seems as insular as that of his subject. His critique of Stalinism has led some Western intellectuals to imagine him a like-minded com-patriot. But one may criticize Stalin without being a liberal or a political democrat. Khrushchev was an insurgent *within* the Soviet context, and one must be careful not to confuse contexts. There is no muckraking tradition in Soviet literature because there is no real public access to the "smoke-filled room" of Soviet politics. While this reality does not disturb Medvedev, it imposes the sort of limitations on the art of political biography that would drive a writer like Robert Caro to despair. Khrushchev cracked the Stalinist glacier and rehabilitated nearly twenty million people, most posthumously. For Medvedev that is enough to excuse his complicity in the purges and his various policy errors; a system that can produce such a man must be redeemable. This biography will remind admirers of *Let History Judge* that its author is a critic not of autocratic power but of the *abuse* of autocratic power.

Perhaps the best part of this new book is its discussion of Nikita Sergeevich's flirtation with the intelligentsia. Medvedev contends that no other group in Soviet society stood as solidly behind him, both then and now. Judging from Medvedev's evidence and from his own example, this support had as much to do with Khrushchev's populism as with his tolerance of the arts. The point comes through in an anecdote: In 1967 an unauthorized film showing Khrushchev in retirement appeared on French television. Khrushchev was summoned by Kirillenko (a former protégé) for reprimand. "You are living too well," Kirillenko snapped. "All right," Khrushchev replied, "you can take away my dacha and my pension. I shall be able to wander through this country with my hand outstretched and people will give me whatever I need. If you were destitute, no one would give you anything." The deposed premier is pictured here as a kind of "holy fool," impetuous and a bit crackbrained, but sustained in all his wanderings by his wise faith in the common people.

In short, Medvedev's Khrushchev is lov-

able, like no Soviet leader before or since. He emerges from this portrait as a limited man—a prisoner of ignorance and dogma, the understudy of a vicious tyrant—who nevertheless overcame his limitations because he insisted on firsthand involvement with the people. A peasant himself, Khrushchev's common touch made Soviet power seem legitimate to men of learning and discernment, even when his handling of that power was undeniably incompetent. That is why many still prefer him to his more efficient and security-minded successors. The volume ends appropriately with an image of Khrushchev's grave, upon which the Soviet people lay fresh flowers "nearly every day of the year."

Whether this avuncular populist was the real Khrushchev may not be important. Whether this is the Khrushchev Russians will choose to remember may turn out to be significant for their future, and for our own as well. WV

CAN THE THIRD WORLD SURVIVE?

by Jacques Loup

(Johns Hopkins University Press; xix + 244 pp.; \$25.00/\$8.25)

BITTER PILLS

by Donald P. Warwick

(Cambridge University Press; xvi + 229 pp.; \$24.95)

THE CAUSE OF WORLD HUNGER

by William J. Byron

(Paulist Press; 256 pp.; \$8.95 [paper])

Walter E. Ashley

As the 1980s unfold, scholars and statesmen are taking a new look at the results of development in the Third World. The picture is more complex and the prospects less bright than they appeared a decade ago.

Johns Hopkins has made a considerable contribution to the debate by translating and reprinting Jacques Loup's *Le Tiers-Monde peut-il survivre?*, published originally in 1980. The book makes and documents the case that, despite great success in the aggregate in achieving economic growth, the plight of the rural poor, particularly in the "poverty belt" stretching from sub-Saharan Africa across the Indian subcontinent, has not improved and may in fact be worse than it was in 1970.

Literal-minded readers seeking an answer to the question posed in the title will be disappointed. (Couldn't Johns Hopkins have found a better title of its own?) But

the book does take some steps toward an answer.

Clearly, great progress has been made. Economic growth in the Third World has been higher than it was in nineteenth-century Europe—up to 5.4 per cent a year in the first U.N. Development Decade, 1961-70. Life expectancy has reached fifty years, a figure Europe did not achieve until the twentieth century. Literacy in 1961-70 rose from 65 to 75 per cent in Latin America and from 45 to 53 per cent in Asia. The figures for Africa are much lower—up from 20 to 26 per cent.

Yet this progress hides some serious problems. The 1974 World Food Conference resolved that "within a decade no child will go to bed hungry, that no family will fear for its next day's bread, and that no human being's future and capacities will be stunted by malnutrition." That hope is now seen as incapable of realization, even by the end of the century.

Loup gives many reasons why the promise of the 1960s went sour in the '70s: The Green Revolution entered a period of decreasing marginal returns; the Soviet Union entered the world grain market; and the price of oil rose drastically, forcing most developing countries into massive external financial arrangements that now are themselves a cause for serious concern. So the problem becomes, how do we proceed from here?

In reply, Loup outlines a "basic needs" strategy that calls for more of the same (intensify efforts to cut birth rates, develop food production, expand foreign trade), plus a new effort to develop indigenous energy resources and—a new emphasis—direct action to improve the productive capacity of the poorest.

So far so good, and the insight that poverty is at the root of the problem is a valuable one—it has been so obvious that it largely has been missed until now. The poor need food, shelter, drinking water, health, and education, says the author, and they need to get them by paying for them—which means increasing their productive capacity or transferring money directly to them. The major way to make the poor productive is to give them land; the author gives reason to suppose that the popular wisdom that large holdings are more efficient no longer applies.

Here, however, as the author admits, we run up against an even deeper problem. Land reform involves systemic change, and it is unclear how this can be brought about. To that extent, the question posed in the book's title is unanswered. But Loup's work remains a useful stepping stone to further

discussion of the problems of the Third World and how they may be solved.

Warwick's *Bitter Pills* is a useful cross-country study of the successes and failures of population programs. The four main countries studied—Egypt, Kenya, Mexico, and the Philippines—were chosen to exemplify the experience of different continents, disparate political systems, and cultural traditions. Secondary studies were made of Lebanon, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, and India.

The Hastings Center, according to the preface, mounted the study with financial support from the United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA). UNFPA, however, refused to be associated with the final publication of the study. Clearly there is extreme sensitivity to population questions in the United Nations even now. And certainly the record is not good. The study talks repeatedly of confusion in the administration of population programs, failure to take into account traditional values that emphasize fertility, the negative effects of coercion, and much more.

The totally unsurprising conclusion is that population programs should steer a middle way between the "machine model"—imposing a program from outside—and the "game model"—which opposes plans of any kind. A program should be introduced, in other words, but it should be tempered by regard for its political and cultural context. While the conclusion is expected, the study may help induce a more subtle approach to population control in the future.

The Cause of World Hunger, consisting of eighteen essays by past and present members of the board of directors of Bread for the World, a Christian citizens' movement dedicated to trying to influence U.S. policy toward the Third World, is a useful overall introduction to the whole subject of world hunger.

Douglas Ensminger, former director of the Ford Foundation's program in India, a contributor to the volume, lays out a proposal strikingly like Jacques Loup's—that the developing countries need to implement substantive land reforms and that the United States should help with the task of developing small-farm, foodcrop agricultural systems overseas. Elsewhere, Senator Mark Hatfield urges that the U.S. separate its truly effective hunger programs from those devoted to U.S. foreign policy objectives: "We must be able to assert our advocacy with a clear conscience." Other valuable essays, such as the one on the extent of the refugee problem, round out the picture. With few