

MUNICH, 24 April 1963 (Non-Target Communist Area Analysis:
USSR - r.c.)

During recent weeks, and especially since mid-April, a spate of rumors regarding an imminent announcement of Khrushchev's retirement, partial retirement, deposition or down-grading has filled the pages of the Western press. In some instances the reports have been loosely attributed to CPSU sources or "rumors circulating in Moscow", although for the most part they have originated in Eastern Europe or in West European communist circles. Upon careful scrutiny it appears that no Western correspondent has received the information directly from responsible Soviet sources, which leads to the conclusion that the rumors bear less relation to Khrushchev's current political position than to erroneous extrapolation of the serious general problems now facing the Khrushchev régime.

In order to place the rumors in the proper perspective it would be useful to examine the various interpretations which would be possible if the rumors were true.

1. "The rumors were originated by a neo-Stalinist opposition in order to force Khrushchev to abandon completely his revisionist policies or as part of an effort to depose him." In the first place, the existence of a unified conservative opposition, headed -- as has been suggested -- by Suslov, Molotov, or Kozlov (sic !), has never been demonstrated convincingly. It is true that large numbers of local level Party hacks have suffered from the November reorganization and that until the end of 1962 many nonentities in the cultural field experienced the bitterness of Party indifference. Further, some Party officials, including top level, may be dissatisfied with Khrushchev's conduct of the Sino-Soviet, Berlin and Cuban situations. In addition one must always assume the existence of factional struggle in the upper échelons of the CPSU. However, there is no evidence that any of these groups or individuals is organized to a degree which could permit effective pressure on Khrushchev's pre-eminence. The deposed local Party hacks are disoriented, leaderless and fully occupied in efforts to obtain a new niche. The cultural Stalinists have little --

reason to be dissatisfied at present, having enjoyed Khrushchev's full blessing since the end of last year. Although there are probably differences of opinion at top levels on how to proceed in the dispute with China, and regarding Cuba, Berlin, etc., one must keep in mind that a leader in the Soviet system is not subject to the same degree of pressure from flamboyant policy failures as are some Western leaders. Stalin survived a series of colossal blunders and Khrushchev, contrary to the expectations of the "anti-party group", also managed to survive the crisis of 1956. Political intrigues in upper party and government levels, furthermore, are primarily conducted among potential successors to the leader rather than against the leader himself. If such a neo-Stalinist opposition group were to exist it would be the height of indiscretion for it to tip its hand by spreading rumors of Khrushchev's imminent down-grading. Khrushchev has the power to deal effectively with anyone indulging in such picayune measures of opposition to his policies or personal position.

2. "Khrushchev is tired and wants to give up the premiership, retaining leadership of the party." One might consider that Khrushchev himself launched the rumors as a trial balloon to determine Soviet and world reaction before announcing his partial retirement. If Soviet and world opinion did not interpret the move as a blow to his prestige, then he would follow through with a public announcement. Feeling overburdened with work, Khrushchev might also conceive of such a move as a means to ensure a smooth succession to Kozlov after his death. Although a precedent for retirement from the premiership was set by Mao Tse-tung in 1959, it does not seem likely that Khrushchev would consider partial retirement at a time when so many of his policies are open to the charge of failure. Coming at such a time, retirement from the premiership would surely be interpreted everywhere as a confirmation of his failure and decreased prestige. It appears even less likely that the announcement would be made two years in advance, as the rumors state. Such an announcement would set off intense factional intrigues, directed primarily at the successor designate. Finally, Khrushchev's continued demonstration of vigor and his potential —

for delegating tasks to subordinates belies the suggestion that his work load has become too great.

3. "Khrushchev spread rumors of a threat to his personal power in order to pressure the West to make concessions which would increase his prestige." Here one may ask what Khrushchev expects to gain from such a stratagem. According to the rumors, he is most anxious to attain agreement on outer space and a summit meeting with President Kennedy. One wonders if Khrushchev would intentionally stimulate doubts in the West concerning the stability of his régime in order to obtain such secondary objectives. Other possible motives might be related to a nuclear test ban treaty, Berlin or Cuba. However, Khrushchev's passion for a test ban treaty is not borne out by the protracted Soviet haggling over the number of inspection sites. Reasonableness and compromise could bring Khrushchev much quicker results on this score than devious spreading of rumors. The relatively innocuous post-Cuba stand by the USSR on Berlin seems also to rule this out as a possible objective of the rumors. One cannot, therefore, easily discern what Khrushchev hoped to gain from the West if this were the purpose of the rumors.

One is brought to the conclusion, therefore, that these second- and third-hand rumors have their origin only in extensive recognition in East and West European communist circles of the profound problems currently afflicting the Khrushchev régime. The capitulationism after the Cuban adventurism, the inability to resolve the Berlin problem, the split with China and disorientation of the world communist movement, Soviet agricultural failures, resistance in Eastern Europe to economic integration in Comecon, and the alienation and recalcitrance of Soviet intellectuals -- to mention some of Khrushchev's problems -- would have resulted in the downfall of a series of Western governments, but there is insufficient evidence thus far on which to speculate that Khrushchev's position is in jeopardy.

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