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THE PROBLEM OF THE NEXT SUCCESSION IN THE USSR

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The Problem of the Next Succession in the USSR

Summary

The struggle to succeed Stalin is analyzed in terms of the policy and institutional conflicts which took place from 1953 to 1957, and the intra-Party consolidations which occurred from 1957 through 1961, in order to ascertain the variables involved in the succession dynamics of the Soviet Union. These data, reinforced where applicable by projections from the earlier struggle to succeed Stalin, are used to establish the probability and general nature of the succession struggle. From this frame of reference, predictions are made concerning the probable institutional conflicts, the format, the leading contenders, and the possibilities for the West in the future struggle to succeed Khrushchev.

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"--but behind the speeches, some obscure game is being played."

The Winter Station
Yevgeni Yevtushenko
Oktiabr No. 10, 1956

Chapter I Introduction

"If we begin in certainties, we shall end in doubts; but if we begin with doubts, and are patient in them, we shall end in certainties."

Francis Bacon

Since the successful establishment of the Soviet regime in Russia there have been two cataclysmic struggles for succession to the power vacated by undisputed leaders. Each struggle has been characterized by the formation of an uneasy collective leadership, composed of the dead dictator's former lieutenants, in which the rivalries begun during his lifetime were continued.

Until a single successor has emerged, each succession has consisted of a period of several years during which policies and ideology have been subordinated to the more immediate issue of the defeat of rival factions and personalities.

Manifestly these periods of change are of the utmost signi-

ficance to the free world. During such periods the normal nuances of Communist tactics are affected by the permutations of hidden factionalism. Changes having great import for the West have resulted from these conflicts. Each succession crisis has been a drama the final act of which has been a function of several variables: the relative power positions of the rival lieutenants, their individual capabilities, the relative strengths of the institutions of power, the extent to which social forces had been tyrannized and atomized under the dictator, the extent of general enlightenment of the people, etc. A projection of a future succession, based on the same variables, is further complicated by lack of the knowledge of the time at which the dictator will depart from the scene. Manifestly, a realistic study can do no more than trace the portents. On the other hand we must have the best possible understanding of the succession dynamics in advance of the event.

The essential facts of the Stalin succession to Lenin have been treated within a reasonable spectrum of agreement by many experts. The second struggle, for succession to Stalin's power, is too recent to have received the same degree of historical analysis. This research paper therefore summarizes in Chapter II, the writer's analysis of that period, as a backdrop for the analysis of the next succession struggle.

The period of adjustment of positions within the Party, from late 1957 until the present time, which began after the institutional threats to the Party were eliminated, is subject to a still wider range of interpretation. Experts disagree because this portion of the succession is even more recent and because there have been fewer "esoteric communications"¹ upon which to base conclusions. Chapter III presents the mainstreams of what appear to be the salient arguments in support of the two most reasonable schools of thought concerning the significance of specific events of the last four years. This serves to emphasize the controversial and tentative nature of succession studies based on recent data. Chapters IV and V analyze the nature and probability of the next succession struggle. Finally, in Chapter VI, projections are drawn concerning the next succession struggle.

Chapter II

Institutional And Policy Conflicts After Leader's Death, 1953-1957

"Tyranny--has no regard to any public interest which does not also serve the tyrant's own advantage."

Aristotle

The Succession to Lenin: a summary. After an initial hiatus, the power vacuum following Lenin's death was filled by a top leadership group among whom rivalries for ultimate control immediately began. Trotsky was considered the logical successor and heir appar-

ent among most Party members. Stalin at once became mutely antagonistic to Trotsky's ambition. "The fight was focused on a disagreement of policy; whether this disagreement precipitated the antagonism or whether the antagonism begat the disagreement in policy is an idle question; the two were obviously part of the same total situation.²

Stalin, by his skillful manipulation of the position of General Secretary of the Party, to place his henchmen in key Party posts while demoting or denouncing the associates of his rivals, obtained control of all the resources of the Party organization, including its files.³ With the mechanism of the apparat he gradually isolated Trotsky, destroying his power and support. Stalin then turned on those leaders who had assisted him. Seizing vital ideological policy issues, shifting from one side to the other of these issues as his opponents presented him with weaknesses, he proceeded to destroy them.⁴ By 1930 he had achieved the position of a totalitarian leader in effective control of the system.⁵ The Party apparatus had become the supreme institution in Soviet society. Although Rykov, as head of the government during Stalin's climb, fought Stalin on several economic issues from the perspective of a State bureaucrat, Stalin's machinations enroute to total power were facilitated by the lack of a well organized, institutionalized State bureaucracy. Instead, the Party organs under his

control had, by the 'twenties, already assumed significant local administrative functions. Neither the infant secret police, nor the Army, a weak territorial militia, were institutional threats. With the Party relatively unopposed as an organization and highly involved in local operations and administration, the Secretary and his staff achieved paramount importance in the fields of patronage and occupational loyalty. Not only Stalin's position but also his capacity for the work related to these fields contributed heavily to his subsequent seizure of power.⁶

Transition in tools of power. As a result of the purges of the 'thirties, the Party apparatus was reduced to an instrument of Stalin's absolute rule.⁷ In the beginning of Stalin's rule the Party had been clearly pre-eminent among the institutions of power in the elaborately interwoven checks and balances between the Party apparatus, political police, State bureaucracy, and Army. The moot question for analysis during the latter part of the period was whether the increasing reliance of the Party on the military and the security police might so increase their importance as to result in an ultimate loss of control by the Party.⁸ That this nearly occurred is attested by an acknowledged government expert's statement that the Communist Party was in the process of being destroyed as an institution toward the end of Stalin's

regime, by his personal secretariat, The Special Sector, superimposed above State, Party, and military, relying for its control on the secret police.⁹ Certainly Stalin had pushed emphasis on pure power, as the means to enforce decision-making, close to its possible limit.¹⁰ The spectre of Poskrebyshev, perched like a spider at the center of the web of his Special Sector, transmitting the will of the dictator to intervene at any level in any of the institutions of power, using the secret police to keep all officials insecure and uncertain as to lines of responsibility, is to project a picture of pure power without rationality.¹¹

To complicate our reconstruction of the struggle to succeed Stalin, this swollen power structure, even as Stalin died, was, by means of the Doctors' Plot, gestating slowly, ponderously, another round of purges to dispose of too powerful lieutenants.¹²

Survival of the regime. During the last twenty years of Stalin's life the entire system in the Soviet Union - methods of operation, the determination of all essential policy matters - rested in the hands of one man. His death therefore confronted his lieutenants with a series of problems as to how they were going to rule a dictatorship without a dictator. As a result of Stalin's emphasis of the Special Sector and

deemphasis of the Party bureaucracy, his death left the Party machine, the army, and the political police roughly in equilibrium. At the same time, having ruled by terror, Stalin left a residue of fear that helped stabilize the regime while the succession crisis was being solved.¹³ Stalin's complicated system of personal controls broke up into its institutional elements when Poskrebyshev and the Special Sector, together the projectors of Stalin's personal will, disappeared. The purging of Poskrebyshev probably had to take place immediately¹⁴ in order to prevent his usurping Stalin's role with the Special Sector. There would certainly have been near unanimity on this score among the other key lieutenants, each eager to control his own power base within one or more of the institutions held in thrall by the Special Sector. With Poskrebyshev gone, those lieutenants who had welded the levers of control within their respective institutions, remained. Part bureaucrat, part feudal satrap, and part militant ideologist, each in varying degrees—these men had served Stalin as a corps of loyal supporters, not willing or able to challenge his supremacy. They came to the fore only when the "inexorable laws of human life removed from the picture the familiar, and dreaded, face of the dictator."¹⁵ That they were able to continue calling the signals, collectively, points to the high degree of institutionalization of the totalitarian regime through their elaborate bureaucratic networks.¹⁶

The lieutenants, whose personal aspirations at Stalin's death were leavened by fears of: mass unrest or uprising; uncertainty of Army and police; the actions of the "imperialist bloc"; and the unknowns in a non-constitutional power equation; set up a collective leadership in the first post-Stalin hours. The initial announcement on March 7, 1953, of the post-Stalin regime, indicated an intensive effort to avoid uprisings by cloaking, with the appearance of stability, the rather remarkable power shifts into the vacuum. On March 1 Stalin was alive and ruling through a 25-man Presidium containing a majority probably so constituted as to satisfy him that he could carry through a major purge on some of its members.¹⁷ On March 5 his death was announced.¹⁸ By March 6 sufficient regrouping among his heirs had gone on to result in a small ruling group, probably exercising its authority as a self-constituted small Presidium. The major factors appeared to be:

- 1) The reduction of the large Presidium to the small 10-man resultant by the elimination of Stalin's new appointees. These had probably been brought forward by Stalin to succeed to the posts of those about to be purged; some returned to relatively minor posts. They were eventually brought back to the center when Khrushchev was in the ascendancy and remained in 1957 when the "Anti-Party Group" were being expelled.

2) Beria's return to power. The Ministries of State Security and Interior had been taken from him prior to Stalin's death. The Doctors' plot had appeared to be an effort to denigrate him and his associates. Yet by 7 March Beria controlled both Ministries, had merged them, and had achieved a position second only to Malenkov in the power structure. This could only have been done on the basis of a personal coup.

3) Confirmation of Beria's coup is provided by the fact that the streets of Moscow were lined with MVD troops when Stalin's death was announced. The Commanders of the Moscow District, Moscow Garrison, and Kremlin Garrison, police generals, were all removed after Beria's fall.¹⁹

Beria was probably deterred from seizing total power at this time by the strength of the Army units outside Moscow, by the threat of mobilization of Party apparat against him, and by his estimate that without the support of these institutions he could not, as a reputed terrorist, win the initial support to remain in office.²⁰

Thus, initially the lieutenants moved cautiously and closed ranks. Malenkov was satiated with the highest posts in both Party and State; Beria, with regained police control and increased powers. The remainder of the power poles had achieved the removal of the threat of Stalin's purge by the elimination of his new appointees.

Khrushchev had retained a base from which to threaten Malenkov's control of the Secretariat but had lost Moscow, giving up his First Secretaryship there.²¹

The collective leadership thus began as a duumvirate of Malenkov and Beria with the other lieutenants ranged in such a manner as to maintain a precarious balance, the entire collegium committed to a broad program of reducing commitments, seeking popularity at home and abroad, but without risking vital progress. For one week there flourished a considerable "cult of personality" for Malenkov. Mutual distrust and ambition made it inevitable that the minor poles of power would be sought out. Both senior lieutenants were forced to give solicitive weight to Khrushchev, Molotov, etc. The resulting institutional conflicts became inevitable as several of the lieutenants in thair personal strategies recruited forces for future battles when the survival of the regime should have become insured.²²

Beria's strategy, the maneuver of secret police. At the end of what must have been a week of furious juggling for position, Beria achieved the initial victory of renunciation of the Doctors' Plot. This was an important step in establishing the legitimacy of the Beria administration of the secret police during the period in which the Doctors' Plot was alleged to have occurred. More important, Beria, probably in alliance with Khrushchev, in a move to reduce Malenkov's personal

power, succeeded in removing Malenkov from the Party Secretaryship. The day after the formal denouncement of the Doctors' Plot Stalin's anti-Beria purges in Georgia were reversed.²³

There is evidence that Beria now began to maneuver to increase his power still further. He purged both central and territorial MVD structures to restore his own associates. He strove to build up local nationalism as a political base for his own aspirations. Lithuania, Latvia, and the Ukraine appear to have been initial targets. His machinations in the Ukraine were probably an effort to weaken Khrushchev. In many republics, nationals began to move up the hierarchy. This anti-Russian campaign ended abruptly when Beria fell. Beria seized two other policies to build support: relaxation of state controls over agriculture and liberalization of political controls in the satellites. Although he presumably could have seized power at the center, he seems to have been reluctant to do so until he had a base in the republics. His only real control in areas other than in his Party fiefdom of Transcaucasia, was through the secret police. But using them, and through association with liberal policies he probably hoped to demonstrate power enough to attract followers and to place in key places those whose nationalism could make them his supporters. Through influence or fear he carried a majority of the Presidium with him until June 1953. His lack of prudence in pursuit of personal power, or in his policies, (especially the

failure of his liberal policies in the satellites which led to the Berlin uprisings of June 17) coalesced the opposition. On June 26 he was arrested by trickery and the coup against him succeeded.²⁴ Dominant police influence in Soviet affairs ended. His police were broken into two separately administered organizations to reduce their authority - the MVD and KGB. The rest of his empire was broken up with the Army taking over his Atomic Energy Ministry. This close call from the institution of the police taught the survivors a lesson. They began a precedent of keeping a very loyal but low level figure in charge of secret police.²⁵

One of the most far-reaching effects of Beria's strategy, which was further accentuated by the later breakup of his own monolithic control of police at the center, was the decentralization of police control in the satellites and the abandonment of their use as a conscious instrument of terror.²⁶ The consequent loss of capability to obtain direct, abject response in the satellites cost the world-wide Communist movement an important qualitative control in these countries; Stalin had been the unquestioned dictator of these nations and their policies, just as much as he was in the Soviet Union.²⁷

A significant fact of the Beria phase of the power struggle is that neither faction apparently had any difficulty in visualizing a coup d'etat. A power struggle may not, therefore, necessarily be

restricted to the normal Party factionalism. The coup, attempted or planned by Beria, may be read as an institutionalized (police) attempt to retain the despotic dictatorship; in the total agreement of the other members of the Presidium to resist or prevent this, there was unanimity at that time that the mechanism of the Soviet dictatorship must be readjusted to institutionalize the Soviet power system in order to avoid one-man rule. 28

Malenkov's strategy: the maneuver of the State. After initially succeeding to the top positions in both Party and State, Malenkov was forced within one week to give up one. He probably was powerful enough to make a choice and gambled on the State bureaucracy. He almost certainly based his strategy on the belief that the Party apparatus, especially the Secretariat could be weakened and that the State bureaucracy, freed from constraint, could become dominant. Subsequent accusations indicate that his ideological justification was Lenin's thesis that the State organs have primacy once the proletarian revolution becomes victorious. 29

Malenkov may have made his first fatal miscalculation in the grappling at the March 14, 1953, plenum of the Central Committee. Beria's maneuvers to remove him from the Party Secretaryship probably forced him to choose between the new generation of apparatchiks—e.g., Aristov and Ignatiev, and maneuvers for power

based on the State machinery. His overall strategy made his choice clear but his failure to assuage the apparatchiks probably turned them toward Khrushchev. Kozlov, a former Malenkov associate, probably turned to Khrushchev at this time. Malenkov's personal power was reduced. But his surrender of this post was probably made more palatable by the removal of certain figures who were beyond his reach and by permitting his associate, Shatalin, to take over cadre control, the Party Organs Department, in the Secretariat.

In Beria's downfall Malenkov was the immediate gainer. Shatalin, his associate, probably inherited the police which were carefully interlaced with controls. This left only the State and the Party as prime competitors for power - with the Army in the background; none of these institutions were yet under the monopolistic control of one man. During this period events pointed in the direction of a polarization of power between Malenkov and Khrushchev. Institutionally the Malenkov/Khrushchev polarization represented a conflict between the economic bureaucracy and the Communist Party over the direction and goals of the economic process. These events took place during Malenkov's Premiership under such circumstances (Army initially non-participating and secret police downgraded) that the Presidium majority was the only decisive force. Thus a measure of pluralism-collective dictatorship-was introduced into the Soviet system.

Against this backdrop Malenkov strove to develop his power and influence. He delivered, as official spokesman for the Presidium, the report on Beria to the July 1953 plenum of the Central Committee. He added to his power base by the appointment in December 1953 of 5 more Deputy Chairmen of the Council of Ministers. He seized as policy issues: liberalization of agricultural and ideological controls, greater emphasis on consumer goods, and the infeasibility of modern war given the destructiveness of nuclear weapons. As late as February 1954 Malenkov managed to retain a senior position to Khrushchev in the prestigious matter of press listings.³⁰ Malenkov's strategy required strengthening the Government apparatus, weakening the Party apparatus at all echelons, and building up the economic representation in the provincial Party bureaus. With Malenkov using his institutional tools to achieve his strategy and Khrushchev operating in a similar manner, the power struggle during the Malenkov Premiership followed a sinusoidal pattern with now Malenkov, now Khrushchev seeming to have the advantage of a Presidial majority. Malenkov's forces sought to deny Khrushchev's claim to the title, General Secretary, by claiming that Stalin had vacated that title before his death. Despite Malenkov's strength and resiliency the periods of Khrushchev's ascendancy became longer and those of Malenkov, shorter. By the middle of 1954 Malenkov's original offensive strategy for seizing power had been checked and eroded

by Khrushchev until it became the essentially negative one of seeking to resist Khrushchev's march.

Throughout this phase of the struggle the economic managers were deeply involved. The potentiality of their power was emphasized by the decision of the cunning Malenkov to use them as his power base and by the heroic measures taken by Khrushchev, after his victory, to eliminate their influence in Moscow. However, the actual power they were able to bring to bear proved inadequate. This is not necessarily an extrapolable result because other variants were involved-i. e., the quality of the tactical moves and leaders, the role of the political police in the early phase, the role of the Army, etc. But the bureaucratic elite proved that they were an autonomous force by providing a base for continuation of the conflict even after the defeat of Malenkov. In the course of the struggle the economic ministry was halved and then doubled in a year; then cut again severely. Similar drastic changes took place in the economic administrative procedures and in the powers of the Economic Minister. Yet Soviet industry adjusted to the changes and prospered. Thus the political bargaining power of the economic elite in a future succession struggle may have suffered. Malenkov's failure led in the long run to the breaking up of his sources of power, the economic institutions at the center. Decentralization and better Party control were brought about by achieving more

supervision from republic and provincial bureaus. At the present time the Soviet regime seems to be providing empirical proof that a diffused and weak state bureaucracy, if closely directed by a pervasive Party apparatus, may adequately support the economy.

In the battle for succession the cleavage between Party and State in effect at Stalin's death was broadened and deepened. Moreover, Malenkov by his efforts to place State representation within the Party, especially at local levels, created an incipient pluralism which lasted beyond his period of optimum power. In their struggle both sides used tactics that risked harm to (the Communist concept of) the nation.³¹

The study of the final defeat of the economic bureaucracy requires analysis in terms of Khrushchev's winning strategy. But first it is necessary to summarize the Army's part in the struggle.

Zhukov's strategy: the maneuver of the Army. At the time of Stalin's death the Army unquestionably had neither the motivation nor the organization to attempt a Bonapartist coup. The complete interlacing of Party and secret police observers into the Army structure insured that any marshal or general who risked an open break with the civilian authority would have had tremendous difficulty in getting his orders obeyed by enough subordinates to give himself and his co-conspirators an adequate power base. On the other hand the Army in 1953 had distinct assets for the power struggle. Its direct control

of and expert knowledge of the use of weapons of destruction made it a major power source to be exploited. Moreover, it was not closely identified in the public eye with the repression and cruel police acts of the Soviet regime. These assets made it desirable for both Khrushchev and Malenkov to seek to ally themselves with the Army. As they waged their campaigns to bring the Army into their respective camps, key Army leaders were led to ponder their opportunities in the new political environment: To participate more fully in determination of military strategy; to rid the Army of the hated internal control of Party and police.³²

The Army has been cited earlier as one of the probable reasons that Beria, after his coup to recover police control, did not move on to complete victory. Possible specific sources of support were the nearest and most powerful military district, Leningrad, under Marshal Govorov³³ or the Moscow Antiaircraft Command under General Moskalenko.³⁴

Significantly, Zhukov moved up to fill Beria's vacancy as a full member of the Central Committee; other signs of the increased role of the military began to appear.³⁵ For instance, there was increasing emphasis in the press on the speeches of military leaders. The Army undoubtedly weighed heavily in the planning of both Khrushchev and Malenkov in this period. Malenkov in advocating more emphasis on

light industry to increase consumer goods was thinking primarily of the impact on the populace; but he sought to placate the Army by arguing that nuclear war had made general war unthinkable and that once the Soviet Union had achieved a finite deterrence, greater emphasis on heavy industry was no longer necessary. Khrushchev, through his associates and military supporters argued that heavy industry must continue to have primacy in order to capitalize on technological breakthroughs. Molotov, his ally at this point, preached that only Capitalism would be destroyed by nuclear war. The Army spokesman believed that surprise attack could have a decisive effect on modern war's outcome but that nevertheless such war could be of protracted length. These spokesmen appear to have sided with Khrushchev on the heavy industry issue.³⁶ The Army's initial benevolent neutrality to Khrushchev therefore gradually changed to positive support by the time of the 1957 Anti-Party crisis.

As early as 1955 the Army had achieved a measure of independence. When Bulganin became Premier, Zhukov took the Ministry of War. Many marshals were promoted. Khrushchev was almost fawning in his Secret Speech in 1956, bidding for Zhukov's personal support. Stalin's military purges were deprecated; the purgees were rehabilitated; after the 20th Congress men of real military stature replaced political military appointees; at the next plenum of the

Central Committee Zhukov became senior candidate member of the Presidium - an unprecedented position for a pure soldier. Army commanders, especially Zhukov, began to be praised as the real winners of the war. In 1956 and 1957 Zhukov broke the power of the Army Political Department, under Zheltov, to permit the final development of the Army as an independent instrument of his will. He became a full member of the Presidium in July of 1957. He was an extreme opponent of the "Anti-Party Group" in that month, probably because of the effect Malenkov's views on strategy and heavy industry might have had on the size and influence of the Army. His support of Khrushchev in this crisis may have been the decisive element.

After the defeat of the "Anti-Party Group", Zhukov was maneuvered out of the country on a visit to Yugoslavia in October 1957 and, during his absence, dismissed from his government posts. His carefully contrived displacement betokens the power he had achieved.³⁷

The performance of the Army during this period gives, in relatively pure form, some of the phenomena typical of all Soviet ruling groups. Military professionalism, similar to economic, police, or Party professionalism, is an area of expertise which resents interference by the uninformed. Such interference may force an institution to move toward intervention in affairs of State. The career of Zhukov makes it apparent that he was the one figure accepted by the

Army as their spokesman and that he was capable of wielding the Army's influence as an independent force with reasonable certainty of backing. This demonstrates both the shrewdness and the sense of desperation with which the leadership must have elevated him in the fluid politics of 1953. Once admitted to the inner sanctum his support became increasingly necessary; he promoted his own political prestige and control of the Army. He rose in status with each crisis. He became so strong as to be a mortal danger to the Party. Thus, the motives compelling Khrushchev to turn on him, regardless of Zhukov's personal aspirations, were very strong.

In summary, in the years 1953 to 1957 the Army was first incapable of a coup and benevolently neutral to Khrushchev. Later it became allied with Khrushchev and the Party and was thereby able to win its internal political freedom. Having become free and powerful it became an instrument to promote its own status and that of its leaders. This made it a serious rival to the Party to which it then fell victim. ³⁸

Satellite relation to the succession. The events in the satellites fell somewhat outside the arena of institutional and policy conflict in that autonomous forces were set in motion which were beyond the capability of the lieutenants and their institutions to control. Yet

these events were to play a significant part in the struggle and were seized by several factions to bolster the strength of their side.

The regimes set up by Stalin in Eastern Europe were merely projections of his system inside the Soviet Union. He was the unquestioned dictator of these countries and their policies just as much as he was in the Soviet Union.³⁹ Yet within months the order he had created by close direction, police methods, and terror, was threatened. There were urban riots in Czechoslovakia in connection with a domestic succession crisis.⁴⁰ In East Germany intense popular hatred of the Ulbricht regime and a passionate wish to end the partition caused a rebellion which may have been the trigger for the anti-Beria coup.⁴¹ There was then a period of relative stability which terminated during the acute stage of the Soviet succession crisis when Khrushchev attacked Stalin in his Secret Speech. This led to new disturbances in Poland and Hungary, both torn by local succession crises.⁴² The difficulties in Hungary brought Khrushchev's opposition, Molotov and Kaganovich, temporarily back into power and might, had the revolt not been promptly put down, have led to his fall. In the Polish difficulties the foregoing opponents accompanied Khrushchev on his flight to Warsaw to prevent the election of Gomulka. These dissident leaders decided on the spot not to use force because they discovered that Gomulka had a powerful backing among the people--the Polish Army and, curiously enough,

the Polish secret police.⁴³ Resolution of the succession crisis in Moscow with the establishment of Khrushchev's personal Dictatorship in 1957, led to stabilization of the regimes in Eastern Europe. Yet the Soviet succession struggle had resulted by that time in a quantum change in the heretofore monolithic empire of world communism.

Khrushchev's strategy: the maneuver of the Party. Khrushchev apparently very early in the struggle picked Stalin's route as the path to ultimate control. Although his tactics have varied his strategy appears never to have changed. This strategy involved building up the Party over the other institutions; the Secretariat over the rest of the Party organs; the First Secretary over the Secretariat. We have seen that in the shadow of the Beria-Malenkov duumvirate he held onto a seat in the Secretariat while sacrificing his vital First Secretaryship of Moscow; that within one week, apparently in alliance with Beria, he captured the Party Secretaryship from Malenkov, gambling that he could wrest cadre control later from Shatalin; and that apparently by maneuvering to save certain apparatchiks from total purging he assumed the role of protector of that category.⁴⁴

The version of the June 1953 coup against Beria leaked to the press during the 22nd Congress in October 1961 seeks to convey that Khrushchev took the lead in organizing the trickery which permitted Beria's removal; it further confirms earlier impressions that the

Army participated in this episode with the Presidium. Khrushchev was undoubtedly instrumental in the breaking up of the secret police and in the adoption of the practice of placing them under a low level administrator. His later reaffirmation of this principle in the November 1961 appointment of Semichastney to replace Shelepin in charge of the secret police on the occasion of the latter's promotion to the Secretariat is a case in point. The period of collective dictatorship, during which the Presidium was the only decisive force, gave Khrushchev a forum for the kind of political machination at which he was adept. Meanwhile he was busily winning control of the Secretariat. And even while "collective leadership" was being proclaimed in Pravda and while foreign delegations were being greeted by a governmental group, Khrushchev was setting out on a whole congery of policies calculated to build up his own power and to weaken his opposition. Although Malenkov had filled the primary role at the July 1953 plenum, Khrushchev delivered the report on agriculture at the September 1953 plenum, for the Presidium, and was nominated as First Secretary of the Party. By the February 1954 plenum, Khrushchev's report to the Central Committee was delivered simply on his own. Khrushchev probably used a threat to reveal Malenkov's association with the Leningrad Case to weaken him during this period.⁴⁵ The general tide was Khrushchev's, with Aristov, Ignatiev,

and Kozlov regaining their footholds as his associates.

The vital policy issues of the 1953-54 period were in agriculture, cultural affairs, and industrial planning. Khrushchev initiated his spectacular "Virgin Lands" scheme at the September 1953 and February 1954 plenums.⁴⁶ Molotov appears to have opposed him; other Presidium members were passive. It appears that Khrushchev's arbitrary attempt to create State rather than collective farms in the "Virgin Lands" created a Presidium majority against him. He went into a period of temporary decline, in the summer of 1954. However, by October of 1954 he seems to have forced his plan through.

The extended contest in the cultural field from Fall 1953 until May 1954, witnessed at first a considerable "Thaw" in the rigidity of ideology, associated with Malenkov, and later a partial swing back to ideological conformity, associated with Khrushchev.⁴⁷

Khrushchev's maneuvers in connection with agricultural and cultural policies had failed to unite Molotov and the other more conservative members of the Presidium with him, against Malenkov. He found an issue which would bring them to his support in the public sponsoring by Malenkov of the policy of more consumer goods for the population. Malenkov apparently believed not only that popular pressure demanded his policy but that he had the strength to force it through. Khrushchev, having successfully wooed the Army and a majority of

the Presidium to his side, won out. Malenkov resigned as Premier on February 8, 1955, accepting blame for agricultural and heavy industry errors; he remained in the Presidium, probably because some of Khrushchev's majority wanted to have a potential opposition, to prevent Khrushchev from developing a one-man rule. Bulganin, backed by the military, but a willing collaborator of Khrushchev, succeeded Malenkov the same day.⁴⁸ Most significantly, Malenkov's associate, Shatalin, was now ousted from the Secretariat leaving Khrushchev in full control of cadres. No longer need he rely exclusively on political maneuver to maintain a majority in the existing Presidium. By gradually placing his own selectees in the lower Party Secretaryships he was able to start building the patronage system which would eventually start sending Khrushchev-oriented delegates to Party Congresses to elect Khrushchev-oriented Central Committees which in turn would provide support as insurance against future Presidial majorities.

Khrushchev now moved to reduce Malenkov's power base in the State bureaucracy, both by removal of Malenkov men and by reorganization to eliminate his institutional power. But Khrushchev's maneuvers to consolidate apparently developed concern within the Presidium that he was making a bid for one-man rule. Khrushchev, not yet having placed a majority of his associates in the lower Party bodies had to