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Senior Research Staff on International Communism

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SUBJECT: Nikita Khrushchev

Khrushchev as a man is the product of a pure Slav milieu, the borderland of Great Russia and the Ukraine. He proudly displays the characteristics of his background, the shrewdness of the peasant, the proletarian energy of the coal miner. The advancement of Soviet agriculture is perhaps his consuming passion. He seeks and cultivates popularity with a high degree of success. He exploits his natural conviviality, turning the vodka toast into an instrument of highly effective statesmanship and propaganda. He loves to visit industrial plants and collective farms, encouraging and admonishing with a degree of earthy specificness that seems spontaneous and unbriefed.

Khrushchev has always gambled as he fought his way to the top, and now that he has arrived he utilizes his courage and his ability to run risks in the cause of a dynamic drive for world domination. How far he will push his aggressive policies in the face of determined opposition is not clear, but we do not believe that, like Hitler, he would seek to destroy the world as well as himself in a moment of ultimate frustration. He does not want war, being convinced that Communism will triumph in "peaceful competition."

For Khrushchev firmly believes in the historical forces which Leninism teaches will carry Communism to victory. No perceptive observer who has dealt with him face to face doubts the sincerity of this belief and his dedication to the ideological and practical mission of world communization. For that reason he is a "proletarian internationalist" who sees first in the Soviet Union and then in the world a "socialist system" in which nationalities will be merged in a sort of "commonwealth."

His power is perhaps unique in the world. He has achieved it by classic Bolshevik tactics, building his personal following through the party secretariat and eliminating all rivals. Having achieved total power, he has allowed the "cult of personality" which he denounced in Stalin to develop around himself. But he shows no signs of the brutal, inhuman "style" of Stalin. He purges even his trusted followers, bloodlessly - although there has been blood on his hands in the past - in the cause of efficiency rather than as an arbitrary exercise of power. He appears sincerely to believe that resort to coercion and terror is no longer necessary, though he obviously keeps the instrumentalities thereof at hand.

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Here is a formidable man, intelligent, ruthless, dedicated. He has learned the art of self-discipline, utilizing even his personal weaknesses as instruments of popularity and dominance. It would be a grave mistake to see in him the pig-like, hysterical drunkard which he has sometimes been painted. Rather he is a complex human being who draws his strength from his background and from the forces of "life" and "historical necessity" which he finds himself called to lead.