

THE RANCOR OF NIKITA KHRUSHCHEV

During the summer of 1964 I was in President Nasser's home with Nasser and President Tito of Yugoslavia, along with a number of aides. We were all glued to a transistor radio following an exciting development in Moscow. Nasser listened carefully, concentrating deeply; Tito, in his dramatically nervous manner, was holding a cigarette lighter in his hand and kept rolling it and turning it upside down while listening. I imagine high-ranking officials around the entire world were following the same dramatic news: Nikita Khrushchev's portrait had been removed from the walls of Moscow, while the pictures of the rest of the Politburo remained. The

Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party had been unexpectedly convened in the middle of the summer vacation. Khrushchev, first secretary of the committee, was on holiday on the Black Sea and had not been invited to attend the meeting.

Of those present in Nasser's salon, I was the most happy at the news we were hearing. I knew the arrangements for Khrushchev's downfall were the work of a good friend of mine, Aleksei Shelepin, chairman of the Internal Security Committee. For his part, Nasser was worried by the fact that Khrushchev had finished a visit to Egypt only a few days earlier, and while he was here he had completed an agreement with Nasser permitting Egypt to buy advanced armaments from the Soviet Union and obliging Russia to

contribute to the building up of the Egyptian economy. As for Tito, he seemed to be the most concerned of all, fearing a change in the Soviet leadership would undo Khrushchev's work in bringing about a reconciliation with Yugoslavia. Tito kept changing radio stations nervously, then switching back to the station he had been listening to in the first place.

At length, the news came through that Khrushchev had been removed from all his posts and that a collective leadership would take over, with Brezhnev as first secretary-general, Kosygin as premier, and Malenkov as head of the Presidium. I was delighted—first because my friend Shelepin had been the star in bringing all this about, and second because of my own relationship with Khrushchev. I had perceived the dominant element in his makeup to be one of rancor; he disliked me; and when he visited Egypt I had done all I could to avoid him. He was prone to harsh and foul language and was full of curses for all regimes that did not embrace communism.

Following the removal of Khrushchev from all his posts, however, Nasser made the decision to stand by him. Our press kept up a campaign of indirect attacks on the new regime, until at length the new collective became worried enough to send my old friend Shelepin to see us in Cairo. As chairman of the Internal Committee of the Soviet Communist party, Shelepin was in control of the country's internal security. When he arrived in Egypt, he looked relatively young and was envied by most of the other Soviet leaders, who were all older than he. I cherished my friendship with Shelepin and still believe the bilateral ties between Egypt and the Soviet Union would never have deteriorated to the extent they did had the other leaders been more like him.

His visit to Cairo was a great success, and after his departure our press dropped their attacks, while Nasser promised to make a visit to Moscow later on. During his visit to Cairo, Shelepin had many meetings with Nasser and came one night to an informal dinner at the home of Field Marshal Abdel Hakim Amer, then commander of the Egyptian armed forces. "Tell us about what you have done to Khrushchev, and why," we said to Shelepin. But he in turn surprised us all by asking us a question instead: "You tell me first—was or was not Khrushchev rude to Iraqi President Abdul Rahman Aref when they were together in Aswan recently?"

Actually, Khrushchev had attacked Aref on a number of occasions at Aswan and had insulted the Iraqi leader in the most obscene words imaginable. But only a very few people had been present when these heated arguments took place; so we were taken by surprise at Shelepin's question. It transpired, however, that the news had somehow got back to Moscow, and the quarrel between Khrushchev and President Aref was among the main justifications used by the Soviet leadership for Khrushchev's overthrow.

The truth is they had really been taken aback by the overwhelming reception given to Khrushchev by the Egyptian people. He had been given a hero's welcome, on a scale that even Khrushchev himself could hardly have dreamed possible. Alarmed at this, the Moscow leadership thereupon decided on a swift removal before Khrushchev could capitalize on his image as a world hero. The two excuses they used were his outrageous behavior at Aswan and the failure of his agricultural policies at home.

The fact is of course that neither Khrushchev nor Brezhnev, nor any other Communist leader, could solve the agricultural problem without

making radical changes in his Marxist philosophy. This philosophy ignores one simple but crucial fact: that agriculture should never be nationalized, nor the farmers either. Before communism came to the Soviet Union, the Ukraine was known for its tremendous production of wheat, but after the land was nationalized the Soviet Union has had to import some ۲۰ million tons of wheat every year just to keep her own people from famine.

But back to Khrushchev's visit to Egypt, where he had come to celebrate a historic occasion: the altering of the course of the Nile following the completion of the first stage of the Aswan High Dam.

Nasser had invited a number of world leaders to the celebrations, among them Khrushchev and President Aref of Iraq. Khrushchev delivered a speech at the Aswan stadium and distributed a number of medals—amazingly enough giving one to the chauffeur of the dam's engineer, Osman Ahmed Osman, without giving one to Osman himself. In his view, Osman was a member of the bourgeoisie and therefore did not deserve a medal, even though he was chairman of the nationalized board that had constructed the dam. After this ceremony, Khrushchev delivered his first attack on President Aref. I think his motivation was the legendary reception he had been given on his own arrival at Alexandria, which he used as an excuse to frighten his rivals in the Central Committee in Moscow.

Nasser and Field Marshal Amer rushed in to calm down Khrushchev after his outburst, and the first part of the celebration passed without disaster. Next, we flew to Bemice on the Red Sea, where the yacht Syria was anchored, and decided to spend the day in fishing and other recreational activities. During a political meeting on board the yacht, we were stunned to

hear Khrushchev, all of a sudden and without any provocation, resume his cursing and swearing at Aref. As I have said, Khrushchev's heart was full of rancor, and when rancor dominates a person he becomes extremely dangerous. Aref did not become ruffled or angry at the continuous insults poured upon him by Khrushchev, but it caused us all a great deal of embarrassment since it was happening in our country.

Khrushchev's behavior led me to avoid him, for I did not wish to come into contact with his foul mouth and vulgar expressions. Despite this, I could not escape the lashing of his tongue entirely. As we were eating a delicious meal of fish, I heard him say: "I will call Sadat 'Gasbadinaxata'"—a Russian word meaning comrade. Then Khrushchev added that the Russians also used the word as a curse. There seemed to be no way I could escape his tongue, and he frequently revealed his hatred of me.

There was another clash after we had invited Khrushchev to address the National Assembly, of which I was at that time the Speaker. Khrushchev was received very warmly and given a standing ovation by the members, and when the session was over we moved to the president's room. The atmosphere encouraged us to set aside formalities and continue our talks as friends. I tried to break the wall of ice created by Khrushchev's behavior at Aswan by making a joke at the expense of Andrei Gretschko, the former defense minister of the USSR, who was also present. I told them: "I have decided to arrest Gretschko and keep him as a hostage here in Egypt until you agree to give us the arms we have been asking for."

Everybody in the room laughed, with the sole exception of Khrushchev. His face had turned yellowish, and he smiled faintly. I fully

expected him to fire back with an obscenity from the same filthy dictionary he had used at Aswan. But something forced him to swallow his answer. He looked as though he would choke, and his face was consumed by rancor. Khrushchev laughed only at his own jokes, even if they upset everyone else around.

But despite what I have just said about him, one must admit that the man tried to introduce a more mature system of transferring power in the Soviet Union. In our private meetings, I remember well how Khrushchev used to tell us about Stalin's behavior and his abuse of his power and authority—how Stalin invited all his aides to his apartments every night, got them drunk with vodka till they lost consciousness, and then ordered them to dance before him until after midnight. The only thing that kept changing at these parties were the faces of the people who attended. Each night, the participants would find that at least one or two of them had disappeared or had been wiped out. But no one ever dared to show any sign of curiosity over what could possibly have happened to their disappearing friends. Khrushchev told us he used to say farewell to his wife every time he was called to one of Stalin's vodka and dancing parties. He said he felt as though he were heading for the execution chamber instead of Stalin's home.

The only one who managed to stay close to Stalin for very long was Aleksei Kosygin, and Khrushchev used to make fun of this, asking Kosygin in public: "How could Kosygin remain with Stalin for thirteen years while nobody else lasted more than thirteen months?" It was quite obvious that jokes of this sort were among the important factors that caused Kosygin to turn against Khrushchev and support the plot to overthrow him.

In all sincerity, though, I must pay tribute to Khrushchev for trying to lay down a system whereby power in the Soviet Union might be transferred in a more civilized manner, in a way that prevented strong men from seizing power by plots— as the case had always been in the Soviet Union. Khrushchev himself never concealed the reality and told us of things that happened in his own country without any sign of inhibition, embarrassment, or sensitivity. For instance, he recalled in great detail how the new leadership after Stalin had succeeded in purging the Secret Police chief, Beria.

It seemed Beria had gathered a great deal of evidence, supported by both photographs and tape recordings, indicating the wrongdoings and deviations of all the Soviet leadership. “It was not possible to arrest or kill him,” Khrushchev told us, “for his eyes were present and his spies were monitoring each move and registering every single move or step. At last it was decided to call the Central Committee’s Political Bureau to convene for a normal session. Beria attended in his capacity as a member of the Politburo,” Khrushchev went on. “The members of the Politburo gathered around the conference table and the door was closed behind them. At a signal, they all got up and went directly to where Beria was sitting, took hold of his neck and kept wringing it until he died.”

That was the only possible way they could find to purge Beria. Khrushchev then abruptly altered the course of the conversation, looked at us and said: “You could also apply the same method to get rid of the Egyptian Beria.” Khrushchev meant our colleague Zakaria Mohieddin, the minister of the interior, who had been responsible for hunting down the

Communists in the country, arresting them and keeping a close watch on their activities. Khrushchev called him an American agent, and his suggestion was that we should call a meeting of the Revolutionary Command Council and in the course of the meeting should seize Mohieddin's neck and squeeze it firmly until he had breathed his last. The Egyptian Communists, said Khrushchev, would then be left in peace.

We in fact discovered when we got rid of the Soviet-backed power centers in 1951 that they were already applying Beria's techniques of "controlling" the population. They liked to boast they had something against each and every Egyptian, and for this reason I determined to get rid of these power centers when the Russian advisers were expelled from Egypt. Some held the view that a committee should be formed to listen to the tapes on which the power centers had recorded the secrets of our citizens, on the grounds that we might find something of use to national security. But I rejected this suggestion and ordered that the tapes be burned, along with their countless scandals and secrets.

To return finally to Khrushchev: rancor had been eating out his heart for many years, and eventually it destroyed him. My own personal experiences bear this out and go back to 1960, when I led a parliamentary delegation to Moscow to discuss our military needs. During this conference over the supply of arms, Khrushchev once more took us by surprise when he abruptly started to lecture us about communism, its achievements, its inevitability, and its triumphs.

He talked of "socialism" like a self-styled great teacher, and when I told him we had socialism in our country, that only made him ruffled and

angry. He exclaimed: "Your socialism is one of 'foule' [horsebeans] while ours is one of shish kebab, and you can judge for yourself the great difference between foule and shish kebab." From all these experiences I conclude I would not be exaggerating if I said Khrushchev really hated me. He simply could never forget our past differences, and up until the last meeting I had with him, he remained as he had always been with me: aloof, angry, and rancorous.

When the Soviet leaders had become more favorably inclined toward us, they agreed to receive me in Moscow on October 11, 1951. For months I had been trying to impress upon the Soviets the need to negotiate an agreement to supply us with the essential arms for the war I was planning. In typical Soviet fashion, they had pleaded inability to receive me on the pretext that all the Soviet leaders moved to the Crimea during the summer months and would be far from Moscow. I waited until I heard they had returned from their long vacation and applied to them once again. Finally, the answer came, and I left for my visit on October 10.

When I arrived at the airport in Moscow, I was overjoyed to find that Podgorny had not come to meet me. He was the third member of the collective leadership at that time, and I could not stand the sight of him. He had gone to Iran to represent his country at the festivities to mark that country's twenty-five hundredth anniversary. I thanked God for his absence and for being spared the ordeal of having to sit and talk with him. I was met instead by the other two members of the collective leadership, Brezhnev and Kosygin—although the term "collective leadership" invented by the Soviets

was simply an illusion. There was no "collective leadership." There was a single ruler: Brezhnev.

Podgorny and Kosygin were completely powerless. Kosygin had since died and lay far removed from their so-called "collective leadership." The question was: where was Podgorny? He was not dead but nobody knew his whereabouts. One day he was head of the whole Soviet Union, the next he had suddenly disappeared. Who could tell where he was or what had become of him? Maybe he was in Siberia, or working as a railway station master, disposed of in the same way as Malenkov. Maybe they had made him a caretaker in a primary school or an elevator operator in one of the government buildings. Nothing is unlikely in the Soviet Union. We had two sessions of talks during that visit to Moscow, among the stormiest as well as the most important I have held with the Soviet leaders. In the course of these talks I came to know them in their true colors.

Taking part on the Soviet side were Brezhnev, Kosygin, Marshal Andrei Grechko, the defense minister, and a man called Panamarov, a carbon copy of Podgorny, with a rigid, inflexible mind and impossible to deal with. Panamarov was, and still is, in charge of the Communist parties throughout the Middle East. He often heads large Soviet delegations on visits to Baghdad, Damascus, or Aden, and has frequently visited us in Cairo.

Not long before, he had come to see me in Egypt when the Sudanese President, Jaafar el-Numeiri, crushed the Communist revolution there in July 1971. I received him at Sidi Abdel Rahman and seized the opportunity to talk to him about our mutual problems, hoping that on his return he would

persuade his leaders to change the stance they had adopted toward me. Panamarov listened without taking in a single word I was saying. For he had not come to solve Egypt's problems. He had come to ask me to intervene in order to prevent the execution of their number one agent in Sudan, known as el-Shaft. "We hope you will ask your friend Numeiri not to execute el-Shafi", "he said. I was well aware that el-Shaft was one of the most dangerous men in the Sudanese Communist party. Nevertheless, I phoned Numeiri from Sidi Abdel Rahman and said: "The Soviet Union hopes you won't execute el-Shafi'. They have asked me to intervene on their behalf. What do you think?" Numeiri answered: "I would have accepted your intervention most willingly, but it has come too late. It would have been possible to grant your request had you called earlier. El-ShafT was executed an hour and a half ago."

The news of the execution came as a great blow to Panamarov. He returned home saddened and angry. As for all I had told him about our need for weapons for the forthcoming war, he had taken in not a word. For he had been in one world, I in another. The same thing happened when we resumed our talks in Moscow with the Soviet leaders. As I said, they appeared in their true colors, betraying their real intentions. I began to reassess our relations with the Soviet Union from that moment, in the light of what had been revealed.

This led directly to the expulsion of fifteen thousand Russian military experts from Egypt in July 1952.

In my view, nationalism is closely related to patriotism, and because of this belief I have made many enemies in both the Eastern and Western blocs. At one time, the Soviets believed I was an American agent; at another, the Americans thought I was a Soviet agent. The truth of the matter is that I am a full-hearted Egyptian, interested in serving my own country's interests.

I recall two incidents in particular: the first when the non-aligned movement was founded, which enraged the American secretary of state, John Foster Dulles. In his view, each country could adopt only one stance

and support either the East or the West. I had criticized Dulles for this attitude, emphasizing the right of each state to choose its own stance. Dulles did not like this at all and began to call me a Soviet agent.

Later, when King Faisal of Saudi Arabia came to Egypt following a trip to the United States, he gave Nasser a report from Dulles's brother, the head of the CIA, which stated that Anwar el-Sadat was the number one Soviet agent in Egypt.

Nasser passed the report to me, saying, "Look Anwar, how the Americans view you." Nowadays, there is not one single Marxist radio station that does not still consider me the number one agent of the United States. Such accusations do not bother me in the least. I know I am the number one agent in the service of Egypt. I am prepared to extend the hand of friendship to the United States or to the Soviet leadership, provided they show respect for the people of Egypt.