THE PRIVATE LIVES of THE MEN of THE KREMLIN

What are Stalin and Molotov really like? How do the members of Russia's new ruling class live? Here is a first-hand report by one who knows ~ a Soviet Newspaperman

by

Nicolay Kotov

FOR ALL PRACTICAL purposes, 14 men run Russia today. They are the members of the Politburo—Premier Joseph Stalin and the 13 kingpins in his governmental machine—and they live and function largely in secret. The cold gray walls of the Kremlin hide them from prying eyes. Their appearances before the people of Moscow and the nation are painstakingly planned as to time, place and manner. The rest of the time, secrecy and propaganda are combined to present them as paragons of industry, wisdom and selfless devotion to the common welfare.

All this follows a principle adopted after profound, systematic study of the Russian people by their rulers. The latter early decided that the less the people know, the better for everyone. As far back as 1934, for example, the editor of the newspaper *Izvestia* was severely reprimanded for a story on Stalin's visit to his old mother in Georgia. The people must not know that Stalin has a mother or a family—his family is the whole Russian people, and he is its head, leader, father and teacher.

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The Kremlin Men

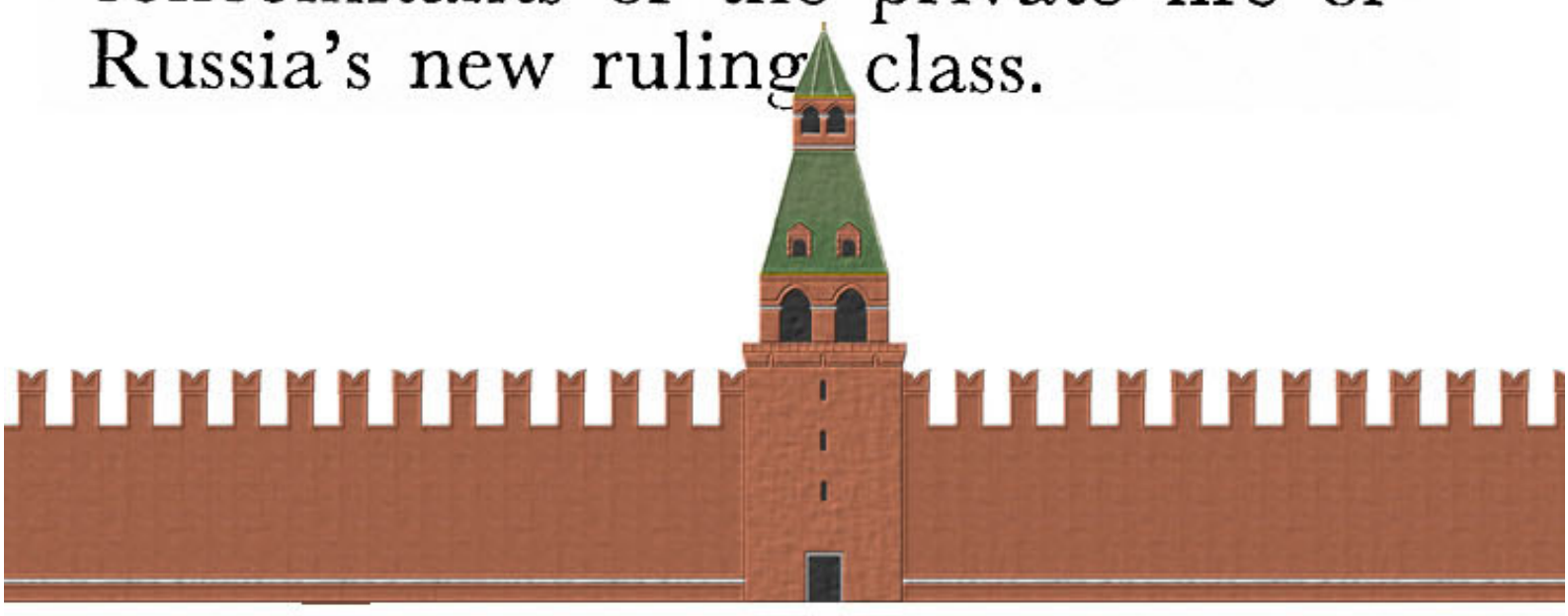
Neither do the people know that Stalin can be shockingly rude and impatient with his wife, or that his amusements often take crude and primitive forms. Instead, the overwhelming majority of the Russian population carries an image of the Generalissimo as an exceptionally kind and responsive person, perfect in all respects, tirelessly laboring at his desk. Yet sometimes a little factual information trickles through. When it does, it throws confusion into his worshipers.

Such was the case with the film of the Teheran Conference. Instead of the brisk, energetic, healthy Stalin that looks out of all his portraits, the people suddenly beheld a man of medium height, with gray hair, slow movements and, worst of all, given to fits of awkward confusion and embarrassment. An elderly Ukrainian woman lamented pityingly: "He is so small, and those heartless capitalists are looking at him, ready to eat him up. Poor Stalin."

Another revelation occurred before the war, during the celebration of Stalin's 60th birthday. The hero of the Polar expedition, Papanin, who was then in high favor with Stalin, mainly for his jolly temperament and ability to drink vodka, published in *Pravda* his recollections of meetings with the leader. One of them took place at a party in the villa of Marshal Budenny, just outside Moscow. Papanin arrived late and was afraid to enter the room, where the festivities were already in full swing, until Stalin caught sight of him at the door, urged him in and introduced him to one of the women guests. Then "the boss," as he is called by the top officials, returned to the phonograph and resumed his task of turning the records. The Polar explorer was enchanted at this sight, and told *Pravda's* readers so. They failed to share his enthusiasm. The role of phonograph attendant, they said, was not at all befitting a man

like Stalin.

What does befit Stalin—though his devoted followers are unaware of it—is as luxurious a mode of life as this old Bolshevik now sees fit to enjoy. He, the rest of the Politburo and a few other government leaders have made of the Kremlin a city within a city, packed with comforts and surrounded by bayonets. Inside its walls are comfortable, warm, handsomely furnished apartments. (Most Russian city dwellers live one family, or sometimes two or three, to a single room.) There are special shops for residents only, overflowing with meat, canned delicacies, fresh fruit at all seasons, wines, chocolates. (Most Russians have lived for the past six years on 500 grams of bread a day, one pound of fats and one pound of sugar a month.) The wives of the Kremlin have their own dressmakers and, like the old slave-owning nobility, heap abuse on the poor designers who fail to create flattering styles for their fat and aging figures. (The average Moscow woman rarely sees one new dress a year.) Special schools for Kremlin children, special medical and dental care for their parents, special laxness regarding moral standards—these are obvious concomitants of the private life of Russia's new ruling class.

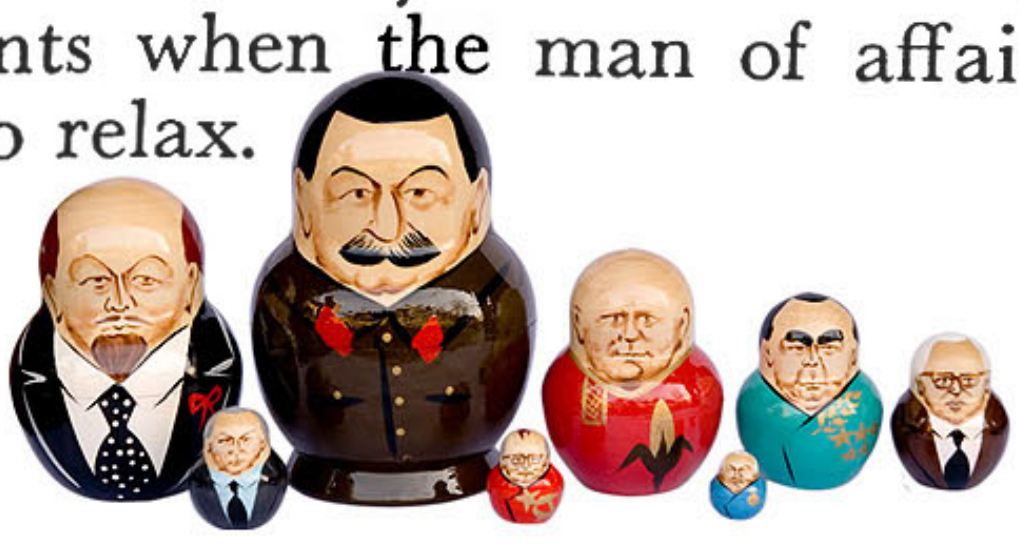


In summer the Kremlin dwellers move to their *dachas*, handsome villas outside the city. A typical villa has 12 to 14 rooms, a staff of servants, an automobile or two (usually American-made), a bulging larder, a well-stocked cellar. Outside, the villa may look old-fashioned by American standards; but its rooms are thickly carpeted, oil paintings line the walls and, above all, it has the privacy neces-

sary for such entertainments as its occupants may devise. Most Politburo members also enjoy the use of fine vacation homes near the Black Sea, though these are visited more rarely because of the pressure of work and the complications of transportation. It would be easy to fly to them from Moscow, of course; oddly enough, however, few of the Politburo members (whose ages range from about 45 to about 68) feel at ease in airplanes.

During the war, party idealists attempted to justify the unlimited necessities and luxuries enjoyed by their leaders with the argument that the better they lived, the freer they were to devote themselves to the welfare of the people. The leaders themselves had long abandoned any effort at idealized explanations. They had acquired a conviction of superiority over the rest of the people. "It is not for minds like yours to decide," they said. "The Kremlin knows what it is doing."

While the leaders strongly condemn rank-and-file members of the party for lapses from the stern rules of family life, they generally seek their own pleasures "outside." They founded their families in their youth, long before they attained their present high posts and power. Now, having grown intellectually in the course of party and government work, they find their wives simple and crude. Therefore each high dignitary includes in his secretarial staff some well-dressed, interesting and intelligent woman with whom he can enjoy his spare moments. She may or may not accompany him on his standard diversions—hunting, soccer games, the opera, the ballet—but she is with him in many of those intimate moments when the man of affairs likes to relax.



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The Kremlin Men

Stalin himself liked to pay deliberately pointed attentions to young women in the presence of his second wife, causing untold suffering to the woman who loved him. Nevertheless, he was deeply attached to her and for a long time after her tragic death (people still insist that she committed suicide) he paid almost daily visits to her grave. In 1937 he married again—this time the sister of Lazar Kaganovich, Politburo member and head of the Communist party in the Ukraine. In the third month after the marriage it was whispered that Stalin had begun to insult and ignore her, and that later in the same year he took a trip to his villa in the Caucasus with one of his young secretaries.

Many of the Kremlin magnates, perpetuating the traditions of the old Tsarist aristocracy, are great admirers of ballet and ballerinas. Their infatuations soon become open secrets (at least among capital circles close to the theater. The people as a whole continue in total ignorance of such tidbits.) The Kremlin dweller, of course, does not bring his inamorata home; instead, he goes to her apartment. Best known of the highly-placed balletomanes is the important member of the Politburo, Klementy Voroshilov. They still talk in Moscow of the time the NKVD (the secret police) tried to arrange an affair between him and a ballerina who was one of its agents, and the

terrific scandal raised by Voroshilov, then Minister of War, when he discovered the plot against him.

Even Foreign Minister Molotov, long known for his strict, puritan life, has begun to weaken in his principles. Molotov's capacity for work is famous — he has been known to spend 20 hours a day at his desk—but lately his capacity for play also has expanded. After all, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs does employ a number of interesting women.

Other Politburo members make no effort to resist their inclinations. Anastasy Mikoyan, Minister of Foreign Trade, is the wittiest of the Kremlin group and can be found regaling friends with a choice store of anecdotes from his native Armenia. Mikoyan has an unshakeable belief in his psychological insight into the feminine soul, plus a willingness to test it whenever practicable. Andrey Andreev, head of a special agricultural committee formed four months ago for the rehabilitation of the ruined Kolhoz economy, is equally popular with the ladies—a handsome, dark-haired, attractive man who frankly relishes the perquisites of his position.

Parenthetically, being a high official's favorite is not without its drawbacks. Any woman who becomes the mistress of such an official falls instantly under the surveillance of the NKVD, and pays for any breach of secrecy with imprisonment or worse.

But of course the people do not know these things. Nor do they hear of the behavior of the children of top officials, some of whom get into lurid adventures indeed. Dur-

ing the war, for instance, Vassily Stalin (the Premier's son by his second wife) served as an air-force commander; on one visit to Moscow he stole the wife of a talented motion-picture cameraman. The latter worshiped his wife, a tall, beautiful girl much younger than himself, but he could not compete with a youth who had status and prestige and could offer a woman everything she might desire. Yet after two weeks this woman returned to her husband, humbled and ashamed. It was said he did not forgive her; in any case, he completely disappeared from the public eye after this affair. Vassily Stalin, however, did not stop there. He soon married another woman, and just as soon tired of her.

Often the adolescent children of the government leaders are completely wild and undisciplined. In 1944 the 16-year-old son of the Minister of the Aviation Industry, Shakurin, shot to death the daughter of the former Ambassador to the United States and afterwards to Mexico, the late Umansky. The murder was preceded by a violent scene and reproaches of infidelity; afterward the boy became frightened and tried to commit suicide, but merely wounded himself in the shoulder. All efforts were made to hush up the scandal, but it became known in Moscow. Nevertheless the boy went unpunished, as did his father. Umansky's wife, who had lost her only daughter, demanded prosecution and tried to obtain an interview with Molotov —without result.

Shakhurin's son is typical of the spoiled and pampered majority of these children. To a great extent this is because their teachers are afraid to discipline the children of

high dignitaries. The children therefore do practically what they please. The wife of one Minister once visited her son's school and angrily scolded the teachers for making *her* child cry. Witnesses said there was little difference between this exalted woman and the heroine of an old Russian comedy who asserted that the children of the rich need not trouble their heads over geography when there are so many cab-drivers in the world.

The children of the country's rulers already regard themselves as the hereditary aristocracy. Their fathers may be able to justify their privileges by their years of toil and struggle; the children simply do not question their right to occupy an exceptional position in Soviet society and to enjoy life regardless of the standards obligatory for others. Accustomed from their earliest infancy to the obsequious flattery and fear of all who stand on lower official rungs than their fathers, they grow up with the psychology of the masters of the land, to whom everything is permissible. The absence of a free press and, consequently, of public criticism, allows them to retain this psychology even beyond their adolescence. With such an upbringing, it is doubtful whether many of them will be capable of assuming truly important and responsible tasks.

Meanwhile it is true that the majority of the present Politburo members are hard-working, earnest men whose moments of relaxation, though often intense, probably are well earned. Some of the new Kremlin dwellers — notably Chief of the Gosplan Nicolai Voznesensky, Vice-Premier Alexei Kosygin and War Minister Nicolai Bulganin—lead definitely austere lives (though in the same breath it might be pointed out that the colloquial Russian definition of "austere" means a man who lives only

with his wife). Generalissimo Stalin frowns on large, lavish parties, and the very isolation of the leaders means that most of their gaiety takes place on a small scale.

Thus the picture of the men in the Kremlin that emerges is not basically so different from that presented to the Russian people. What the people do not see is the comfort and freedom their leaders enjoy—that, and the growing inclination of those leaders to consider themselves a caste apart. What this may lead to is up to the leaders and if the facts ever should become widely known, to the people themselves.