5 Why this Pattern?

The pattern of discussion of problems in intra-party functioning in the republican press is clear. Throughout the whole period there was a continuing current of criticism of the performance of lower-level leaders, but during most of this time that criticism was standardised and did not portend a threat to lower-level incumbents generally. However, there were two periods when the level and vigour of criticism were sharply raised and the sense of threat became more tangible. In the initial years of the Khrushchev period up until 1959, the discussion was couched in more moderate language, suggesting administrative sloppiness and mistakes rather than crimes. From 1959 into 1962, the language was more vigorous and the symbolism reflected a more serious malaise within the party; problems were due less to mistakes than to the conscious decisions of personnel, with crime rather than error being at the heart. Following Khrushchev’s ouster, the language and symbolism were once again moderated, with less emphasis upon abuse of position and power and more on personnel oversight and administrative mistakes. The harsh critical tone returned with Andropov, and was escalated under Gorbachev.¹

This pattern was not standard across all republics surveyed.² While generally the tone and language of those more moderate phases (1953–58 and 1963–82) were common to all republics analysed, the more vigorous criticism was much more prominent in some republics than others. In general terms, criticism tended to be more vigorous in republics in the following rank order: Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Ukraine and Belorussia. Although such a rank ordering cannot reflect fine grades of distinction, the greater vigour of the criticism in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan compared with the other three republics, and in particular Ukraine and Belorussia, is clearly established. The question is why these temporal and geographical patterns occurred.

THE ROLE OF ALL-UNION POLITICS

One of the enduring characteristics of the study of Soviet politics has been the relative neglect of politics below the
all-union level. While this was for a long time largely a result of paucity of information and relative inaccessibility of sites,\textsuperscript{3} it also reflects the dominance held by the totalitarian paradigm over Western approaches to Soviet affairs. Totalitarianism allowed for no autonomy on the part of lower-level political figures, and relegated local political life to the realm of the unimportant. Even when alternative approaches shook the dominance of the totalitarian paradigm, like the emergence of a school of social history\textsuperscript{4} and theories which recognised the existence of elements of plurality within the Soviet system,\textsuperscript{5} politics below the all-union level remained relatively low on the research agenda. Both the course of politics below the all-union level and the nature of the relationship between politics at these different levels of the Soviet system thus remained largely unexplored. But there clearly was a relationship between the course of political life at each of these levels, and this was reflected in the timing of the more vigorous criticism of party leaders: those phases when criticism at the republican level was at its most severe and vigorous coincided roughly with periods when similar language was being used at the centre, chiefly by the party leader. When the language at the centre was more moderate, so too was it less extreme in the republics.

**Khrushchev’s Campaign Pressure**

Khrushchev was always an interventionist First Secretary. His abrupt, often biting interruptions of speakers were a constant feature of party plena and like gatherings following the consolidation of his position with the defeat of the anti-party group in 1957. But even before this, the highly interventionist profile he adopted in policy issues was evident. His career before Stalin’s death was characterised by continuing personal involvement not just in the broad sweep of policy-making, but often in the minutiae of policy implementation. This sort of level of involvement was maintained after he became First Secretary. Moreover, he was a person of infectious enthusiasms and strong views, a combination which, when combined with the powers his office entailed, could lead to policy havoc. The course of policy under Khrushchev was idiosyncratic, with national policy frequently being moulded by the First Secretary’s latest fads and enthusiasms, often associated with ideas whose relevance