

He wisecracks with Khrushchev



When C.B.S.'s Dan Schorr and U.S.S.R's Mr. K meet head-on - sparks fly; and Nikita doesn't always come out on top...

AT THE LAST UNITED NATIONS General Assembly session, Columbia Broadcasting System's newsman Daniel Schorr secured the shortest Nikita Khrushchev interview on record. Just after former President Eisenhower's speech, Schorr, equipped with a wireless microphone, buttonholed the Soviet Premier. "Mr. Khrushchev," he asked in Russian, "what did you think of President Eisenhower's speech?" "I," replied Khrushchev, "am going to lunch." But Khrushchev is not always so terse with Schorr. He has been known, upon spotting the 44-year-old American newsman, to boom, "Ah, there's old Schorr, my sputnik." He has frequently exchanged pointed banter with Schorr at cocktail parties. And occasionally the world Communist leader has come out second best. Khrushchev

first became aware of Schorr, then C.B.S.' Moscow man, when the network did a one-hour telecast with the Soviet chief in 1957. "This was Khrushchev's first TV interview anywhere," Schorr explains. "He was delighted and connected me with it."

Khrushchev later complimented the American for his "honest reporting" on the program. This puzzled Schorr, who says, "All we did was show the film." Last spring, in an Austrian town, the Premier was making his standard speech on communism, under which everybody's grandchildren are supposed to live. Suddenly he spotted Schorr in the crowd and announced, "Ah, there's Mr. Schorr. He's already been convinced, but he has to go on writing nasty stuff about us or his capitalist bosses won't pay him."

For an instant Schorr (who is so far from being convinced that for a long time he couldn't even get into the Soviet Union) was stunned. Then he said softly, "Mr. Khrushchev, I'm sure we could argue the point for a long time, but should we do it on neutral territory?"

Khrushchev realized where he was, grinned, and subsided. Schorr says happily, "That's the first time I ever really beat him."

One technique Schorr has developed for turning aside the Prime Minister's bellicosity is to throw some of his own catch phrases back at him. On one occasion, when the Premier began to roar, Schorr chided him, "Mr. Khrushchev, you're not coexisting."

The Soviet leader usually sees the joke. Schorr reports, "Khrushchev likes people who can stand up to him." But Schorr does not often

come out ahead in these exchanges.

In 1957, for example, while Schorr was in Moscow, Khrushchev scheduled a trip to Czechoslovakia, then mysteriously delayed it. Schorr, encountering the Premier at a reception, decided to pump him subtly. He began, "You know, Mr. Khrushchev, you say our people are slaves of capitalism. And we say your people are slaves of communism. But I'm the poor fellow who's a slave of both."

"How so?" Khrushchev asked.

"Well, you said you were going to Czechoslovakia. So I got all the visas and made arrangements to go, and now you delay the trip, and nobody will even tell me why. I'm a slave of both systems."

Khrushchev cocked his eye quizzically at Schorr, and said, "Mr. Schorr, we will try to liberate you from one of those slaveries."

In 1956, after Khrushchev returned to Moscow from a hunting trip with Marshal Tito of Yugoslavia, Moscow was rife with rumors of an impending secret meeting of the Central Committee of the Communist Party.

How to find out if such a meeting was imminent?

Schorr said, "You know, Mr. Khrushchev, I, too, would like to take a hunting vacation."

"Splendid," said Khrushchev.

"Only I'm not sure I could go," said Schorr.

"Why not?" asked the Prime Minister.

"Well, I hear there's to be a meeting of the Central Committee," Schorr said. "And I don't know if I should be away from Moscow."

Khrushchev crooked his finger. "Come here," he said. He whis-

Dan & Nikita

pered into the correspondent's ear, "You want to go hunting for three weeks? Well, you can." He paused. "Because if necessary . . ." the whisper became a boom, ". . . we'll have the meeting without you. Ho, ho!"

In 1958, after a trip to the U.S., Schorr was refused a Soviet re-entry visa. The Kremlin wished to be free of him since the reporter had developed techniques for reinserting censored material into his short-wave broadcasts. Schorr wanted a visa to accompany Eisenhower on his intended visit to the U.S.S.R. in 1960. He saw his chance one day last spring, while riding through the French countryside in a special train with Khrushchev. The Premier in one of his news conferences invited several newsmen aboard to apply for Soviet visas.

Suddenly Schorr popped up over one of the seats and asked, "What about me, Mr. Khrushchev? May I have a visa?"

Khrushchev eyed him speculatively. "You have caused us some trouble in the past, Mr. Schorr," the Premier said at last, "but yes, you may have a visa."

But Schorr got scooped on his own visa story. At the first stop of the Khrushchev train, he telephoned his C.B.S. boss, John Day (then vice president in charge of news), in New York.

"Khrushchev says I can go back to Russia," he announced.

"I know," Day said tartly. "It came over the United Press International wire an hour ago." U.P.I. had had a radio-telephone on the train. Actually, Schorr never picked up the visa, for Eisenhower canceled his trip.

It was during that same tour of France that Schorr managed once more to top the Premier. Catching sight of Schorr at a reception, Khrushchev raised his glass and cried, "To truth!" Without hesitation, Schorr lifted his own glass to the Premier and responded: "To truth—and to being allowed to report it from your country."

Then he drank deeply.

Coronet

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