A Brief Summary – Taubman: Khrushchev

# Why Khrushchev?

* Had to deal with the issues of Stalin
* Focus on psychology of Khrushchev – based on social science theories
* Khrushchev was a good focus for psychological approach – had immense power and behaved in a unique way
* Situations didn’t dictate K’s actions – K’s character a key driver in his self-destructive nature.

# Evidence for the psychological approach

* CIA Psychological analysis of Khrushchev suggested he was hypomanic
* Khruschev’s wife also confirmed this
* Also evident in K’s actions for example in the CMC (definition)

# Influence of other biographies?

* Built from a range of memoirs and interviews – K’s own memoirs very important (note on K’s memoirs)
* K wrote his memoirs without the documents at hand
* K’s memoirs might not be reliable for what happened but give good insight into his state of mind and what he wanted to have happened – portrays himself as very limited
* Not just Bolshevik false modesty – K was playing the part of a jester for Stalin. Led to people underestimating him.

# Top down bottom up?

* Strong argument for top down view
* There are major trends happening from below – people demanded better lives but had little incentive to work for the system
* However totalitarian nature of regime held all of these things in control.

# Reasons for reform

* Most people wanted change when Stalin died – primarily to remove the threat of terror
* All also knew that agriculture was at a dead end and the Cold War had isolated the USSR
* K’s uniqueness was the way in which he carried out the reforms and how far he wanted to reform
* K’s destalinization linked to his personal resentment of the actions that Stalin carried out during the purges
* Secret Speech was also about succession.
* A complex range of motives including personal repentance

# Effectiveness of Khrushchev’s reforms

* For a few years the Virgin Lands campaign worked well and produced large harvests
* Loosening of controls and decentralisation also had a positive effect
* Sergei Khrushchev argues that K’s reforms were the beginning of a longer programme of reform which he never got the chance to finish

# Whose fault?

* It was partially K’s lack of knowledge and advice but also the system itself may have been impossible to reform at all
* K failed to carry out land reform but it is likely this would have been opposed by the party and the agricultural apparatus as well
* K can be blamed for half measures and his changeability but he was up against a potentially impossible task.

# Khrushchev’s foreign policy

* Attempted to ease or end the Cold War but this was not recognised by the West
* Berlin Crisis 1958 – sidebar
* K tried to ease the Cold War but in the end raised tensions with plenty of help from the West!
* Another example of K’s self-destructive behaviour.

# Why Khrushchev was so poor at international relations

* K’s personality was a key driver in his failure in foreign relations
* K was also very limited in his abilities – very uncultured – this led him to fail to understand Western politicians – HE WAS OUT OF HIS DEPTH

# Ukraine

* There is a direct link between the crisis today and K’s handing over of the country in 1954
* K had previously tried to do the same at the end of WW2
* K had a sentimental feeling about Ukraine – linked to his own upbringing just a few miles from the Ukrainian border. He also served in Ukraine in the party and during the war
* Maybe K was guilty about what happened in Ukraine.