

Piggy Foxy and the Sword of Revolution



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## Bolshevik Self-Portraits

Edited by

Alexander Vatlin and Larisa Malashenko

*Translated by Vadim A. Staklo*

Foreword by Simon Sebag Montefiore

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# Foreword

SIMON SEBAG MONTEFIORE

**T**he history of the Bolsheviks during the brutal turbulence of their long revolution, from the seizure of power in October 1917 through the Civil War and collectivization, up to the ritual cannibalism of the Great Terror, is as absurd as it is grim. Its tragedy is made for satire yet defies caricature, for its madness seems beyond humor. Hence the great value of this remarkable collection of cartoons, caricatures, and drawings is that both the artists and the subjects were Bolshevik magnates. Not only most of the subjects but most of the artists too were shot on Josef Stalin's orders during the Terror.

The caricatures are often outrageously, perversely funny. Indeed this book is highly comedic. But the laughter has an echo in the dungeons of Lubianka, and we can follow the foreboding and sadness and then the tragic bloodbath through these images. They are much more than just funny cartoons: they are golden assets for the historian, and I think, in the future, historians of Stalin and Stalinism will have to use this book.

They are of course part of the treasure chest formed by the Stalin and Politburo papers in the Russian State Archive of Social and Political History (RGASPI), formerly the Communist Party archive, in Moscow. The drawings and the archives themselves reveal a totally different picture of the Soviet leadership: beforehand, we were limited to monolithic histories of grim institutions—Politburo, Orgburo, Sovnarkom—filled with mustachioed men without biographies.

The RGASPI's wealth of archival material reveals the humanity of the leaders and, more important, how the entire regime worked on human terms: patrons and patronage, personal alliances and rivalries between characters and departments, fighting for power and, of course, for financial resources, were the essence of high politics in the Kremlin. We learn that Stalin himself did not emerge, fully formed after Lenin's death, as a steely figure of fear and reserve. Far from it, he built power not on fear but on personal relationships not only with his henchmen, such as Molotov or Kaganovich, but also with more formidable intellectual figures such as Kamenev, Bukharin, and Radek. The very top of the Bolshevik pyramid was a tiny group of fanatical Marxist-Leninists and tough managers, hardened by a long life of underground conspiracy and tsarist prison, bloodied in the savage killing of the Civil War, and later the war on the peasantry.

Stalin was the linchpin of these personal relationships, the patron of patrons, and the arbiter of departmental rivalries, but we must be careful not to write history backward. Until 1937, he was regarded as the toughest of the Bolshevik hard men, but he was still an old comrade: the archives reveal how intimately Stalin lived with the other Bolshevik leaders. He constantly dropped in on his neighbors and friends in their Kremlin apartments, suburban dachas, and Black Sea holiday villas, as witnessed by his many notes to friends like Klim Voroshilov, Vyacheslav Molotov, and Demian Bedny suggesting dinners or trips to the country as well as the discussion of political matters.

These grantees, with their wives and children, their country houses and family parties, presided over a state of repression and propaganda, a realm of misery and mass murder and prison camps. Yet the leaders could still tease and laugh at one another. The archives reveal the constant joshing and joking in Politburo meetings in which notes were constantly sent around the table and often Stalin himself took part. Only in 1937 did this collegial political world disappear forever.

All this is in these drawings, which helps us listen in on the tone of these talented but brutal leaders with their towering egos and ambitions. The cartoonists, leaders themselves like Nikolai Bukharin and Valery Mezhlauk, mock the vanities of their comrades in witty and sophisticated jokes and often obscene language and images: among so much political jargon and tough bargaining, we see hilarious images of castrations and genital dismemberments.

Here we can sense the idiosyncratic culture of high Bolshevism and its contradictions: the intellectual culture versus the rude working-class machismo; the strange



system of repressive dictatorship mixed with the dying relics of party democracy; the matey comradeship of friendly equals in a party without a *Führerprinzip* alongside the growth of Stalin's personal tyranny; the cheerful rough bonhomie of old comrades undermined by the cheerless, po-faced ambition of Stalin's rising apparatchiks.

The story is told in these invaluable historic documents: they are often enjoyed by Stalin himself, who writes in his unmistakably emphatic scrawl: "Correct" or "To all members of the Plenum," because the drawings often serve his immediate political purposes. Many are especially revealing. The drawings by Bukharin and Yaroslavsky of Stalin himself (figs. 4–6) reveal him as friskily vigilant, grimly determined, and unattractively long-nosed: they could have been drawn only by Soviet leaders before 1937, and it is no surprise they were drawn before 1930. Similarly, Trotsky appears as Stalin's comrades saw him—a preening Spanish troubadour (fig. 8). That was how Stalin saw him too.

The famous characters come across strongly: Yan Rudzutak's notorious laziness (fig. 25), Feliks Dzerzhinsky's almost religious fervor in his persecution of enemies (fig. 28), Bukharin's affable charm throughout, Voroshilov's mixture of vanity and fun. There are priceless portraits of Sergo Ordzhonikidze's dashing vigor, explosively passionate Georgian temper, and relentless pursuit of Stalin's enemies (fig. 103). There is Anastas Mikoyan's dapper Caucasian glamour and Stalinist hardness. Both of these men were ruthless Stalinists, but Ordzhonikidze is ironically shown as a tsarist officer, Mikoyan as a Caucasian mountain warrior (fig. 157). Interestingly, Ordzhonikidze, the last big beast of the Bolshevik jungle, would be driven to suicide by Stalin in 1937, while the shrewd, feline Mikoyan turned out to be the ultimate Soviet survivor—a man who carried Lenin's coffin in 1924 and attended John F. Kennedy's funeral in 1963, finishing his career as chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet from 1964 to 1965.

Even the future NKVD head Lavrenty Beria appears at the 1937 plenum, still boss of Caucasia, using threats and denunciations to make his name and prove his potential to his patron, Stalin. As well as famous comrades, such as the blowhard leftist Grigory Zinoviev and his ally Lev Kamenev, the dreaded faces of less known Stalinist hatchet-men are fascinating too: the colorless Andrei Andreyev was one of the worst. The far from colorless but almost unhinged Lev Mekhlis, editor of *Pravda*, later political boss of the Red Army and killer of many of its officers, was so excessively Stalinist that even Stalin often mocked him for it. Mekhlis accumulated huge power as one of Stalin's private secretaries, and two others appear here: Ivan Tovstukha, until his death in 1935

the trusted guardian of Stalin's papers, and Amayak Nazaretian, who did not make it and was shot. In their place arose the grim Alexander Poskrebyshev (who does not appear in these pictures).

We know how vicious and serious were the ideological disputes among the leaders, but now we have learned too that many of the rows were not remotely ideological. They were personal fights and more often turf wars over resources and personnel. These documents show this clearly. The artists do not seem to foresee how grave these disputes would actually become: Stalin smacking the bare bottoms of Zinoviev and Kamenev may have been the worst that could be imagined at the time (fig. 104).

But Valery Mezhlauk's superb drawings in the 1930s are brilliant illustrations of the darkening sky: Stalin and his henchmen become increasingly furious about and frustrated by the economic problems and mechanical blunders, blaming their financial specialists. The experts were accused of corruption, double-dealing, and "wrecking." They were increasingly persecuted by Stalin and his brutal industrial managers such as Ordzhonikidze (fig. 152) and his friend, the former cobbler, Lazar Kaganovich (fig. 149).

The classic of the collection is where Mezhlauk mocks finance commissar Briukhanov, on 5 April 1930, and then Stalin adds his terrifying note about hanging him by his testicles: If they tear, then he is guilty; if they hold, he is innocent (fig. 135). Here is a preview of the witch-hunting style of the Great Terror of 1937, when death was random and people would die because of the look in their eyes. The cartoons illustrate how the failures of the regime, such as the constant train crashes, built up a pressure that only the Terror would release, and then in an orgy of bloodshed.

Mezhlauk skillfully shows the rise of the Soviet apparatchik in his series of drawings that mock the fat posterior and the bulging belly of this new breed. He satirizes the tedium of party conferences, the waiting in the anterooms: again, character is everything. There is still hilarity—as in the image of the veteran Georgian Bolshevik Felipe Makharadze urinating out his endlessly tedious speech (fig. 136).

There are many drawings that show the character of Mikhail Kalinin, an Old Bolshevik who had known Stalin since about 1901 and had succeeded Yakov Sverdlov in the ornamental position of head of state in 1919. He had moderate tendencies and an easygoing nature in a world of manic workaholics, but he was utterly incapable of exerting intelligence or will in any direction, bending to Stalin while trying to preserve his own good cheer. One of Mezhlauk's figures depicts him sending another famous per-

sonage, Marshal Semyon Budionny, to hurry up a boring speaker at a plenum (fig. 133). Budionny, with his flamboyant mustache, was the archetypal primitive Stalinist commander, a crony from Tsaritsyn in 1918, a swashbuckling hero of the regime for his command of the Red Cossacks in the Civil War. But as some of the cartoons reveal, he was far from appreciating the arrival of the mechanical age of fast-moving Panzer warfare, repeatedly denouncing tanks as inferior to his beloved horses (fig. 165).

The funniest of the collection is the telling 1935 duel between the talented cartoonists Bukharin (then enjoying a resurgence as *Izvestia* editor) and Mezhlauk about the latter's portrayal in the former's newspaper. Mezhlauk takes his vengeance by portraying Bukharin wielding a colossal erection; Bukharin replies by belittling his critic's equipment (figs. 137 and 138). Both were only a few short years from their downfall and execution. But Mezhlauk correctly observes the growing danger, the blood in the water. When Lev Kamenev, Lenin's old comrade and indeed Stalin's patron from Tiflis in the early 1900s, denounced himself at the Congress of the Victors in 1934, Mezhlauk draws him first disemboweling himself and then, tellingly, cutting off his own penis (figs. 163 and 164).

So we reach Mezhlauk's haunting and frankly outstanding artwork at the doom-laden, dark February 1937 plenum. There Stalin unleashed his attack dogs, such as the newly appointed NKVD commissar Nikolai Yezhov, his murderous and dwarfish impresario of the Terror. Mezhlauk no longer comments or jokes—he just observes and records, perhaps appreciating his own vulnerability. One senses his feeling of isolation from the disgusting proceedings and his realization that he no longer belongs in such ugly scenes. Mezhlauk was one of an extensive family of Bolshevik brothers, and he rose quite high, heading Gosplan but never reaching Politburo status. He clearly possessed a surprising sense of humor and perspective for a top Bolshevik.

Now, in 1937, he draws his old friend Bukharin as “Holy fool Bukharin Iscariot-sky” (fig. 170). He sketches the dreadful dreary killer Andreyev chairing the witch-hunt at the plenum (fig. 173), and spots the rising star Beria, still Stalin's viceroy in the Caucasus but soon to emerge as NKVD commissar, Politburo member, gifted manager, father of the Soviet atom bomb, perverted sadist and rapist, and finally, the man who almost succeeded Stalin in 1953 before his own execution. Here Mezhlauk shows Beria denouncing the Old Bolsheviks of the Caucasus, all of whom would soon be slaughtered (fig. 179). Truly this was, as he noted, the dead end. It was to be Mezhlauk's too.

The collection has one more remarkable twist: the earlier drawings had been

handed round the Politburo or Council of People's Commissars table and enjoyed by everyone, including Stalin. They were then given by Mezhlauk and Bukharin to the sentimental Voroshilov for his private collection, whence they made it into the archives. But the last set found here was obviously kept by Mezhlauk. When he was arrested months later in December 1937, the drawings were discovered in the usual search of his apartment and filed in his Lubianka dossier. He was shot in July 1938.

By that time, Nikolai Yezhov, commissar of the NKVD, was already in decline. By the end of the year, Beria had been brought to Moscow to destroy Yezhov and restore some orderly conduct to the business of mass murder. Reviewing his files, Beria found the drawings and sent them around the Politburo to the bigwig who would be most interested in that particular one, such as a picture of Andreyev that he addressed to its subject: "To Comrade Andreyev. Drawing by V Mezhlauk. L Beria." Molotov, Kaganovich, and the newly risen favorite, cultural expert and Leningrad boss Andrei Zhdanov, all received similarly lugubrious and macabre gifts. But Voroshilov got the most. Here is the ambitious and utterly ruthless new boy from the provinces, Beria, using the wit and artistry of a murdered man to win friends among the magnates of Moscow. Chilling indeed.

Most of the drawings ended up with Voroshilov. It is fitting that he became the keeper of this extraordinary collection, for Kliment Ye. Voroshilov personified many aspects of Stalin's regime. He was the ultimate Soviet grandee, a marshal, Politburo member, and people's commissar for defense (1925–40). Like Budionny, he was one of the regime's swashbuckling pinups. An Old Bolshevik metalworker who had known Stalin since 1906 (they shared a room at the Stockholm Congress), he made his name as a colorful and brave commander at Tsaritsyn in 1918, where Stalin met and liked so many of his military bunglers. Klim was good-looking and vain, flirtatious, kind, genial, and charming but was also a crude military commander and inept manager with a vicious temper, and a dangerous inferiority complex toward more talented generals. He was capable of ruthless brutality, and during the Terror he supervised the killing of around forty thousand Soviet officers, many of them his friends. Yet he had a taste for the arts, pretty women, and singing parties. He adored dancing and took fox-trot lessons to jazz music. Like most of Stalin's top deputies—Molotov, Mikoyan, Beria, Kaganovich, Andreyev—he survived the dictator and indeed served as head of state from 1953 to 1960, dying a beloved old hero.

Tellingly, Voroshilov continued to collect these drawings from his friends Bukha-

rin and Mezhlauk even when he knew they would be shot, when he had signed their death warrants, when they were being tortured—and he kept the works long after their creators had been executed and buried in mass graves. That demonstrates how these caricatures are so much more than just cartoons sketched at boring Gosplan meetings. They unforgettably tell the tale of an entire epoch.



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# Introduction

**T**he former Central Communist Party archive (now the Russian State Archive of Social and Political History, or RGASPI) contains, in addition to its numerous manuscripts, a collection of drawings produced mainly by the leaders of the Bolshevik Party—using pens, pencils, and paintbrushes—during the interwar period. The sketches were made hurriedly, on notebook pages or the backs and margins of party records. The dates and inscriptions on the drawings indicate that they were mostly produced and shared during Politburo and government sessions, or during plenums of the Central Committee and party congresses. Often a drawing would turn into a sort of collective game: an initial sketch would acquire details and comments until eventually it was transformed into something like a modern cartoon. It is easy to recognize Stalin’s blue pencil marks or the crude jokes of his entourage as they developed the idea of a caricature.

These “funny pictures” are an unexpected legacy from the creators of such a dismal era. What inspired this creative process? We can speculate endlessly, but we will never know for sure. Perhaps they wanted to illustrate dimensions of their political discussions that would otherwise be unacknowledged; perhaps they simply wanted to quell the boredom of daily sessions, to express their pent-up frustrations. Whatever the stimulus, these documents are a very special historic source that deserves the attention of scholars.

In contrast to more official discourse, these drawings reflect the spontaneous and sincere responses of the communist leaders to particular events: they contain much less of the falseness and sycophancy that strongly colored the behavior of the Soviet elite in the late 1930s. In a way, the drawings constitute a snapshot of the time, a tes-

timony of immediate and honest witnesses. They shock the contemporary viewer with their crudeness and primitive nature. The drawings generated during Politburo meetings allow one to see the issues being discussed from a different perspective. Satirical language permitted the artists to say what was taboo in verbal discourse. Many caricatures made the Soviet leaders laugh even though they did not fit into official party ideology: it is hard to imagine these cartoons being published in the *Pravda* of the 1930s.

In this book we have selected the most vivid samples of the work of the high-ranking artists, those that preserve both the general tone of the time, when “socialism advanced on all fronts,” and the specific ambiance inside Stalin’s closest circle. Only a small part of the entire archival collection is included here, and publication is only the first step. Future researchers will complete the task of establishing the artists, commenting on the content, and tying the caricatures to specific events. Our understanding of the first two decades of Soviet history will be greatly enriched when scholars are able to study the Soviet leaders’ attempts at artistic expression in addition to their official correspondence.

## Humor of the Humorless Epoch

We venture to disagree with those who insist that caricatures and more general comic statements were impossible in the Soviet Union of this period given the existence of ideological censorship and a lack of political freedom. These drawings speak for themselves. They express a sense of humor that differs from both the official optimism of censor-approved satire and the alternative subculture of jokes and ditties. It was a specific humor developed for internal use, hidden for many decades between the covers of special files.

Readers who grew up in a free society will no doubt see this humor as timid, feeble, and deficient. It is common knowledge that comedy demystifies the world around us, breaking moral and ideological taboos, making us question established stereotypes. An authority that allows itself to be laughed at must have no doubts about its legitimacy. It was not an accident that in the early 1920s the only satiric magazines that existed in the USSR unquestioningly followed the party line. Notwithstanding all the “just cause” propaganda, the Bolsheviks had a strong inferiority complex.

But even as they deprived humor of its independence, the people at the helm still wanted to have some fun. Laughter helped to reduce the stress, to distract them at least briefly from tough problems; and that was important, considering the intense pressures within a system fueled solely by commands from above. Joking was both natural and necessary when long hours of Bolshevik leadership sessions grew stressful, and when tensions and hostile tempers needed release. Jokes were usually not recorded by stenographers, if the session was recorded at all, but their visual echo, in the form of cartoons and drawings, now belongs to history.

The great volume of cartoons in this archival collection makes it clear that this sort of art appealed to many members of Stalin's *nomenklatura*. It was a natural part of their lives, as ordinary as traditional hunting expeditions or group vacations to the Caucasus shore. It is indicative of the prevalence of this appeal that Leonid Brezhnev, a person not frequently associated with humor, once said during a meeting with cartoon artists: "By the by, in my younger years I played with very risky drawings. If I could show them to you, you'd die of laughter!"

One of the genre's oldest artists, Boris Yefimov, tells this story in his memoirs: "Regarding Stalin [I must say that], although he liked cartoons and always paid a lot of attention to them, he wouldn't allow any jokes about himself. . . . In 1925 I made a friendly drawing of him; it was returned to me with the short resolution: 'Not to be published!'" However, Stalin apparently made exceptions for his close circle—in this album, Stalin is both an author and a target of friendly caricatures.

The content of these drawings reflects not only many properties of the postrevolutionary period, but also the conflicted mentality of the new political elite. These men achieved absolute power over society, yet trembled in Stalin's presence. They were sure that history was on their side, yet could not cope with the simplest of problems. These drawings help us to grasp the group's character and understand more accurately the level of sophistication and education of the first generation of leaders of "socialist construction."

At this point two observations are necessary. First, it is interesting to note that the cartoons rarely address the problem of the Western world and foreign policy, even though official slogans demanded the fomenting of the proletarian revolution all over the world. Images of the fat capitalist or of German and Japanese aggressors appeared in the drawings only in 1937, and even then they were directly related to the unmask-

ing of “enemies of the people” within the country. To a certain extent, this can be explained by the fact that the official propaganda published caricatures hostile to the outside world ad nauseam. But it is also possible that such indifference among higher-level leaders indicates their weariness of such political ballyhoo and their support for Stalin’s policy of building socialism in one country. Second, the world represented in these drawings belongs entirely to men. The rude and sometimes obscene cartoons never concern half of humanity: women appear only as cleaning ladies or secretaries. The portrayal of someone as a “broad” was meant to be humiliating. Judging from both the available correspondence and these cartoons, the Bolshevik leaders’ attitude toward women was conservative and paternalistic.

## Cartoonists from the Bolshevik Olympus

It goes without saying that these cartoons do not belong to the category of great art, though their creators displayed, to varying degrees, some artistic skill. The drawings are more important as visual memoirs than as artistic achievements. Any memoir written by a person who was active and close to the top for a long time is guaranteed to provoke a great interest in the public, regardless of the literary merit of the text. The men represented in our book were not merely witnesses; they were the movers and shakers of the political process in the Soviet Union. The trends and dynamics of that process are not entirely transparent if we look only at written sources.

In order to fully appreciate these drawings as memoirs, it is important to know the main points in their creators’ lives and careers. The first of the artists in talent and in political importance was Nikolai Ivanovich Bukharin. Born to a family of Moscow intelligentsia, he was educated at a gymnasium that provided some training in the fundamentals of art. Throughout his youth, even while engaged in revolutionary activity, the man who Lenin would later describe as the “darling of the party” developed his artistic skills: drawing was always one of his many hobbies. The harsh conditions of underground life and his nomadic existence in European exile made the preservation of Bukharin’s early artistic productions impossible. The drawings of the postrevolutionary decades, on the other hand, survive in abundance. Bukharin preferred to work using the Indian ink technique, mastering the smallest details of his chosen subjects on the pages of his notebook. Unlike his colleagues, he rarely busied himself with cari-

catures of trivial moralizing mottos. He was more interested in nonpolitical topics, drawing landscapes, animals, and insects, studies in the style of cubism. His forte was the drawing of friendly cartoons depicting Politburo colleagues, sometimes with accompanying verses or pseudo-folk songs. The drawings are a testimony to Bukharin's sharp mind, social skills, curiosity, and particular ability to capture his subjects' whole personalities, not simply their weaknesses.

Valery Ivanovich Mezhlauk, the most prolific artist in our album, was not as famous as Bukharin. Like Bukharin, Mezhlauk had a gymnasium and college level education. He was also involved in revolutionary activity, and was a typical intellectual member of the Bolshevik Party. In the spring of 1918, Mezhlauk managed to rescue valuables from the State Bank of Ukraine and bring them to Moscow. Later he became a member of the Revolutionary Military Council in the famous Tenth Army that defended Tsaritsyn. There, Mezhlauk met Kliment Yefremovich Voroshilov. The two men remained friends until Mezhlauk's arrest on 1 December 1937. The peak of Mezhlauk's career was 1934, when he was appointed chairman of the State Planning Committee while also serving as Vyacheslav Molotov's deputy in the Council of People's Commissars.

In the early 1930s, Mezhlauk replaced Bukharin as the dominant artist in the Politburo. This change has symbolic significance; it reflects a new era of political thinking. Bukharin had preferred to draw lyrical landscapes; Mezhlauk was in favor of industrial scenes. If the former made cartoons with the intention of probing the psychology of his subjects, the latter was more interested in the function and position than the person. Mezhlauk's cartoons reflected current political events: an easily recognizable theme was usually combined with the locker room sense of humor that satisfied the tastes of the new elite.

In collections of Mezhlauk's artistic output, it is possible to distinguish series of drawings created during discussions of a specific problem or provoked by some big event. At first glance, the only common denominator appears to be the format of the notebook pages on which they were drawn, but a more careful study finds a common line of thought, a certain general attitude toward the issue and toward the personalities involved in the discussions. An entire series of cartoons describes the conflicts between various branches of the government during preparation of the state budget. As a member of the Presidium of the Supreme Council of the National Economy (VSNKh)

since 1924, Mezhlauk was actively involved in those decisions. Especially interesting are the drawings related to the discussion on aviation. He made portraits not only of various people's commissars (*narkoms*), but also of directors of aviation plants and designers. Some of his last drawings were made at the Plenum of the Central Committee in February–March of 1937.

The biography of a third politician and artist, Moris Lvovich Belotsky, bears little resemblance to Mezhlauk's beyond a few limited similarities: both were friends of Voroshilov, who was the main fan of their satirical art, and both perished during the purges. Born to a poor Jewish family, Belotsky joined the Bolshevik Party in August 1918 and proceeded to make a brilliant career. He began as a political commissar in the Red Army. In 1923 he graduated from a military academy, serving first as a consul in Termez and later in the North Caucasian Territorial Committee. During the early stages of conflict between Stalin, Lev Kamenev, Grigory Zinoviev, and Lev Trotsky, Belotsky supported Trotsky, but he soon repented and returned under Voroshilov's protection. However, even the protection of Voroshilov was not enough: in 1937, Belotsky, serving as the first party secretary of Kirgizstan, was arrested for "connections with enemies of the people."

The first part of the album contains many portraits made by Yemelian Yaroslavsky, a devoted member of Stalin's team, who worked for many years in the Party Control Commission. His friendly cartoons appeared from time to time throughout the mid-1920s in *Rabochaia gazeta*, but he cautiously avoided offending anybody. In the early days of his career, in 1922 and 1923, he created a whole portrait gallery of his colleagues in the apparatus of the Central Committee of the party. There is nothing satirical about those portraits; they look rather like preparatory work for something large and serious that never quite came to fruition. The remaining works of Yaroslavsky are mostly oil paintings of neutral content.

Some of the drawings in this publication are of unknown origin. Sometimes they were the productions of talentless delegates who came from the provinces for party congresses and sent their pictures to a congress presidium or to party leaders. Many members of party and government leadership tried their hand at cartoons and drawings from time to time. In the archives there are works signed by Mikhail Tomsy, Yan Rudzutak, and Gleb Krzhizhanovsky. Even Stalin experimented with a pencil (fig. 63). His drawings are distinguished by their crude sense of humor, typical of the informality

within the Politburo, and by their characteristically nervous style. Stalin's drafts often have doodles on the margins; their uncertain twitching lines differ enormously from his clear, strong handwriting, which can be observed in comments written on these same cartoons.

## Structure and Principles of the Publication

The cartoons in this album capture the black-and-white world that surrounded these artists. This should be understood both literally and figuratively: most of the drawings were made in one color on white paper; they are also characterized by their extreme bluntness. The artists were certainly not given to nuance or shades of gray. A few political watercolors (including Mezhlauk's work in Part 2 of this album), are among the rare exceptions.

The first part of the album is titled "Gallery of Leaders." It contains portraits and friendly cartoon drawings of Bolshevik celebrities, secretaries of the Central Committee, officials of the central apparatus, chiefs of republics, and ministers. Both the images themselves and their inscriptions reflect the sympathies and antipathies of the Bolshevik leaders. They are an important comment on the political events of the 1920s and 1930s. The second part, "Comrades and Problems," contains multigure caricatures depicting issues tackled by the leadership of the country. Through them, we can follow the discussion of problems and the decision-making processes of Soviet authorities at the highest level. These images are divided into several categories by theme: conflicts inside the party, the mechanics of Politburo sessions, and matters of economy. The final segment of the album contains artistic reports covering two especially tragic events in the history of the Bolshevik Party (VKP[b]) and the Soviet Union: the seventeenth congress of the party and the February–March 1937 Plenum of the Central Committee.

The main difficulty in preparing these drawings for publication is establishing the identity of their artists. These images were created neither for history nor for historians. They were variously exchanged or donated and then collected, and for that reason were generally kept not in the archives of their creators but in the archives of their collectors. The main collector of the drawings was Voroshilov. Aleksei Rykov, Karl Radek, and Felix Kohn collected images of themselves. To identify the creators of these draw-