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THE PURGE OF L. P. BERIA

Moscow Radio and the Soviet press have announced that L. P. Beria has been ousted from the Communist Party and from his government positions as first deputy premier and MVD minister, has been jailed, and will be tried by the Soviet Supreme Court as a traitor. "A few days ago" Malenkov gave a report from the Party Presidium to a plenary meeting of the Central Committee which discussed Beria's criminal, antiparty and antistate activities.

According to Pravda, Beria has been accused of:

- (1) trying to undermine the Soviet state in the interests of foreign capital by treacherous "attempts to place the MVD above the USSR government and party;"
- (2) machinating to seize power by using the MVD organs against the party and its leadership and against the government "by selecting MVD personnel on the basis of loyalty to himself;"
- (3) "impeding decisions, under various invented pretexts, on most important and urgent agricultural problems with a view to undermining the collective farms and creating difficulties in the food supply;"
- (4) trying to undermine "with various crafty schemes" the friendship of the USSR peoples, to disseminate hostility among them and "to achieve bourgeois nationalism in union republics;"
- (5) impeding and distorting Central Committee and governmental orders regarding the strengthening of Soviet legislation and the liquidation of lawlessness and arbitrary action;
- (6) becoming a "bourgeois renegade," an "agent of international imperialism" and hatching plans to seize power with the aim of destroying the party and changing the party's policy to a "capitulatory policy which would have brought about ultimately the restoration of capitalism".

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US ambassador Bohlen on 6 July reported rumors circulating in Moscow that Beria was in difficulty if not in disgrace because of the recent disturbances in East Germany.

While Beria's absence from the opera on 27 June may indicate that he was under arrest on that date, it is also possible that he was in Germany, personally supervising the restoration of order. It would appear to have been almost impossible to make the necessary arrangements for his arrest while he was still in Moscow because of the intelligence sources and police power at his disposal. There is some indication he may have been in Berlin on 17 June, the day following the outbreak of the East German demonstrations.

Other recently noted evidence that Beria might have been in trouble was the continued postponement of the Georgian party congress originally scheduled for 25 May. This meeting presumably would have confirmed that republic's April purges which had generally been credited to Beria's influence.

The appointment of S. K. Kruglov to succeed Beria as MVD minister is an illustration of the lack of loyalty among top Soviet bureaucrats. Kruglov was Beria's deputy police chief from 1939 and succeeded him as chief of MVD in 1946 when Beria relinquished his ministerial duties and became a full member of the Politburo. The following description has been made of Kruglov: "a baby-faced leviathan of six feet, two inches and 245 pounds, he looks like a cop and is one. At Potsdam he chain smoked, enthusiastically bummed chewing gum from every Yank he met, and consumed vast quantities of food and vodka, keeping his belly shaking with laughter between mouthfuls. Truman liked Kruglov well enough to give him an autographed picture and a Legion of Merit."

Although Beria in addition to his police responsibilities was generally considered to have run the Soviet atomic energy program, it is quite unlikely that Kruglov will have greater than security responsibilities in this field. There is also no reason to believe at present that Beria's removal will change the USSR's emphasis on this program.

With respect to the foreign policy implications of Beria's arrest, the Pravda editorial again pointed out that the Soviet government has "stated more than once that

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all unsolved international questions under dispute can be solved by negotiations between the interested countries," and that "the new peaceful initiative demonstrated by the Soviet government has brought about the further strengthening of the international position of the Soviet Union and the growth of the authority of our country." On the other hand, there are significant allusions to "the general intensification of the undermining anti-Soviet activities of international reactionary forces," to the fact that "international imperialism is becoming increasingly active," and Beria is charged with "a policy of capitulation." All of these may well foreshadow a new "vigilance campaign" like that evoked by the first announcement of the "doctors' plot."

The desire of the governing Kremlin faction to consolidate its power should continue to provide motivation for attempts to reduce international tension. The probability of further purges, their influence on Soviet prestige throughout the Orbit, and the possible weakening of the police apparatus of control would also contribute to a desire to obtain an easing of Western pressure or interference within the Orbit. It would, however, only be under circumstances that war with the West or revolutions within the Orbit appeared imminent to a weakened regime that the Soviet leaders would consider it necessary to make major concessions to the West.

The internal power situation does not appear to have been the determining factor in the Kremlin's attitude toward foreign issues. Molotov's position in the triumvirate probably rested mainly on his seniority and prestige as one of the old revolutionaries and on his long experience in foreign affairs, and not on his control of a vast bureaucratic machine which he could throw into a struggle for personal aggrandizement. In this case, Molotov would not have been in any position to make a play for supreme power against either Malenkov or Beria, both of whom controlled the more formidable machines of the party and police. It would seem that the fundamental issues which affect the USSR's vital interests and power position in international politics were not drawn into the struggle.

In relation to the new conciliatory policy inside the Soviet Union the Pravda editorial appeared non-committal, used ambiguous language and in some cases appeared contradictory. With regard to the post-Stalin emphasis on increasing the production and availability of consumer goods,

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the early part of the editorial seemed to emphasize heavy industry, "the very basis of the Socialist economy," machine building, technology and science adding that "our light industry and our food industries have achieved a high level....they are able at present to satisfy the growing demands of the urban and rural population on the basis of the policy of price reductions carried out by the party." However, the emphasis on consumer goods was somewhat greater toward the end when the editorial stressed that the party's task is "to consider with profound feeling workers' demands, to care daily for an all-around improvement of the living standard of workers and collective farmers, intelligentsia, and all Soviet peoples." It is not clear whether Pravda was modifying its 8 July announcement that this year "additional reserves have been found for an increased output of consumer goods amounting to over twenty billion rubles in excess of the envisaged annual plan for consumer goods turnover." On the whole, the renewed emphasis on heavy industry, on "the strengthening of the economic and defensive might of our motherland," and "the tasks set by the 19th Party Congress" would indicate that the benefits to the people promised by Pravda in its 8 July editorial would not be at the expense of the Five Year Plan.

With regard to the anti-Russification policy, another important factor of the new "liberal" policy, Pravda was also unclear. Beria was accused of trying "to undermine the friendship of the USSR peoples -- the very basis of the multi-national socialist state and the main conditions for the successes of the fraternal Soviet republics -- to disseminate hostility among the USSR peoples and to achieve bourgeois national elements in union republics." This language is generally similar to the recent criticism in the Georgian and Ukrainian republics which launched the anti-Russification drive in propaganda. However, the inclusion of the phrase "bourgeois nationalism" suggests that Beria may be accused of encouraging local nationalism to the detriment of Soviet patriotism which would seem to indicate a return to Russification. It is possible that Pravda is here cautioning the people not to overinterpret the anti-Russification propaganda or take too literally the propaganda line that the minority republics are "equals among equals" with the Great Russians.

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In any event, the editorial emphatically reaffirmed the party's dominance over all Soviet institutions, particularly the MVD, in stating: "Every worker, in whatever post, must be under the constant control of the party. The party organizations must systematically check the work of all organizations and the administrative activity of all leading workers. It is necessary to check systematically and unremittingly the activity of the USSR Ministry of Internal Affairs. This is not only the right but the direct duty of the party organizations."

With regard to the danger of reversing the present liberal trend Ambassador Bohlen recently reported that it might be radically changed as a result of top level dissension. However, in his estimation a reversion to the state of terror characteristic under Stalin would come as a shock to the population and would severely strain the system.

The captive peoples of Eastern Europe will receive the downfall of Beria and the clear implication of dissension within the Communist regime with great satisfaction, and unrest will be encouraged. The more violently anticommunist elements in Eastern Europe may be stimulated by this sign of weakness to participate in underground resistance work, at least for the time being. However, riots or other violent demonstrations can be prevented or controlled unless the Soviet security system is so disorganized by the coming purge that local operating units of the Satellite security systems also are involved.

Certain individuals in these police organizations, which in varying degrees are coordinated with and controlled by the Soviet security system, are certain to be affected. Consequently, it is expected that there will be some confusion in the Satellite security ministries and headquarters, but it probably will not seriously disorganize the operating units.

There is no firm evidence that any specific Satellite leaders have been dependent on the support of Beria. However, a large-scale communist purge can be completely irrational and indiscriminate in its choice of victims. For this reason, it is expected that there is considerable uneasiness among the Satellite leaders. A large-scale purge within the USSR will undoubtedly involve some of them, who will be victimized for real or imagined association with Beria and his alleged ambitions.

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The purge of Beria has cut across the manifestations of more liberal economic programs which have been appearing in East Germany, Hungary, and to a lesser extent in Albania and Rumania. The reforms which have been made or promised appear calculated to cope with long-standing problems that the policies of the Stalin regime had failed to solve. These problems, shortages of food and consumer goods, labor apathy, peasant resistance and general discontent, are as serious as ever. It seems logical to assume that the reforms will therefore continue in force for the time being, in order to eliminate as much as possible these internal weaknesses. But the accusation that Beria was aiming at "replacing the policy pursued by the party for many years with a capitulatory policy which would have brought about the restoration of capitalism" suggests that the economic reform program may be re-examined.

In this connection, the accusation that Beria "under various invented pretexts, has in many ways impeded decisions on most important and urgent problems in the field of agriculture....with a view to undermine the collective farms and create difficulties in the country's food supply" may portend a resumption of the collectivization drive in the Satellites.

Malenkov and his colleagues may have seized upon the recent riots in East Germany as an excuse for the final move against Beria but Beria's ousting appears to have resulted from deeper considerations than the need to provide a scapegoat for disturbances in the Orbit.

Beria's arrest would seem almost certainly to have been the result of a struggle for power. Judging by the nature of the accusations against him, the other Soviet leaders suspected that he was wielding his power as police chief too arbitrarily with an eye to increasing his role in the regime. It is also possible that these accusations are false and that Malenkov and his supporters took their first opportunity to arrange a colleague's removal.

Certainly this move would seem to have been made at an extremely inopportune time from the viewpoint of the Kremlin's presenting the world with at least a facade of strong, unified leadership. With the recent developments in East Germany, the comparatively high degree of unrest in the Eastern European Satellites and the prestige which Mao enjoys as a Communist leader, Malenkov's arrest of the number two figure in the regime seems to be an overly bold and even illconsidered move in a struggle for power.

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Some measure of the gravity with which the remaining leaders faced this action emerges from the accompanying announcements that local party central committees in Moscow, Kiev and "other places" had been convened and that they unanimously supported the decision.

How extensive a purge will now be necessary to remove Beria's previous supporters and create a new power balance is not yet clear. It seems likely that at least five republic MVD ministers who appear to be Beria appointees will be, or perhaps even have been, replaced. Beria's trial may implicate other figures, perhaps on the Presidium level. However, the remaining leaders must be aware that their rule, to outside eyes, will appear weaker and more confused in direct relation to the size of the purge. Unless the situation deteriorates to a point where one faction, in an effort to vanquish another, directly depends on the military power of the army, it is unlikely that the latter, permeated with police and party controls, will play a significant political role. The calling of the army into such a struggle would be a dangerous, last resort move in that it would facilitate what has been carefully guarded against for thirty-five years -- a coup by the military over the political leaders.

The decision to try Beria, apparently publicly, in the Supreme Court is reminiscent of the great show trials of the 1930's, when the victims were sentenced by the military collegium of that "highest judicial organ" of the USSR. While most of this court's work is concerned with the review of decisions of lower courts, it does act as a court of original jurisdiction in cases of high treason of exceptional importance.

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