MIKOYAN AN ACCESSORY TO THE MURDER OF SLANSKY?

Moscow-Prague relations seem likely to be sinking today into a new trough in the wake of Karol Bacilek's public attack on Mikoyan yesterday. Bacilek is the former Czechoslovak Minister of National Security, so he is in a strong position to know what happened in the summer of 1951, when Mikoyan allegedly travelled to Prague to order the political trial of Rudolf Slansky and some other Czechoslovak officials.

Anastas Mikoyan is still not only an honoured and respected full member of the Central Committee of the CPSU, but he was also elected President of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet USSR (i.e. the head of the State) as recently in July, 1964. Moreover Mikoyan remained the de facto President of the USSR until December 1965, when he retired from active politics and was replaced by Podgorny. But he was retired with full ceremony, and without a word of criticism from the present rulers of the USSR. Bacilek is telling us, therefore, that Brezhnev, Kosygin and Podgorny were for more than a year, at a time when they controlled the Politburo (it was then called the Presidium), the colleagues of a man who played a major part in Slansky's execution.

According to the official records, Joint, the international "Jewish-bourgeois-nationalist organization," was allegedly involved in the Slansky case, and presumably this part of the frame-up derived directly from the documents which Mikoyan is said to have brought with him from Moscow in 1961. In those days Joint used

1) Smena, 28 April 1968, quoted by Ceteka.
2) Sentence of 27th November 1952.
to get the blame for many a conspiracy, and indeed it was said to be the prime mover (together with British Intelligence) in the "doctor's plot" of January 1963, which was denounced only 3 months later, by Beria himself, as a "provocation."

The doctors were then supposed to be plotting to kill Stalin, but it seems possible that they in fact were to be used by Stalin as an excuse for the purge of execution of either some or all the following Beria, Voroshilov, Molotov, Andreyev -- and Mikoyan, any of whom might have been accused of being in league with them.

At the 20th Congress Khrushchev said in his secret speech that:

> When we examined this case (i.e. the doctor's plot) after Stalin's death, we found that it was fabricated from beginning to end.

Clearly the use of the term "we" refers to Mikoyan as well as Khrushchev, because it was Mikoyan's public criticism of Stalin at the Congress which gave Khrushchev the cue for the secret speech. And if Mikoyan knew that the alleged Joint inspiration of the Kremlin doctors was a fabrication, he must also have known or suspected that the alleged Joint inspiration of Slansky was also faked. If so, why has he neither spoken out to this day about the Slansky case, nor criticized his own part in it, and will he do so now that Bacilek has brought the frame-up out into the open?

Eleven long years ago, Mikoyan admitted to Louis Fischer that he himself had no faith in Stalin's accusations against Bukharin. Here is an extract taken from their conversation, which was held in Moscow in 1967:

> Mr. Fischer: "Why don't you publish Khrushchev's speech?"

> Mikoyan: It's too early. But hundreds of thousands have read it."

> Mr. Fischer: "The speech didn't go far enough. Do you really believe that Bukharin was a wrecker and spy?"

3) Pravda, 13 January 1953.
Mikoyan: "No, I don't."

Mr. Fischer: "You were one of those who used to have supper with Stalin regularly."

Mikoyan: "I not only ate with him. I was very close to him. But now and then at Politburo sessions, I spoke my mind, and that ended our friendship. How many people did I myself save from execution!"

"At the end of Stalin's life I was about to be executed. Now we have changed all this. Yet in the West we are attacked for what we did in those years."

Slansky was not one of those saved by Mikoyan from execution during his Politburo rows with Stalin. And now Mikoyan is coming under attack, in the East, for his sins of commission as well as omission. Once again the Western attacks of the type criticized by Mikoyan in his talk with Louis Fischer seem to have been justified by later events, at least if Bacilek is telling the truth.

In connection with Mikoyan's alleged complicity in the Slansky case, it is also worth remembering that Enver Hoxha believes Mikoyan to have been guilty of a plot to kill Stalin. On 24th May 1964, the Albanian First Secretary said:

Nikita Khrushchev and his followers are the plotters who had the impudence to tell us openly -- as did Mikoyan -- that they had hatched a plot to kill Stalin.

If this is true, Mikoyan could hardly be blamed, since he and his fellow "plotters" were probably acting in self-defense. Mikoyan has told Mr. Fischer that he expected Stalin to kill him, and all the circumstances on the "doctor's plot" certainly point to that as one of its possible motives. But if Mikoyan was not above planning to murder Stalin, he may also not have felt much compunction about sending Slansky to his death on Stalin's orders, knowing that to refuse would have involved his own rapid liquidation.

5) ATA, 27 May 1964.
On the whole Mikoyan was involved in fewer of the purges than any other Old Bolshevik, certainly in far fewer than Pelshe, for example. Moreover he deserves to be remembered in E. Europe not only as an accomplice in Slansky's murder and in the 1956 suppression of Hungary, but as the first man at the 20th Congress to quote Marx on the possibility of "different and peaceful roads to socialism."

It is his misfortune that his honourable retirement should now be belatedly disturbed by Bacilek's broadside in Smena. But then murder will out. And if Brezhnev and Kosygin want to preserve anything of the USSR's tattered reputation in Czechoslovakia, they would be well advised to let Mikoyan answer Bacilek's charge, publicly, as best he can. The wily old Armenian has spent his life doing his best to obey the llth Commandment. But it now looks as though he has broken it at last; and at least some of the stain on his reputation will inevitably wash off on Brezhnev, Kosygin and their past and present KGB chiefs for not having persuaded Mikoyan to conduct self-criticism in time. Finally, if there were any other rigged executions in which he was involved, it might be wise for him to confess to them now, rather than have them unearthed, one by one, by the Bacileks of the future.

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