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MORE ON MALENKOV

Six years after the death of J.V. Stalin there is still no documentation available which provides a definitive explanation for the changes in the top Party-State positions which were published on the day after the announcement of his death.¹ Neither the reasons for the reorganization of the 25 member Presidium, elected at the XIX Party Congress, nor the grounds for the abolition of the Bureau of the Presidium, the first and only mention of this body in the Soviet press, have ever been revealed. These measures which, in fact, reestablished the predominance of the veterans of the post-purge Stalinist Politburo - Malenkov, Beria, Molotov, Kaganovich, Khrushchev, Bulganin, Voroshilov, Mikoyan - were presented subsequently in Soviet propaganda as the beginning of the return to the collective leadership principles of Lenin. Even after the disappearance of the last vestiges of this fiction as a result of the victory of Khrushchev over the anti-Party group in July 1957, there has been no light thrown upon the events which took place in the final days of Stalin's life and in the hours before the new Party-State hierarchies were made known to the world. From a Communist source, the Moscow correspondent of L'Unita from December 1953 until late 1958, now comes the first illumination of the background of the first of these organizational changes. Although the accuracy of this account cannot yet be checked from other sources, the following addition to already familiar charges against Malenkov may provide a new starting point for analyses of post-Stalin developments:

"It was a fact...that upon the death of Stalin, Malenkov had settled, together with Beria, the reshuffling of the principal organs of leadership before convoking the Presidium of the Party. In fact, the CC had been confronted with a 'fait accompli'. Considering the gravity of the moment, no one raised any objections; but so singular a procedure could not easily be forgotten." 2

Thus, according to the Western Communist journalist selected by Khrushchev to "leak" his version of the June 1957 events to the outside world,³ the collaboration between Malenkov and Beria

¹ Pravda, 7 March 1953.

² G. Boffa, La Grande Svolta, Editori Riuniti, March 1959, p. 29.

³ See L'Unita, 8 July 1957.

in persecution and execution of "loyal Party cadres" - the Leningrad Case - reached its Party-political highpoint in their cooperation to reorganize the Party leadership after Stalin's death without the consultation of the remaining "comrades-in-arms" of the deceased leader. On this basis, then, the ousting of Malenkov from the Secretariat at the next plenum⁴ was the first action, directed not only against the person of Stalin's self-appointed successor, but also the prelude to the subsequent removal of Beria.

This tiny beam of light, however, does not permit any further penetration into the darker recesses of Kremlin secrets, particularly since Boffa claims this fact was first disclosed to the Central Committee members at the January 1955 plenum which preceded Malenkov's resignation as Chairman of the Council of Ministers - the second downward step on his road to defeat and disgrace.

Since the revelations of a former Polish Party functionary,⁵ the fact of Khrushchev's charges against Malenkov for complicity in Beria's crimes have been known in the West⁶; since the expulsion of the anti-Party group the same accusations have been publicly repeated several times by the First secretary⁷, both in general terms and more specifically with reference to the Leningrad affair. To the evergrowing data concerning this crucial episode, which has obviously hung over Malenkov's head ever since the trial of Abakumov in December 1954⁸, Boffa also adds an interesting item: the arrest of A.A. Kuznetsov, a secretary of the Central Committee and Zhdanov's deputy in Leningrad had taken place in Malenkov's own office.

To the mysteries still surrounding the Stalinist era must be added the puzzle of Khrushchev's denunciations of Malenkov's criminal past and the failure to apply the appropriate legal sanctions. Although Khrushchev's case against Malenkov has long been complete, the necessary consequences have not yet been drawn. That a reliable "outsider" has been allowed to darken further the reputation of Stalin's fallen favorite indicates that the passage of time has not brought prospects of a brighter future for Malenkov.

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⁴14 March, see Pravda, 21 March 1953.

⁵S. Bialer, "I Chose Truth", News From Behind the Iron Curtain, October 1956, pp. 6-7

⁶See for example, Pravda, 6 July 1957; also Kommunist, No. 12, August 1957.

⁷See Background Information, Execution of V.S. Abakumov, 27 December 1954; also Khrushchev secret speech on this case.

La Grande Svolte
by G. Boffa
Editori Ruiniti, March 1959
pp. 28-30.

Malenkov was dismissed as Chairman of the Council of Ministers on February 9, 1955 at 1 p.m. The deputies, who had already been informed, heard and accepted the decision in silence. The procedure was rigorously constitutional... Before receiving this parliamentary sanction, the removal of the Chairman of the Council of Ministers had been decided by a plenum of the CC of the CP which had been convened at the end of January. Why? The letter of resignation gave two self-critical motivations: lack of experience in the conduct of top economic affairs and responsibility in the past for the situation which had developed in the countryside. The majority of observers, however, preferred to seek the cause in a disagreement about the priority of heavy or light industry. At that time this was the subject of a quite lively polemic which was reflected in the press, and Malenkov was criticized, among other things, for having created confusion on this point in several of his speeches. At this was not the essential point: the substance of the criticism directed by the CC against the Chairman of the Council of Ministers who had led the government at the death of Stalin was different.

The January session of the supreme Party organ had once again been dedicated to agricultural problems, particularly to livestock breeding. But after the process of considering all aspects of Soviet life which had taken place the previous year, the discussion could no longer remain bound to kolkhoz themes. The speeches turned to and remained with particular insistence on past errors: more specifically on those which had damaged the countryside and on other, more serious ones which had had negative influence on the whole of socialist society as well as on agriculture. Malenkov had been for many years a Party secretary - in practice, the first of all the secretaries, although such a post did not then exist officially - and as such had counter-signed or checked all the most important decisions. In the long run he had also become directly responsible for agricultural matters. Therefore he could not have been ignorant of the true state of affairs in the villages because... various signs had reached the CC: why had he never talked about them? Why had he altered the harvest figures? And worse, why had he never undertaken

deliveries required of peasants and also it was under his leadership that the slogan of an abundance of consumer goods within two or three years had been proclaimed. However, this could be nothing more than a mere slogan: superficial, hence also demagogical. As a program, it almost lacked ingenuousness. In the light of other problems which appeared later, one can say that this promise hardly lessened the basic problems of Soviet economy: it would have been necessary to define precisely and reform, probably abandon, even if independent of polemics, the question of the relative importance of heavy and light industry. (The same Malenkov, this I know, thought...of acquiring consumer goods from foreign countries with gold payments: this was a most perilous palliative, because the consumers of these goods, the Soviet people, would find themselves once again with the aggravating circumstance of having exhausted their gold reserves. In other words, they would not have either the consumer goods nor the equipment to produce them in earnest, nor finally the means to acquire either abroad.) At the moment of Malenkov's demotion this was not yet clear: but his position was nonetheless compromised. One year later, after the 20th Congress, it would be asked by more than one group that he be definitely removed from government. Only the least informed observers would therefore be able to wonder that, after his decisive defeat in 1957, so little regret accompanied his departure.

130-31 ...The position of Malenkov was different (than that of Molotov): different also his relation to former methods of rule. One cannot with certainty attribute to him an equal consistency and solidity of concepts. Personally, he is very able and intelligent. His voice has the most sonorous metallic timber that I have ever heard. A singular mixture of childishness and age, his face is more attractive in reality than is apparent in photographs. Not averse to a certain demagoguery, he knows how to win one's sympathy: it was apparent during his trip to England even though the publicity given him in London was anything but fair. Relatively young, Malenkov was bound to the preceding political phase, not from a long revolutionary activity and a complex experience in government, as Molotov, but because of the functions of the highest importance to which he was elevated suddenly a little before the war, then during the conflict, and which made him, especially after the war, the closest collaborator of Stalin. Among all the leaders, he is the one who developed the most directly in the shadow of "the cult". His most active participation in the leadership of the country occurred particularly in those years which were the gravest of the Stalin era. His own influence upon the late leader was certainly not the best. He had himself set in motion some of the most repressive measures: his co-responsibility was grave since he had more than once worked together with the ex-minister of the interior (Beria). In spite of this, upon the death of Stalin, he was probably among those who realized what profound changes were necessary - a preoccupation which - to judge by his attitude - Molotov in contrast felt very slightly. But the 20th Congress could only, at the same time, be a condemnation of him and of his acts of many years. It was this that induced him to ally himself with Molotov, although it does not appear that he shared Molotov's political views very deeply: for Malenkov it was a matter of personal ambition which was lacking in the case of Molotov. In the "group" he was the organizational brain, as Molotov was its theoretical brain...