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Background Information (USSR)

THE SPECTER OF SUSLOV

Even before there is a completely substantiated version of how Zhukov—the "anti-Stalinist"—saved Khrushchev from defeat by the Stalinists—Malenkov, Kaganovich and Motetov—at the June Plenum, the expulsion and humiliation of Zhukov at the hands of Khrushchev in October is being attributed to the behind the scenes machinations of another "Stalinist," M. A. Suslov. (H. Salisbury: New York Times, 5 November 1957; A. Korab: Tages-spiegel, Berlin, 5 November 1957; Reuter, 1 November and other agencies from Belgrade, November 1957.) No documentation is cited, but the original source—Belgrade—suggests very strongly that this is a Yugoslav inspired interpretation.

The Yugoslav antipathy to the Agit-Prop specialist, now completing his tenth year in the CC Secretariat, may, perhaps, be traced back to his active role in the Soviet-Yugoslav exchange of letters leading to Tito's expulsion from the Cominform (see V. Dedijer: "Tito Speaks," London, 1953, p. 365-367); the smoldering animosity from the Cominform period, certainly rekindled as the result of the Suslov letter of September-October 1956 which warned the satellite parties of the dangers of following the Yugoslav example (Kx: NZZ, 18 Nov. 1956) was clearly revealed by Marshal Tito in the Brioni speech (Borba, 19 April 1957) when he singled out Suslov by name as spokesman for the "negative" i.e. Stalinist trend in Soviet policy during the post-October period (see General Desk, Background Report, 20 April 1957). In neither instance, however, was Suslov acting independently as an architect of Soviet policy. As a secretary of the CC, in May 1943 he signed the letter containing Stalin's invitation to the Yugoslavs to attend the forthcoming Cominform meeting; as a junior secretary of the CC he attended that 29 June 1943 Cominform session together with his seniors, Zhdanov and Malenkov; as a secretary of the CC he headed the Soviet delegation at the last reported meeting of the Cominform which implemented Stalin's instructions to expel Yugoslavia in November 1949. Nearly a decade later, now the senior secretary in Khrushchev's expanded Secretariat, Suslov is still the Party's specialist on inter-Party affairs. In this capacity he was the chief Soviet delegate to the July 1956 Congress of the French CP, the most Stalinist of the Western Communist Parties; to fulfill a similar assignment six months later he was named to head the Soviet delegation to the December Congress of the Italiana CP, under Togliatti's flexible leadership considered to be conducting an entirely different course than that imposed by the rigid Thorez. Early in June 1956 he travelled to Hungary "on vacation," being received officially by M. Rakosi (Radio Budapest, 8 June 1956); in late October he was again reported—not confirmed—in Budapest together with Mikoyan, who had arranged Rakosi's resignation. On 6 November 1956 Suslov delivered the 39th anniversary speech which contained the official reevaluations of Stalin and the explanation of the Hungarian events which have been greatly elaborated and more forcefully and frequently expressed by N. S. Khrushchev on several occasions throughout the year.

Today, as ten years ago, M. A. Suslov remains primarily an executor of the policies determined by the top man in the Secretariat. Then, it was J. V. Stalin; today, it is N. S. Khrushchev.

As senior secretary, however, this relatively unknown apparatchik was in a better position than the famous Marshal Zhukov to challenge—at some later date—the present one man rule of the First Secretary; but, first, like Khrushchev, he must have had an opportunity to build his support in the Party machine. From his speech at the XX Party Congress (16 February 1956) —second only to Mikoyan's in the sharpness of its formulations against the "cult of the personality"—there is some reason to assume that Suslov had been in charge of cadre work in the period before July 1955 when the Secretariat did not contain its full complement\*. Since then, Suslov, while remaining a secretary, has been promoted to full membership in the Presidium but has concentrated almost entirely on relations with the "brother Parties" beyond the Soviet borders. This affords greater opportunities for travel abroad, for participation in meetings at home and frequent listings in the central press; it has also effectively removed him from the key sector of the apparatus—direction of cadre work—which now seems to be in the hands of A. B. Aristov. (See B. Meissner: "Das Ende des Stalin Mythos," Frankfurt am Main, 1956, p. 17.) Under his direction the first stages of the preparatory work for the next Party Congress are being taken—the accounting and election meetings throughout the entire Party organization. From the primary units up to the plenary sessions of Oblast and Republic Committees, this crucial assignment has been defined as follows:

"The standard of the entire future activity of the Party organization will largely depend on the question of who is to be entrusted with its leadership, of who will hold the conductor's baton... One must know how to direct the elections and not allow a policy of laissez faire. This task is the immediate responsibility of the secretaries..." (Partinaya Zhizn, No. 18, September 1957.)

As long as Khrushchev continues to remove and appoint these Party secretaries, he will control those among them who are "elected" to the Central Committee, the Secretariat and the Presidium. From this position of strength the neo-Stalinist, Khrushchev, completely dominating a neo-Stalinist Party apparatus, could scarcely have been forced to take action against Marshal Zhukov by the ideological spokesman of Khrushchev's own neo-Stalinism.

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\*See Pravda, 17 February for Suslov's extensive remarks on Party organizational work.