

Radio Free Europe/Munich
Office of the Political Advisor

7 November 1957

Background Information (USSR)

TUKHACHEVSKY WITHOUT PARENTHESES (II)

In his now famous Leningrad anniversary speech, shortly after the June Plenum, Marshal Zhukov made the following charges against the anti-Party group:

"...Malenkov, Kaganovich and Molotov stubbornly opposed measures introduced by the Party to liquidate the consequences of the cult of personality, especially in the sector of unmasking and bringing to judgment the main culprits who committed violations of legality at one time or another. Now, when their actions far removed from Party affairs have been revealed, it has become clear that they were against the unmasking of the illegalities committed. They feared to be answerable before the Party and people for exceeding their rights and for illegal activities." (Pravda, 16 July 1957.)

According to Pravda "Comrade Zhukov quoted examples of the violations of legality by the members of the anti-Party group," but no indication of the nature nor of the date of the illegal acts has yet appeared in the Soviet press. From Western sources it is reported that Zhukov had "somehow obtained possession of part of the secret archives of the MVD (the GPU and NKVD) and that during the June crisis he threatened to publish documents implicating Malenkov, Kaganovich and Molotov in Stalin's crimes." (R. Lowenthal, Observer, 3 November 1957; see also, I. Deutscher, Deutsche Zeitung und Wirtschaftszeitung, Stuttgart, 2 November 1957; Reporter, November 1957; K. S. Karol, L'Express, 31 October 1957.) The major case, from the point of view of the military in general and Zhukov in particular, is alleged to be the rehabilitation of Marshal Tukhachevsky and the other high-ranking officers executed in 1937-38. Zhukov's interest in clearing the names of his former superiors, however, remains unproven. He was, it should be remembered, promoted to deputy commander for cavalry of the Belo Russian Command (Soviet Affairs Analysis Service, No. 29, 1957) at the time when the "first wave of arrests fell with particular severity on the commands of the Moscow garrison, on the command staffs of the Western front districts of Kiev and Belo Russia and in the isolated Far East." (L. Shapiro: "The Great Purge," quoted from "The Soviet Army," edited by B. H. L. Hart, London, 1956, p. 69; see also Background Information, 29 August 1957, p. iv.) While his unpublished remarks may be interpreted in this sense, it is now obvious that his powers were insufficient to attain this goal. Concerning the genuine interests and desires of the other protagonist in the most recent Kremlin drama, N. S. Khrushchev, there can be no such doubts. Neither in Khrushchev's secret speech nor in any of the subsequent infrequent references to Tukhachevsky in published materials (see Background Information, 3 September; 3 October 1956, 29 August 1957) has the former Deputy People's Commissar of Defense been mentioned in connection with the period of the Great Purges. In the condemnation of Stalin at the XX Party Congress, now nearly completely reversed in the fortieth anniversary speech, there is considerable space devoted to the "annihilation of many military commanders," but only Rokossovsky, Gorbатов and Meretskov, among the living and Podlas, from the murdered, were singled out by name. Under the watchful eyes of Khrushchev's Agit-Prop censors, the historians have not been able to advance the rehabilitation of Tukhachevsky beyond 1921.

Shortly before Zhukov's departure for Yugoslavia, however, a spokesman for Khrushchev in literary matters furnished a most revealing hint of Khrushchev's future approach to this explosive issue. Asked to explain why certain writers (B. Polevoi) made unwarranted accusations against "certain countries and peoples," while others (Sholokhov) "kept silent," Alexei Surkov, Secretary of the Presidium of the Union of Soviet Writers, evaded the direct question but provided a possible answer to the eventual explanation--by Khrushchev--of Tukhachevsky's demise:

"For more than 30 years we believed in Stalin as in ourselves, even more than that. What was said about him (extremely humiliating), was not only the guilt of Stalin and the people around him, but rather a matter of the psychosis of our masses. My writer comrades were disappearing before my own eyes, but I believed that this was necessary for the revolution. Marshal Tukhachevsky was killed because of the intrigues of the Gestapo. Hundreds of thousands of people disappeared. Stalin was a strange man." (Mladost, 2 October 1957; see S.S.: Background Report, General Desk, 26 October 1957.)

In line with the increasing trend to transform more and more of Stalin's "crimes" (secret speech) into "mistakes," it will scarcely tax the ingenuity of the First Secretary to transfer the "guilt of Stalin and the people around him"--including N. S. Khrushchev as Secretary of the Moscow Party Committee--for the execution of Tukhachevsky to the "intrigues of the Gestapo."* With Zhukov no longer in a position to claim credit for--or to oppose--this version of rehabilitation, Khrushchev may now be prepared to speed-up the task which, according to Col. Gen. Gorbатов, a survivor of the purges, aroused the anti-Party group to action:

"[his] struggle against the crimes which the group had committed in 1937-38 and the following years." (T. S.: "Khrushchev and the Anti-Party Group," World Today, September 1957; see also Background Information, 27 September 1957.)

To clear the names of the victims he himself helped send to their graves and to defend "our Party's activity when the Central Committee was headed by Stalin--a devoted Marxist-Leninist and a staunch revolutionary" (TASS, 6 November 1957), N. S. Khrushchev can now exploit what is either an unparalleled example of collusion between Stalin and the Gestapo or, what is more likely, Stalin's conscious exploitation of the faked Gestapo evidence of conspiracy between Tukhachevsky and the German General Staff. Khrushchev's rehabilitations will, in any case, be no less opportunistic and no less in his own self-interest than Stalin's murders.

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*In the German archives that have been investigated since 1945, no trace of Tukhachevsky's contacts with the Gestapo has been found.